

# Derech Ha-rif

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

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## First Shabbat Meal

### The incredible power of reading Sefer Devarim on Shabbat

The Rokeach (Rabbi Eleazar of Worms, c.1176-1238) reveals that there are nine-hundred-and fifty-five Heavens separating our material world and Hashem's Celestial Throne. These 955 Heavens have particular meaning in context of the Tome of Devarim, as in the entire Devarim there are 955 verses. This is no coincidence, as when Moshe realized that he would not enter the Land of Israel and his time was very soon approaching, he made one last request to Hashem. He never had any personal interest in what he did; his actions were purely for Hashem's sake and His Nation, the Jewish people. His request was straightforward and immense: that the entire spiritual realms be made visible and then the entire creation will see and realize that You are The One and Only (Midrash Rabba, Devarim 11:8).

The Rokeach explains that Moshe purposely composed 955 verses within Devarim, as each verse is meant to breach through one of the heavens until Hashem's Celestial Throne is reached. Of these 955 Heavens, 900 are no easy task to travel through, as they are presided (through Hashem's instruction) by the Archangel Matatron, an angel of judgment, who decides which prayers and requests can enter the Heaven above. The final 55 Heavens, however, are exclusive to Hashem's Presence, and He alone grants permission for the prayers to pass those Heavens and reach His Celestial Throne.

The prophet Hosea (4:13) alludes to the concealed power of Devarim when he says, "take for yourselves words (Devarim, in Hebrew) and return to Hashem," that is, and attain Hashem's Celestial Throne. Reading Devarim is essentially having Moshe accompany you till Hashem's Celestial Throne. It was told about the Holy Jew (Rabbi Yaakov Yitzhak of Peshischa, 1813), that he would carry around a book of Devarim and read it regularly throughout the day at every bit of spare time he had. His disciples asked him for an explanation of his habit, and he answered: "What better book than Devarim, the greatest Musar (ethics) composition there is. Its teachings and influence are timeless and forever powerful.

Commentators explain that while the first four Books of the Torah were dictated directly Hashem and inscribed by Moshe, the fifth book of Devarim was composed by Moshe through Heavenly Intuition (Ruach Hakodesh). Not only does it provide a bridge between the direct word of Hashem (Written Torah) and the Oral Torah, which incorporates human understanding (that of the Sages), but were it not for Devarim, it would have been near-impossible to fully understand the Written Torah. Ever since the reading of Devarim has become so popularized, we've witnessed miracles in every area of life.

The entire idea of Devarim came to us at that very low point in life when we were locked up; then we thought of our situation as the most miserable distress one could bear, but now we look back at that moment as a holiday, when something great had taken place. Our lockup began on the seventh of the Month of Adar, which is the day of passing of Moshe Rabbenu. In our cell, they didn't allow any form of literature whatsoever, but someone managed to grab a book from the facilities synagogue and hand it over to us; that book was none other than the book of Devarim. That same day we read the entire book several times, all the time crying to Hashem. Later on two more books were placed in our cell, one of which was the "Rokeach," which reveals the secret hidden within Devarim: 955 Heavens, 955 verses, etc... Then we came upon the other literature which shared the same theme of Devarim, namely, the Book of Kings. There, King Yoshiyahu rediscovering the book of Devarim in the Beth Hamikdash forty years prior to the destruction of the Temple and after reading its contents, realizes that it's contents are Hashem's communication to the nation. Ever since we've began publicizing the power of reading Devarim, we've come a long way; there are currently over 100,000 worldwide who regularly read the entire Devarim on Shabbat. After passing the 22,000 mark, the idea of Devarim entered a new dimension and gained great significance and even greater power in Heaven. The previous Satmar Rebbe, Rabbi Yoel, explained that anything- any idea, practice or bit of information- that becomes popularized within 22,000 people, has significant influence and bearing on the entire Jewish Nation (this applies for both positive and less positive practices).

Devarim influence the entire week, and every positive spiritual uplifting we experience during the week, we feel with certitude that it's in the merit of Devarim. Devarim is unique in that it contains both elements of Torah study and those of prayer. The Talmud in Bava Batra 116b teaches that when one has an ill person at home, they should visit a Chacham, a scholar, who will pray for them. Another Talmud (Taanit 8a) teaches that if the skies become dry as copper and don't pour forth rains, then people should know that it is due to those who slander and gossip... The solution, here too, is to visit a Sage and ask that he pray for the situation. The difference between the two is that the Scholar, as defined by the Talmud, is one who heads a Beth Midrash, one who is involved in Torah study. The Sage, on the other hand, is one who is pious in his ways. Thus, in regarding health matters, one should turn towards a sage who is known for his Torah Study, while matters of sustenance (rain) call for the prayers of a pious individual.

In reading Devarim, we feel both the power of the Torah and the piety. Those that regularly read Devarim have blessings in both aspects, both health and financial matters



## Soul Of the Rif

These days of Bein Hametzarim (the Three Weeks), the time of the destruction of the Temple are times during which a person needs to take an accounting of themselves, to analyze and search within oneself, finding the areas in which he has improvements to be made. During this time, a person must work on himself, in particular in regard to interpersonal matters, such as loving one's fellow Jew, not hating other people without reason, and working to subjugate these feelings, and fixing any bad aspects within one's character. A person must know that if there is something which causes him aggravation, or there is something which does not go right for him, or another person wronged him, this can be used positively. In his mind, a person must take what has happened and envelope it with good things, and ensure that he maximizes that which he has undergone and takes the good from something bad.



## 2nd Shabbat Meal

The destruction of the Temple formed an absence within each of us, and we must cry and be pained about this.

One of the Kinnot (poems of eulogy) which is etched on the heart of every Jew is the eulogy of David on the destruction of the Temple. David said "By the rivers of Babylon, we set and wept as we remembered Zion. On the willows there, we hung our harps" (Tehillim 137:1). David eulogizes over the Jews who have been exiled with Yechonya, and the other groups exiled to Babylon. It is necessary to understand why they cried only by the rivers of Babylon and not in the synagogues or study halls. We are told that every G-d-fearing Jew should have a small place in his home set aside for prayer, even if his house is small and basic, he should set aside a small chair or table or corner, where he prays and cries, or learns Torah. This place should be set aside for Hashem. Of course, those exiled Jews set aside a place in their homes for prayer, which served for them as the Gate of Heaven. In light of this, the question must be asked, why did they sit by the rivers and cry there?

There are further questions to be asked, what do the words "we also cried" come to include? What is the meaning of "on the willows there on which we hung our harps"?

Perhaps we can explain this through a broader concept. The prophet Yeshaya said "The Earth will be filled with knowledge of Hashem, like the water covers the seabed (Yeshaya 11:9)." Our holy sages teach that when Hashem created the world, He made it in separate sections: a third of the Earth was formed as inhabitable land, a third was ocean and a final third was deserts. However, the Talmud (Shabbat 56b) teaches that when King Shlomo married the daughter of Pharaoh, the angel Gavriel came thrust a reed into the sea, a sandbank grew around it, and the great town of Rome was built on this sandbank. It was Rome that destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple. The Talmud teaches how on the night that Shlomo finished building the Temple, the night before the inauguration of the Temple, he married Pharaoh's daughter and G-d took this matter into account, and on that very night, Gavriel went and thrust a reed into the ocean; it was the reed upon which Rome was built. Our Sages (Megilla 6a) teach that when Rome is built, Jerusalem is in ruins and vice-versa. Until the moment when Shlomo married Pharaoh's daughter, the world was balanced, but from that moment onwards, the world which had been divided into even thirds was changed.

Based on this background, we can explain that the Jewish people were

in pain in their exile, and they searched for a partner who would cry with them. The waters were in pain, as the world was no longer split into even thirds, and it would remain so until the Messiah came. Since the destruction of the Temple, there are two further causes for mourning in the world, the Jewish people mourns over the loss of the Temple, and the ocean weeps over the loss of balance. The ocean knows that when Jerusalem was destroyed, Rome was built, and when Jerusalem will be built, Rome will be destroyed; the balance will then be restored.

The Jewish people searched for a place to weep, and there was no party better to weep with than the sea. We can explain that they hung their harps in the willows, because it is known that willows have neither taste nor smell; during their exile, the Jewish people reached a stage where they no longer felt that they were in exile, as they had houses and pleasure. Outside of Israel, they no longer have the same pain and difficulty that they used to endure in exile. The story is told of a wealthy Jew who began to say "Next year in the rebuilt city of Jerusalem" during Pesach. The gentile maid in his house asked him what he was saying, he explained that he was praying to G-d that the full redemption should take place the next year and that he would be in Jerusalem. She said to him, "If only I had the exile that you have, as you have everything and are not ruled over by anyone." Today, because of our many sins and the fact that we live among the nations, the feeling of being in servitude is diluted, as we appear to lack nothing. It seems that everything is good for the Jews, but the depth of the redemption is "In inner chambers, my soul will weep (Yirmiya 13:17)." Hashem weeps over the hidden things. We place Tefillin on ourselves and fulfill Mitzvot (G-d's commandments) as was done in the past; the Ari and all the Tzaddikim did just this. But Hashem cries over the hidden things, which are buried deep in the hearts, which we lack; for in their hearts, they had great connection in higher places during their prayers. Therefore, our weeping should be in partnership with the sea which also weeps over the destruction, and our cries need to be over the deep internal feelings which we have lost through the destruction of the Temple. On the outside, it appears that the Jews lack nothing, they have wealth, satisfaction and all forms of good. However, we need to access this inner aspect, namely, that there is internal weeping of the soul. A person must feel in his heart this lack, and then he will cry. This is the great solution which will bring us closer to rebuilding the Temple. The Temple is pained because we are pained over its destruction.

## Q & A with the Rif



### Question:

Dear Rav, thank G-d, I have found a good woman and all is well; she is a righteous woman with Yirat Shamayim (fear of Heaven) and good character traits. However, because I have suffered in the past, my heart is not open and my feelings are not activated. Please can the Rav advise me.

### Answer:

A person needs to know that until his heart is opened, and as long as he does not yet have inner peace, he will always have fears and lack completeness. The fact that you have been hurt once does not mean that you need to make this into something fixed throughout your life. If a person will tell you that he was hurt and that he makes his decisions based on this feeling of hurt, this is not an ideal approach, to say the least.

You have discovered the woman, a good thing would be to go forward and Hashem will give both of you great help and divine assistance.





## 3rd Shabbat meal

The greatest pain during the destruction of the Beth Hamikdash was that the masses of people who were massacred were not brought to burial only many years later.

In Tehillim 79 (1-3), David mourns all the aspects of the destruction of the Temple. He makes special note of the condition of the corpses of those massacred; "their corpses were laid out to scavengers, their blood flowed as rivers around Jerusalem and there was no burial for any of them. That was a disgrace in the face of the nations." Innumerable number of men, women and children were massacred during the destruction until their blood began to form streams around Jerusalem. But the aspect that most disturbed David, as he describes in Tehillim, is the fact that the corpses weren't brought to burial. Why was David most pained about this aspect of the destruction?

To understand David's concern, we turn to the ritual of offering sacrifices in the Beth Hamikdash. There are several steps to offering a sacrifice-slaughtering, pouring the blood on the altar and giving it to be consumed in fire upon the altar. What most pleases Hashem, so to speak, are the elements of pouring the blood, burning the animal and having its smoke rise into the sky. The verse describes the burning of the sacrifice as "a pleasant incense to Hashem (Vayikra 1:9)." Rashi makes it clear that the aspect of the sacrifice which is pleasant to Hashem, that which is referred to in the verse is the consumption of the sacrifice in fire and the rising of the smoke into the heavens.

The Sages teach that as a sacrifice atones for an individual or the entire nation, so to the passing of Tzadikim, the righteous individuals of the nation, atones for the sins of the entire nation. The actual passing of the Tzadik corresponds to the slaughter element of the animal, while the burial and decay of the corpse corresponds to the sprinkling of the blood of the sacrifice and its consumption in fire upon the altar. The verse in Devarim (32:43) alludes to this notion: "And his earth (i.e. turning to earth) will atone for his nation."

The actual passing of the Tzadik is not the part which atones for the nation, but rather when he is buried and the corpse decays, comparable to the burning of the sacrifice, which is the part of the sacrifice which is most pleasant to Hashem. Once a year passes, the corpse having decayed, and the people make a ceremony to recall the Tzadik, commonly known as a Hilloula, then the merit of that Tzadikim comes into its own and atones and influence goodness to all.

During the destruction of the Beth Hamikdash, people were massacred mercilessly, and their corpses were thrown in the streets for many years afterwards. Hashem didn't want that their corpses be brought to burial because then their merits would serve as atonement for the remaining population. Hashem was then still displeased with the behavior of the nation, and if those that had been massacred prior to the destruction would have been buried, then perhaps their merit would have prevented the destruction. Based upon this idea, the Talmud in Berachot 48b states that when the corpses of those massacred at Beitar were brought to burial, the Sages in Yavne composed the blessing of "HaTov Vehemetiv," He who is Good and confers Good onto others. The double blessing was formulated to express gratitude to Hashem for sparing the corpses from decaying even after being exposed for so long, and for finally allowing them to be brought to burial. The deeper meaning of this blessing is that on the day that the corpses were allowed to be brought to burial, those very corpses would then decay into the earth and the merit of those souls

would finally benefit all those still standing. The Sages realized that in allowing that to happen, Hashem was revealing that His displeasure had subsided, and that was truly a reason to formulate a blessing.

At the time of the destruction of the Beth Hamikdash, great multitudes of people and saints were massacred, but were buried for many years. Their corpses were piled up and used as fences and the blood kept on pouring for seven years; streams of blood were formed and diverted to the fertilization of vineyards. Had they been buried, their souls would have amassed great merit for the nation and the destruction wouldn't have taken place. However, Hashem was not entirely pleased with His nation's behavior, and the destruction went on to take place. However, when those massacred at Beitar could be brought to burial, the Sages realized that the affair had been concluded and the reconstruction and rectification can begin anew. We are still counting the years of the destruction, pleading to Hashem that he forgive us, and imploring that He return his Glory and interaction as once was.

Thus, David mourned specifically the lack of burial of the corpses that were massacred during the period of the Beth Hamikdash's destruction. Only once the corpses were buried could those souls atone for the Nation, and appropriately, the unique blessing of HaTov VeHemetiv was instituted.

## Treasure charms from the Rif

If a person can merit to read the verses of Sefer Devarim every day or at least every Shabbat, this is a tremendous segula, and it is one which is especially fitting for today's generation. The Or Hachaim says that before Mashiach will come, Moshe Rabbeinu will come to teach Torah to Bnei Yisrael before the redemption. Sefer Devarim, which is referred to in the verse "Remember the Torah of Moshe My servant" (Malachi 3:22) is the preparation for the redemption. Anyone who has a little understanding knows that we are currently standing at the entranceway of the redemption, the time that the descendant of David will come. If someone thinks that things will change, that they will be as he wishes, this is not so. The world in the Messianic times will not be the same, and will not revert back to how it was, the world changes constantly, like a small child that is a little different each day to how he was the day before. Today, the world is not as it was a hundred years ago, and the world of today will not be the world of tomorrow. There are great messages to be learnt through the study of Devarim every Shabbat; this study brings the redemption close. Aside from the salvation and the great miracles which we see ourselves, we see that people who study this Sefer also undergo extraordinary events, such is the power of Sefer Devarim.



### Rabbi Yitzchak ben Shlomo Luria, the Ari Hakadosh

There is a story told of the Ari Hakadosh who lived in Tzefat. There was a great and holy Tzaddik, named Rav Moshe Galanti, who was very wealthy; he owned many businesses and gave vast amounts of money to charity.

Rav Galanti once came to pray in the synagogue of the Ari Hakadosh. When he came in, the Ari said to him, "You are a Tzaddik, but you have a tiny stain of guilt on account of theft." Rav Galanti responded, "In all my life, I have never stolen, my entire career has been honest. Everything I have ever done is written and recorded, so how can the Rav say that I stole?"

Rav Moshe Galanti was an older man. He went to his business and called all of his workers. He set up a large pot and filled it with money, and announced to all his servants, "Whoever thinks that I owe him money, and I stole or took from him, please can he take." Everyone was silent, and then said "G-d forbid, you never took even one thing from any of us. All your deeds were conducted fairly and kindly, the Rav should not say such a thing."

Suddenly, an old lady got up, she came to the pot and took money from it, she placed the coins in her pocket and declared them to be hers. Rav Galanti asked her and she said that they were hers by right.

Rav Galanti was very happy, the next day he returned to the synagogue of the Ari. The Ari told him, "Now you have nothing stolen in your possession; you appear pure." Rav Galanti asked him what made him say this, the Ari explained to him as follows: "Rav Galanti, you know that this woman has worked for you for many years. She is an older lady and works hard. She knows how to work better than any of the others and deserves better pay for her work. You didn't think that way, so you haven't paid her a higher salary. Internally, she feels that she deserves more, and indeed, she does, even though you agreed a specific amount with her. She does not come to you with claims because it is difficult to ask for more money since you made an arrangement. However, in her heart, she has serious complaints against you."

The Ari said to Rav Galanti, "You should know that what she thought that she deserved and you had not given her was defined as stolen in your hands, and this lowered you, it was a stain which lowered you, and until you had given her more, this remained unresolved. Now that she has received what she wanted, G-d will forgive you, and the sign that you had something stolen in your possession has vanished from your face."

A person needs to be exceptionally careful in financial matters, and ensure that he does not hold anything stolen in his possession, because theft can make a person lose all that he has; indeed, theft can destroy a person's possessions. He must be alert and concentrate on ensuring that all his deeds are fair and conducted properly. When a person conducts himself in this manner, G-d will give him material blessing.



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It is known that the day of the passing of the Ari was a difficult one. He was young in years and had not even reached the age of forty. He reached levels which we cannot comprehend. The story is told that his students came to learn a great secret of the Torah from the Zohar. The Ari said to them, "I am not able to reveal to you this particular secret of the Torah, as this is a secret which is forbidden to reveal." The students pressured him and said to him "You must tell us." Rav Chaim Vital and all the students pressured him, and the Ari shared the secret with them. After he told it to them, he said, "This is it, now that I have revealed this secret, death has been decreed upon me, I will have to leave this world."

The students were pained, they said to him: "Our teacher, how can you die? You are young, and there are still so many secrets of the Torah which you have yet to reveal to us, there are many holy things we still do not know." They began to weep greatly and do anything they could so that the Ari would not die. He said to them: "There is one way to solve the issue of my death, we must go out of the city in which we have been living until now to a faraway land and learn Torah the entire day. If G-d forbid, there is an argument among you, then my fate will be sealed and I will have to die." The students agreed.

The Ari gathered all his students and they left the city, they sat and learnt Torah, becoming holier and more elevated. They served Hashem with purity and devotion, and brought tremendous secrets of the Torah down to the world, secrets whose enormity cannot be described.

One Friday, the wives of the students of the Ari had an argument. After their husbands had returned home and after the Shabbat meal, each one told their husband about the argument which had taken place. The students of the Ari came to pray and began to attack and argue with each other. They then saw the Ari praying and noticed that he was very sad. They asked him why, and he said, "The decree has been passed, this week I will die. There was a fight between the students and the condition was that there would not be, the moment they argued, the decree was made, and this is it, I must die."

At that time, there was a plague which made people die if they became infected with it. One day that week, the Ari caught it, he suffered a severe sickness of his intestines and lay in his bed. The prime student of the Ari, Rav Chaim Vital, who knew all of the Torah of the Ari went out of the room. Rav Yitzchak HaKohen entered, he was another of the prominent students of the Ari. The Ari asked, "Where is Rav Chaim Vital?" Rav Yitzchak answered him, explaining that he had gone out. The Ari began to cry to Rav Yitzchak, telling him, "I am in great pain, Rav Chaim Vital is not here, and there are so many secrets of the Torah which need to be revealed." Rav Yitzchak cried to the Ari, and said "How can this be? What will be? How can we lose our holy teacher? How can we lose you? How can you leave the world?"

The Ari stood up and said to him "I will return and continue to teach you Torah, whether you are awake or dreaming, through whatever means, I will continue. I will come in various unusual ways to whoever merits to learn these matters. I will teach whoever merits to receive the secrets of the Torah." The Ari then told Rav Yitzchak Hakohen to leave the room straight away, as he was a Kohen (and could not become contaminated by being in the same room as a dead body). The Ari warned Rav Yitzchak that he could feel his soul was about to depart. Rav Yitzchak began to leave the room, once he was past the doorway, the Ari returned his soul to the Creator of the world, with purity and sanctity, with a great light, which revealed his inner light.

Our holy teachers say that the soul of the Ari is everywhere; as he promised Rav Yitzchak Hakohen, it comes to the world, each time in a different form.

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