

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 they should raise for Me a donation; from every person whose heart comes forward to donate gather My donation (Shemot 25:2)."

Mitzvot that were not performed with three proper intentions remain in the netherworld and may even backfire and have a negative effect on one's spiritual standing.

It is critically important to have the proper intention and motivation in performing Mitzvot. Mitzvot that aren't performed for the proper reason do not have spiritual value and merit; they are regarded as mere physical actions. Such Mitzvot inject a tension into the person that performed them because they want to be considered as spiritual actions but are perceived as mere mundane actions.

It was recounted about the Baal Shem Tov zt"l, that he once entered a very respected Beth Midrash and exclaimed heavily, "this place is filled with Torah." His disciples were bewildered at the incongruity of his joyous words and uncomfortable expression and asked for an explanation. "This place is full of Torah study," said the Baal Shem Tov, "but none of it was performed Lishma, for the sake of learning, and thus it remains within the physical confines of the Beth Midrash." Mitzvot that are performed with sincerity and for the sake of fulfilling Hashem's Will are not only valued in heaven, but also advocate good and blessing for the person.

This teaching is alluded to in the Parsha, in the introductory paragraphs which describe Hashem's commandment to donate to the Mishkan. In the brief context of two verses, the commandment is mentioned three times. The first one is "and they should take for Me a donation." In this verse it is clear that the donation was brought forward with the proper intent, "for Me," for Hashem's sake.

The next mention is in the latter half of the same verse: "you shall take My donation." Here too, the person donating made his donation with the proper intent of accomplishing the Mitzva, albeit it is considered to be on a slightly lower level than the first scenario, "for Me," for Hashem's sake. Finally, the next mention of collecting the donation from the nation is in the following verse, "and this is the donation." Here there is no association to Hashem or the Mitzva. Meaning, the person donated for whatever reason aside from the ideal and proper reason. In such a scenario, the donation is described as a simple act, and not one which has Heavenly significance.

It is very important to perform every Mitzva with the proper intent. A Mitzva which is performed for ulterior motives, not to accomplish Hashem's Will, not only has no spiritual value, but actually complains about the one who brought them on account of them not having done so for three proper reasons.



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Soul Of the Rif

A person who attaches himself to different opposing belief systems, and who jumps from one thing to the next, will never attain true focus, and will not achieve that which they truly need.

On the other hand, one who knows what they are working towards, and where they are looking to reach and constantly works on that which they do, can be assured that Hashem and the world around them, will look positively on what they are doing.



2nd Shabbat Meal

"And they shall take for Me a portion, from every man whose heart motivates him, you shall take My portion (Shemot 25:1)."

Betzalel drew on the Jewish people's intentions which motivated their contributions, and elevated them to Hashem.

Within this week's portion, we find a great wonder. The Torah starts by saying, "Speak to the Bnei Yisrael and they should take a portion for Me." The word 'Terumah' ends with the letter 'Hei.' Directly after this, the Torah states, "From each man whose heart motivates him shall you take My portion;" this passage concludes with the letter 'Yud' in the word 'Terumati' (My portion). Let us ask about the difference between these two words, why is it mentioned once with a 'hei' and once with a 'Yud'? It is possible to explain based on the Talmud (Menachot 29b), which teaches that this world was created with the letter 'Hei' and the world to come was created with the letter 'Yud.' From each individual, Hashem wants their unique donation, from that which is dearest to them. For one person, the substances of this world may be very dear to him, such a person loves silver, gold and physical things. Another person may love Torah and Mitzvot, sanctity and good deeds.

At this point in time, Hashem requested that each person give their portion based on their greatest love and greatest will. Hashem commanded those with love for physical things, saying, "They shall take for Me a portion," such a person should bring something of gold or silver and donate it to the Mishkan. For a person for whom spiritual matters are their highest priority, Hashem will seek "take My portion" - a phrase which concludes with the letter 'Yud,' the letter with which the world to come was created. Our holy Rabbis say that Betzalel knew how to consider the thoughts of each person and their contribution. He formed good intentions into actions, he took the good intentions that people had and formed them into actions; he formed a connection between the letter 'Yud' of 'Terumati' and the letter 'Hei' of "Teruma," uniting the two letters. Through this, he raised and presented the nation's good intention and good deeds as a single entity before Hashem. The greatest level is when the Jewish people have love and brotherhood between them, when this is the case, Hashem considers our good intentions to be good actions, viewing them as one and the same.

"And they shall make for me a Sanctuary and I will dwell among them (Shemot 25:8)."

The greatness of building a synagogue and a Beit Midrash (Study Hall).

Our holy Rabbis tell us that the Jews contributed enormous quantities of silver in order to build the Mishkan. The leftover silver from these donations was taken by Moshe and used to build a synagogue and a Beit Midrash for the Jewish people. There is an enormous difficulty which must be asked on this. The Gemara (Tamid 31b) teaches that items ascend in matters of sanctity but do not descend. For example, if a person contributes chairs to a synagogue, and it emerges that they already have chairs and do not need these ones, it is permitted to use the money for tables in order to ascend in levels of sanctity within one's contribution. Similarly, if one gave money for the purpose of purchasing Siddurim (prayer books) and it turned out that these were not needed, the money could be used to buy Chumashim.

However, it is forbidden to downgrade the holiness of items. If a person contributed money to build the sanctuary, that money cannot be used to buy chairs, or other lower-grade items, as there is a key principle in the Torah that we ascend in holiness and do not descend. This means that if the purpose of a substance is to be changed, it can only be changed for the sake of becoming something of greater sanctity, but not of lower sanctity. Therefore, the following question must be asked: Bnei Yisrael contributed money to build the Mishkan, which is the house of Hashem, as He said "And they shall make for Me a sanctuary and I will dwell in it." Therefore, how could Moshe take the money which was left over and use it to build this synagogue and Beit Midrash; surely this would contravene the rule that we ascend in matters of sanctity and do not descend? There is a key concept which is learnt from here, namely, that a synagogue and a study hall have even greater sanctity than the Mishkan. The leftover money which was contributed to the Mishkan, was allowed to be used for a synagogue and a Beit Midrash, as they were no lower than the Mishkan about which Hashem said, "And they shall make a sanctuary for Me and I will dwell among them." The sanctity of a synagogue or a Beit Midrash is unmatched.

Therefore, if a person donated money to a cause, and some of the money was left over, it should be donated to a synagogue or study hall, or used to build a new synagogue or study hall. Hashem rests His presence in these places, and therefore, a person who makes themselves a part of these places is on a very high level.

Q & A with the Rif



Question:

Dear Rabbi, I wanted to ask about the following issue: Why is it the case that at the beginning of my process of Teshuva, I did things with love and desire, but now, I have reached a stage in which I no longer feel the same sweetness when engaged in Avodat Hashem (service of G-d)?

Answer:

This feeling is created by the Yetzer Hara. At the beginning of a process, a person becomes fired up, and resembles a stone when it is first launched. The power with which it is thrown starts strong, and it steadily slows down. The Yetzer Hara brings sadness into a person and reduces their joy in order to make them give up.

A person is forbidden to live based on their feelings alone, working along the lines of, "If I feel good today, I will be good, and if tomorrow, I am less happy, I will be less good." Such an approach is the advice of the Yetzer Hara. Rather, a person must continue to do the same thing; constant highs and lows mark a lack of stability. Feelings along the lines of, 'Today, I am excessively happy, tomorrow I am less happy,' entail a lack of stability. Live with stability, rather than being excessively lowly or lofty in terms of feelings.

The normal and middle way of living life is the most healthy one, whereas leaning excessively to either side [in terms of positivity or negativity] is unhealthy.





3rd Shabbat meal

"And they shall make for Me a sanctuary, and I will dwell among them (Shemot 25:8)"

Any man who puts on Tefillin or causes others to merit through Tefillin builds the Beit HaMikdash.

Within this week's portion, we read the following section: And they shall make for Me a sanctuary, and I will dwell among them. Like all that I have shown you, the likeness of the Mishkan and the likeness of all of its vessels, and so shall you make." Rashi comments that "and so shall you make" means that the vessels are to be made in the same manner in future generations. The Mitzva of the Mishkan applies to all generations, it was not merely a Mitzva which existed in its time. Rashi makes the point that the Mitzva of the Mishkan is binding on all generations, in every generation, a Jew needs to have a Mishkan.

The Rambam (Sefer HaMitzvot, Mitzva 2) writes that we were commanded to build a house for the service of G-d. He also states that the offering of Korbanot and the fire burning there will be constant. It will be the place turned to, with celebration and gathering taking place there every year; this is what is referred to when Hashem said, "And they shall make for Me a sanctuary." The Rambam says that it is there that the Korbanot must be brought, we must always turn there, all our prayers need to be directed towards this sanctuary. When the Beit HaMikdash stood and when the Mishkan stood, it was possible to fulfil this command. Today, with the Beit HaMikdash destroyed, how is it possible to fulfil the Mitzva of building a sanctuary for Hashem, which is incumbent upon all generations?

The Shelah (Sefer Mitzvat Tefillin, Perek 1, Ot 4) cites Rabbeinu Bachye that the Tefillin of the arm correspond to the heart, and the Tefillin of the head correspond to the brain. Both these types of Tefillin correspond to the Keruvim (cherubs) which were above the Aron (Ark).

The Zohar (Chaye Sara 130b) brings that Rabbi Yehuda, Rabbi Yaysa, and Rabbi Chiya went to Rabbi Eliezer, the son of Rabbi Shimon and found him busy dealing with the secrets of the Torah in regard to Tefillin. They said to him, "Let us share with you something which your father, Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, taught us about Tefillin. Through the Mitzva of Tefillin, one can fulfill the Mitzva of 'And they shall make a sanctuary for Me, and I will dwell among them.' This is possible even though the Beit Hamikdash has been destroyed."

This is a wonder and a tremendous concept: Every time a Jew puts Tefillin on, and reads the passages of Korbanot and prays while wearing Tefillin, they fulfill the dictum: "And let our lips substitute for bulls (Hoshei'a 14:3)." This means that the Korbanot are offered through the prayers that we recite, our prayers are like bringing Korbanot in the Beit Hamikdash. The Mitzva of building a sanctuary for Hashem was stated for future generations as it can be fulfilled through Tefillin. A person must know that every time they put Tefillin on, they fulfill the Mitzva of "And they shall make Me a sanctuary and I will dwell among them."

Therefore, the strength and power of the Mitzva is indeed equivalent to building the Mishkan. Whoever wishes to build the Mishkan should put on Tefillin and the same will apply for one who causes others to merit putting on Tefillin. Therefore, Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai would say that every time a Jew prays or studies with his Tefillin, it is as if he offered Korbanot in the Mishkan, since the Mishkan has the highest level, and the same is true of the Tefillin.

"And they shall make for Me a sanctuary, and I will dwell among them (Shemot 25:8)."

A person who accords honour to Mitzva items, treating them with great sanctity, merits a great level and their reward is repeatedly doubled

In this week's portion, we find that Hashem commanded Moshe to build the Mishkan and its Keilim (vessels). The Mishkan comprised of five Keilim, and our Rabbis say that it was Hashem Who actually built the Mishkan. He breathed life into vessels, just as He blew spirit and soul into the body of a person. In this sense, these Keilim were literally alive.

The holy Zohar (Teruma 171a) teaches that Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai would recount the following story about Daniel, a greatly beloved man. When Nevuchadnezzar wanted to show his great power to Daniel, he went and built a large graven image. He placed the Tzitz (the holy headband of the Kohen Gadol, upon which the Name of Hashem was etched) in the mouth of this image. The Tzitz would say, "I am Hashem your G-d." Everyone came to see how this image spoke, and they began to believe that this image was indeed a G-d and started to bow to it.

Nevuchadnezzar took Daniel and told him to come and see this image and how it would speak, telling him that he too would have to bow to it. Daniel came near to the image, and said, "Hashem created you in order to sanctify the Name of Heaven, and now you have caused a Chillul Hashem [desecration of the Divine Name]." It is told that the Tzitz then fell out of the image's mouth, and it ceased to speak, everything collapsed, people's faith in this image ceased.

We see that the building of the Mishkan and its Keilim was not an ordinary form of building, rather, each Kli was a living thing like a person, and this was a special feature of the Beit HaMikdash.

A person must know that every form of holy item, such as Tefillin, a Mezuzah, a Sefer Torah, all of them have life from Hashem, as it says, "And You give life to all of them (Nechemia 9:6)." Hashem is the life source behind every Mitzva and every Holy thing. When a person treats items such as these which carry extra sanctity with respect, and they look at the life-force which is in each of them, Hashem breathes special life-force into a person. A person who honors Hashem, as well as honoring Mitzvot and good deeds reaches a great and elevated level, their reward is repeatedly doubled by Hashem.

ספר דברים בשבת ישועה שפוגעת בול!



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Treasure charms from the Rif



Our great teacher Rabbi Meir Abuhatzzeira had a practice which he was particular about. Each time his children were about to leave the house, he would place a small bag containing Za'atar and Rooter herbs in their pockets. He would tell them that carrying these herbs in their pockets served as an antidote to ward off the Ayin HaRa (Evil Eye).

In this vein, it is virtuous for one to place a small amount of these herbs in his home and his car. Doing so is a powerful Segulah (charm) to usurp the Ayin HaRa and other harmful forces.

May G-d save all of us from the Ayin HaRa and gift us salvation, joy, and success.



The fourth Post Shabbat meal

Stories from the Rif

Many times, one undergoes trying challenges, and these challenges lead one to complain to Hashem, asking why they have to undergo such trials. However, one ought to appreciate that these challenges are in fact opportunities to grow.

The above idea is illustrated by a story involving one of the greatest sages in our history, Rav Chaim Yosef David Azulai, known as the Chida. One day a certain man who constantly complained to Hashem approached the Chida. The Chida guided him to his Beit Midrash (study hall); the man sat down on a bench and was overcome by a deep sleep. While sleeping, the man dreamt that he was standing before the Heavenly Beit Din (Court). To one side, there were harsh angels who were presenting his sins, and to the other side, there were benevolent angels, who were presenting all his positive deeds.

The respective deeds were stacked on either side of a scale, and the negative deeds far outweighed the positive ones. The man became dismayed, being able to perceive that his life was on a downward trajectory, which was sure to culminate in Gehinnom (Hell).

Suddenly, all the trials which the man had endured entered the room and began to jump on the scale, topping up the side of his positive deeds. Gradually the side of good deeds began to swell and sink to almost meet the negative deeds. However, the man noticed that there was a shortfall of trials to level out the scales. At that point, the man began to moan, asking why he hadn't undergone further challenges? Why hadn't he experienced more hardship?

One needs to know that this world is passing, and each challenge contributes towards lessening the harsh trait of justice which seeks to persecute him. With this in mind, it becomes incumbent on us to rejoice in challenges, appreciating that they rid the negativity within us.

Placing a note in the Kotel (Western Wall)

It is known that the Chida was a disciple of the Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh. Moreover, the Chida was noted for being particular to avoid deriving benefit from Torah, in any way whatsoever. For his livelihood, the Chida had a donkey, upon which he would travel from city to city, peddling his wares. He lived as a simpleton, and none of the inhabitants of Yerushalayim knew of his awesome greatness.

A few days after his teacher, the Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh's passing, the Chida's donkey passed away and the Chida was left without a livelihood. The Chida was upset and unsure how to proceed, yet the shock triggered a memory. He remembered that before his teacher's passing, he had made a request which he had never made before. He had given the Chida a folded-up piece of paper and instructed him to place the paper in the Kotel. At that moment, the Chida resolved to fulfill his teacher's request. The Chida ran to the Kotel, placed the paper in between the stones, and then proceeded to enter one of the local Yeshivot (Torah Academies).

When the Chida entered the Yeshiva, the Rosh Yeshiva, who was a great Tzadik, looked at the Chida's face and began to yell, saying "you have a radiant glow to your face, which Mitzvah have you done today? Which deed has brought you to sport this awesome countenance?" The Chida responded that he had not performed any special deeds that day. The Rosh Yeshiva persisted and insisted that the Chida repeat everything that he had done that day. The Chida related that he had been a disciple of the Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh and had just been to the Kotel to place a piece of paper in it, as per his teacher's instructions.

The Rosh Yeshiva jumped with excitement and asked the Chida to take him to where he had placed the piece of paper. The Chida led him to the place in the Kotel, showed him the piece of paper, and the Rosh Yeshiva stepped forth and extricated it from the wall. He unfolded it

and read the following message, inscribed in the script of the Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh: 'Divine Presence, please help and request mercy upon my disciple, the Chida.'

From that day onwards the Chida became successful, and it became the practice of the Jewish people to write their troubles and requests on pieces of paper and insert them into the Kotel.

In one of his Sefarim (books), the Chida relates that there was once a famous artist who wanted to paint a large painting containing two men. He wanted one of the men to be exceedingly handsome and the other one to be incredibly ugly. The artist searched far and wide and found a handsome man. The artist stood the man up and began to paint him on one side of the canvas. Once finished, he began to search for a decrepit looking man, however, for months he was unable to find a suitable person. Years went by, until one day, the artist was walking on the street and spied a tramp on the side of the street. The man was drunk, filthy, and perfectly represented what the artist had in mind for his painting. He was strewn in the gutter, with a half empty bottle of whiskey in his hand, and his face was covered in wrinkles. The artist turned to his assistants and instructed them to adjust the man's position, and once ready, the artist began to paint him. Before long, the artist had completed his painting, with the beautiful man on one side, and the dishevelled drunkard on the other side.

After some time, the tramp woke up and saw the painting before him. He was shocked and remarked, 'I am in this painting twice; both sides of the pictures are of me.' The artist laughed, responding, 'You are only in it once; the person on the other side is a beautiful man! How can you say that you are in it twice?' The man stood up and explained that three years prior he had been a wealthy man, who had accordingly dressed in finery and looked beautiful. However, his fortunes had turned, and he had since become a tramp and lived on the streets. He explained that his conduct had diminished, and with that had his fortunes.

This story illustrates that the line between good and bad is fine indeed. The line between them can become skewed, with good appearing to be bad and vice versa. It is imperative to know that good can instantly turn bad, and bad can instantly turn good.

With this in mind, we can appreciate the importance of placing Hashem before us throughout our lives, to truly follow in the path of G-d. For if one fails to do this, then they lie prone to losing their entire life in the blink of an eye.

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