

# 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 you shall take from the first fruit coming from your land."  
Man has the power in his words to create positive things or, Heaven Forbid, the opposite

the Talmud in Berachot teaches that there are three things which expand one's perspective of things, life in general: a pleasant home, a pleasant wife and nice objects. Aside from the literal meaning of this statement, these three elements also have a symbolic intent. A "pleasant home" refers to the time when we are out of homes and living in the Sukkah. The holiday of Sukkot is a time of bringing ourselves closer to Hashem through love. A "pleasant wife" refers to an uplifting and constructive month of Elul, whose astrological sign is Virgo, itself a metaphor for repentance and good deeds. Lastly, "pleasant objects" refers to the Shofar, blown during the month of Elul and on Rosh Hashana.

When these three experiences come to pass in goodness, then one obtains the healthy, growing and positive mindset necessary to live through the coming year in goodness and successfully. The month of Elul and the High Holidays are critical for the following year. During Elul, Hashem is close to all those who reach out to Him. "Seek Hashem when He is around, call upon Him when he is nearby (Yeshaya 55:6)." Hashem is easily reached, so to speak, and there is good will from Hashem's side towards each and every person. One would rather present one's request to the king directly, rather than his ministers and one of the opportune moments is at dawn (the ideal time for Selichot). Hashem looks forward to Repentance involves humbling one's heart, asking for forgiveness for ones errs and requesting that we be granted the strength for support for our future. At specifically these moments of closeness and intimacy with Hashem, we can ask all that we desire.

The Sages reveal the true story behind the Prophet Yona's intent in fleeing from the land of Israel when Hashem transmitted His word to Yonah to reach out to the people of Nineveh and persuade them to repent. Yona realized that if he were to be successful in his mission, there would be serious claims against the Jewish people for being slow to repent, when a city-full of gentiles did repent. He therefore decided to flee as rapidly as possible from the Israel, so that Hashem would cease to transmit his prophecy, as prophecy can only take place on the sacred land of Israel, and he would be excused for not completing his mission.

The details of Yona's story are well known, but their true value is the symbolic message they carry. Yona boards a ship to faraway lands, but not long after leaving port, the ship encounters violent storms which threaten to sink the ship and its occupants.

All the people on board began to pray to their gods, except for Yona, who descended into his cabin and went to sleep. When the captain found him sleeping, he glared at him about not praying like the others. "Awaken and call to your Lord, perhaps He will heed to us and we won't perish (Yona 1:6)." These words apply to every Jew throughout the entire year; that is why we read this passage for Yom Kippur's Haftara. We must look to pray to Hashem at every moment to save the situation, perhaps He will heed to our prayers.

The only condition to this statement is that one's mouth, one's speech that is, be clean from foul words and purposeless talk. How can one present their requests before Hashem with a mouth, i.e. a habit of speech that isn't pure, but tainted with inappropriate utterances? The Rebbe of Rufschtitz interprets the introductory verses of the Torah portion to teach this very lesson. "And you shall take from the first fruit of the land (Pri Ha'adama);" the first letters of these words form the word Pe'h, mouth. Hashem is seeking our mouth, our speech, that we guard and sanctify our speech. "One mustn't soil one's word (Bamidbar 30:3);" we must be very careful of that we only utter proper, clean speech. How can that very same mouth that spoke gossip and inappropriate things, or ate non-kosher foods, be employed to make one's request to the the King of Kings, who commanded us to safeguard ourselves from those very things? Our mouths and power of speech must be safeguarded and sanctified if we wish to retain our conversation and communication with Hashem.



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## Soul Of the Rif

Just as a person undergoes blood tests to inspect their health, and just as a shopkeeper brings in an accountant to check the wellbeing of their business, a person must constantly perform 'blood tests' on his soul, to ascertain their state. Just as they check blood pressure, one must inspect one's situation in terms of Mitzvot and sins. This is the accounting of the soul which a person must do on a daily basis before going to sleep, at the end of every week on a Friday, on every Erev Rosh Chodesh (the last day of each month), on every eve of Rosh Hashana, a person must perform these tests. One must perform checks on oneself just as an accountant would inspect a business. If someone sees that something is amiss and unhealthy, they need to be alert and look again. Even if one allows the problem to persist only a little, they must know where to draw the line, in order to avoid reaching a situation whereby they become like a fool, losing everything unaware that this is happening, as the matter drags on and becomes progressively worse.



## 2nd Shabbat Meal

A charm to erase all of the curses and evils that are destined to come upon a person.

Our holy teachers say that within this week's Torah portion, there is a great charm through which a person can be saved from all of the harsh and evil things which would need to happen to a person during the continuation of the year. The Talmud (Megilla 31b) says: Rabbi Shimon ben Elazar said: Ezra instituted for Israel that they would read the curses in Torat Kohanim (the book of Vayikra) before Shavuot, and those in Mishneh Torah (the book of Devarim) before Rosh Hashana. What is the reason for this? Abaye, and some say that it was Reish Lakish said: In order that a year and its curses should end. Ezra the Scribe divided the Torah into portions in this format so that the first curses in the Torah would fall out before Shavuot and the second section of curses would be in the weekly portion preceding Rosh Hashana.

The holy Sefarim write that when a person goes to synagogue on the Shabbat of Ki Tavo and hears the reading of the curses in this portion, they should think in their mind that if, G-d forbid, all of the curses which are being read needed to happen to them, or that one of the evil things mentioned within was to happen to them, through the reading of these curses, all of the evil and curses are concluded.

Our rabbis teach that a year and its curses should end, meaning every form of evil and curse which a person would need to face will cease. This all ends now with this reading, from this point onwards, we pray that G-d should inscribe us for good, things will start in a proper and fitting form from here onwards.

Therefore, every person should endeavor with all of their strength on the holy Shabbat, during the reading of the Torah to cleanse themselves of every form of impending evil and to erase everything. All that the leader reads is a conclusion of this stage. A new era starts, we enter a new year, with new spiritual energies, safe in the knowledge that the past is behind, and we have a good and new start ahead.

## Q & A with the Rif



### Question:

Rabbi, we wanted to ask the following question: Many times, I am weak and overpowered by the Evil Inclination, what can I hold onto in order not to descend into the depths?

### Answer:

Love of Hashem. Think about this all the time. For example, when driving, rather than thinking about trivial things, think about how much you love G-d, and that you are ready to die, be burnt and endure tremendous pain and afflictions in order to sanctify His Name.





## 3rd Shabbat meal

Even the curses and suffering which happen to a person end up being his blessings.

In the Torah portion of this week, we read about terrible and frightening curses. There is a discussion about who should be called up for this section, some communities have the custom not to call anyone up for this section; however, if someone wants to be called up, they can be. Others call up the rabbi of the synagogue. Ultimately, each place has its own custom in terms of what they do in terms of calling people to the Torah for the passage of the curses. The holy Zohar says that this is not a straightforward thing, as the root of all the curses which are listed are really blessings. However, there is a difficulty, curses are something harsh, and when they are read, it is forbidden to speak, they are recited a little quieter than the rest of the Torah reading. If a person curses another, can there be roots of blessing in this? In light of this, what is the meaning of the notion that the root of the curses is blessings?

There is a tremendous concept through which an answer to this question can be given. When a person has a difficulty of any sort, or an embittering problem, they become angry and blame others. They may say: 'This person caused it, this factor made it happen,' - in short, a person always has on whom to place the blame. However, a person needs to know that when they face trouble or difficulty, buried deep within this is a great salvation for a person.

There are two reasons why people deal with problems and difficulties in life. The first is because of a Gilgul (transmigration), if one's soul had bad things decreed upon it in a previous lifetime which it still needs to undergo.

The moment before a person's soul descends into this world, it is found in a special room in Heaven, and Hashem shows a person the many different types of lives that people have. This is comparable to a film of one life and a film of another life; He shows a person films of lives and gives a person the option to choose which type of life they want, and a person chooses their life. Within that life, there is good and bad, this includes tougher times, times of joy, and of sadness, who they will live with and who they will marry. A person's life is the life they chose for themselves, this includes all the bad situations. There can be corrections made, souls can come back to the world, but regardless, what takes place is all within the paths a person chose, and therefore they cannot complain or ask questions on G-d. A person chose their given path; therefore, they must rejoice over the fact that they repair that which needs fixing and perform tasks which need completion.

The second reason is as follows: When a person has a problem or a difficulty, this is because they did some sort of sin; G-d brings them challenges, so that by overcoming them, they can compensate for that which they did which was not good. For example, if a person stole, they must repay their dues; likewise, if they lied, there will be compensation in this world for what they did. A person may think that a person can do something in life without paying for it, but this is a mistake. Although they may not pay today, eventually, be it in another month or another year, they will. In Heaven, there is a ledger which lists everything which a person does, without exception.

If a person faces a problem, whether from a previous life or a sin for which a person is paying for, either of these two is a good thing. For if a person is paying in this world, he is repairing something or compensating for a sin which he did, it therefore behooves a person to rejoice over this and not be sad about it. Based on this, the statement of the Zohar that the curses written in this week's Torah portion are rooted in blessings can be understood. Those curses lower the evil, they cause a person to be refined, whether this be on account of former lifetimes, or a sin a person did now.

When a person has a financial debt and it is difficult for them to pay, and they then pay the debt, that day is one of great joy. Even if a person loses out now, ultimately, they have paid their debt.

There is no joy like the solving of uncertainties, when a person has a problem and solves it, or a debt which they resolve, there is no greater day than the one on which they achieve the necessary remedy. Therefore, the root of all the curses in this week's portion is in fact a root of blessing, for it takes a person away from the matters which are difficult for them.



The Ben Ish Chai (Lashon Chachamim, end of part 1) says that on the twenty-fifth of Elul, a person should sanctify themselves to an exceptional extent. He continues that before dusk of the twenty-fifth of Elul, they should perform one immersion in a mikva to remove the evil spirit. They should then perform a second immersion to repair the sin of anger, followed by a further five in order to receive the illumination of the five forms of light within the aspect of Kindness, because the twenty-fifth of Elul is the first of the six days of creation, during which the Light of Kindness was created.

One should be careful during that entire day to avoid anger and idle matters, one should not fast on that day, rather one should eat bread and meat at night and in the day, and recite the Grace after meals with concentration, and eat sweet foods. One should increase one's donations to charity. A man or his wife should light five candles on that night, corresponding to the five Lights of Kindness, as the verse says "And G-d saw that the light was good" (Bereishit 1:4). If that day happens to be one on which the Sefer Torah is taken out, one should be called up to the Torah in public.

Everyone should be particular about these directives of the Ben Ish Chai, and with G-d's help, we should all merit to have great light and success, we should all enter the coming year with great strength and Heavenly assistance. There should be great light upon all of us, and we should all merit to have success, blessing and great joy.



## Treasure charms from the Rif



Everyday, one should strive to learn from the Torah of our great Rabbi, the Ben Ish Hai. It is virtuous to discuss his teachings, seeing as the root of his soul is exceedingly lofty, being amongst those unique souls which the majority of the Jewish people are intimately connected to. It is important to appreciate that the Ben Ish Hai's soul sits on the Heavenly Beit Din (court) and serves as an advocate for each generation. Fortunate are those whose souls are connected to such a distinguished Tzadik.

We have discussed his Torah for many years, and many of the Halachot (laws) which we practice are from him, and indeed during challenging times, we experienced revelations from him.



### Rabbi Yosef Chaim, the 'Ben Ish Hai'.

The Ben Ish Hai related that there once lived an individual called Tuvia. Tuvia served as the Chief Justice for the king and was venerated by all. Indeed, wherever he walked, he would be escorted by calls of 'Tuvia the Judge, Tuvia the Judge' and people would acquiesce to his every whim.

One day, Tuvia heard that an accusation had been made against him, putting his life in danger, to the extent that he had to flee the city. During the night he sought to leave the city, however, he was faced with a dilemma. His city was surrounded by a large river and there were no boats or rafts available to cross it at night. Therefore, the common practice was for certain individuals to carry those wishing to cross on their shoulders from one side to the other.

Tuvia was extremely heavy, yet with no alternative, he approached one of these individuals and asked him to carry him on his shoulders from one side to the other. The individual immediately recognized Tuvia, one of the most distinguished individuals in the city, and readily agreed. The man began to carry Tuvia, and despite his bulk, he was able to make rapid progress across the river.

Tuvia was so thrilled with the man's progress that he introduced himself, revealing that he was in fact 'Tuvia' the famous judge, to which the man explained that it was a tremendous honor to escort his venerable passenger. Tuvia then continued to assure the man that the day would come when the people in the city would once again recognise his true stature, at which point he would readily recompense the man for the wonderful job he was doing.

The man was somewhat surprised by Tuvia's musings and inquired as to what was going on. At which point, Tuvia explained that unfortunately his fortunes had turned, with accusations being leveled against him, and he had decided to flee the city.

Upon hearing this, the man was overcome by sudden exhaustion under Tuvia's bulk, and fell forwards, leaving Tuvia victim to the river's torrents.

The Ben Ish Hai explained that this story reflects human psychology. All the while that the man had a vested interest in Tuvia, he was able to lift him despite his bulk, yet the moment that interest faded, Tuvia suddenly became heavy and impossible to lift. So too, at times when we have a vested interest in having a relationship with someone, that person is so to speak 'light to carry,' in that we can effortlessly generate energy to help that person - to carry them. Yet when that interest fades, the person becomes heavy in our eyes - a heavy burden - who we can no longer motivate ourselves to carry.

We have related the following story of the Ben Ish Hai many times, yet its poignant insights warrant it being repeated.

The Ben Ish Hai said that there was a certain father who was exceedingly wealthy. Before he passed away, he instructed his two sons to refrain from entering into a business partnership. He said that all partnerships were problematic and were bound to end on bad terms. He concluded his final moments, stating that his feelings were so strong on the matter, that he had taken steps to divide all his business interests in half to be apportioned to each son separately, in order for them to be able to continue his business affairs with ease, without the risks inherent in partnerships. In this way, he hoped that they would be able to continue their warm friendship going forward. Once the father passed away, the sons began their respective businesses. The first brother felt certain that he would be able to turn the huge sum his father had bequeathed to him into a far larger one. He therefore started engaging in business intensely and took out multiple loans to finance his ventures. However, over time he ran into

trouble and day by day his funds depleted.

The other brother had a more conservative approach, he noticed that at the beginning, he too was struggling, and therefore surmised that there are times when one experiences Divine blessing and times when one does not. He assumed that this was a trying time, during which, for whatever reason, the Divine blessing was not forthcoming. He therefore sold off all of his assets and bought diamonds with the proceeds. He buried the diamonds in a hole and went to work as a simple employee for someone.

The first brother, however, continued to exert all of his efforts in the business, despite failure after failure. Eventually, the pressure mounted to the extent that his heart gave out and he suffered a cardiac arrest and passed away. In the meantime, the second brother who had continued to serve as a simple worker, began to notice his fortunes changing. One day he was offered an unexpected bonus from his employer, and then he chanced upon some money which someone had left in the street; he sensed clear signs that things were improving. With that inspiration, he dug up his diamonds, sold them and started a business which flourished and he became tremendously successful.

The Ben Ish Hai remarked that Hashem gives us signs. When the signs indicate that the times are challenging, rather than fight the signs (as the first brother did), one should instead simply stop and wait, biding one's time until the moment passes. It is important to embrace the signs, rather than oppose that which Hashem does, and through this one will merit great success and joy.

### Below is a scary story involving the Ben Ish Hai.

The Ben Ish Hai related that one day he was approached by a crying young lady. The crying lady turned to the Ben Ish Hai and cried: 'My mother-in-law is killing me, she's pursuing me, torturing me and I simply cannot continue to live like this.' The Ben Ish Hai listened patiently, and once she had calmed down, he asked the lady to summon her mother-in-law to him.

Once the mother-in-law arrived, the Ben Ish Hai inquired as to how old she was, to which she said "70." He further inquired as to how old her daughter-in-law was, to which she said "25." Upon hearing this, the Ben Ish Hai informed her that he was going to tell her something which should remain exclusively between them. He asked her: 'Is it true that when you were younger, you were traumatized when your daughter who was a month or two old passed away?' The lady was shocked, and asked how he had known? He responded that her daughter had in fact returned as a Gilgul (reincarnation) in her daughter-in-law, and as such, each time she tormented her daughter-in-law, she was in fact tormenting her daughter.

From this story we see the impact of one's actions. When one seeks to harm someone, they may well in fact be harming their own child, or their own soul. As such, rather than their actions being inconsequential, their actions will impinge on their soul for years to come. It may well be the case that they feel as if they have succeeded, however in truth, they will be unable to rest in peace. Years and years may pass, only for their sins to return to haunt them, residing in the depths of their souls. Those sins will remain in their conscience, impinging on their peace of mind, and as much as they seek to heal their wounds, they will remain broken. Let us therefore ensure that we take care in our actions.

