

# Derech Ha-rif

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

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## First Shabbat Meal

"This is the statute of the Torah...speak to the Jewish people and they should bring to you a red heifer."

The choicest way to conquer one's Evil Inclination is through Torah study.

The choice of words of the very first verse seem imprecise when we analyze it in context. Why is the verse general when describing the commandment of the red heifer as simply a "statute of the Torah"? It should have gone directly into describing the statute as that of the red heifer: "behold is the statue of the red heifer..."

The words of the Ba'al Hafla'ah (Nitzavim #80) on the verse in Nitzavim provide insight into the reason for the Torah's choice of words. The verse says : "behold, I have given you today Life and Good.." The Talmud learns from this verse that one should constantly incite one's Good Inclination upon one's Evil Inclination. If that doesn't work to overcome the inclination, then they should study Torah. If study doesn't work then they should recite Shema, the acceptance of Hashem's Kingship upon oneself. Finally, if the former three had no effect on one's Evil Inclination, then one should recall the end of life, the day of death.

The Talmud asks: why should a person go through the several suggestions to beat the Evil Inclination when they could at first choice simply recall the end of all life, the day of death?

The Ba'al Hafla'ah suggests a powerful answer in addition to those suggested by the Talmud. In truth, the Talmud may have given only one suggestion to beat one's Evil Inclination, that is to recall the day of death, and that would have sufficed. But, the effect that suggestion and the two suggestions preceding it are entirely different in effect that the suggestion of studying Torah to beat one's Evil Inclination.

The study of Torah has a long term effect on one's Evil Inclination. It will aid one in conquering one's immediate impulse or desire, but critically, it'll also build one's spiritual and psychological defenses against the tactics and attempts of the Evil Inclination. Torah study is not simply a momentary strategy to conquer one's Evil Inclination, but a battle plan to win the war time and again.

The Talmud therefore first suggests that one immerse themselves in Torah study to beat the Evil Inclination. But if for whatever reason they find it difficult to do so, they should move on to the next suggestions, which offer more direct methods of defense. This teaching that Torah is the true antidote to one's Evil Inclination provides insight into why the first verse of the Chukkat Torah portion mentions the words "statute of the Torah..." rather than state directly "statute of the red heifer." The red heifer recalls one of the day of death, as it purifies from the impurity of death. Hence, metaphorically, the Torah teaches first that it is "the statute of the Torah," id est, first refer to the Torah, study the Torah, before you recall the "day of death."

The Talmud in Kiddushin (30b) reinforces the idea of Torah study as the choicest method to conquer the Evil Inclination. "I've created the Evil Inclination," says Hashem, " and I've created the Torah as his antidote." Studying Torah gives one the tools to conquer the Evil Inclination decisively. However, recalling the day of death, or the other methods suggested only provide temporary defeat.



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## Soul Of the Rif

An individual who is not careful with the words coming out of their mouth may unwittingly contribute to the destruction of the world- An employer may hurt and break the souls of his employees with poorly considered words. A teacher may ruin the future of a child through negative speech. For example, when the teacher is angry due to matters in their own personal life, and they take this anger out on the child by shouting at them, or telling their parents negative things about the child in an insensitive manner. It cannot be emphasized enough, how much a person must carefully consider and use their mind and heart to filter every word before it is uttered. Words may cause great destruction- one must take responsibility for every word they utter.



## 2nd Shabbat Meal

**"Behold! A people has come out of Egypt, behold! It has covered the eye (Ayin) of the earth and it sits opposite me."**

Balak was afraid of the Jewish people and wished to pre-emptively curse them, due to the power of the letter Ayin that the Jewish people possessed.

In the beginning of the portion of Balak, the Torah narrates that Balak and the Moabites were afraid of the Jewish people "because it was Rav (numerous)", and so Balak sent for Bilaam to pre-emptively curse the Jewish people. The following difficulty is raised- Why was Balak afraid because of the magnitude of the Jewish population? The number of people is not necessarily a good indicator of military strength, Balak should have looked to the weapons and military capability of the Jewish people rather than just their number!

The Or HaChaim tells us that Balak was called "Ben Tzipor (son of bird)" because he had a bird which he used to perform sorcery and terrible deeds, and through this bird he could foretell future events. Why would such a wise and powerful sorcerer be afraid of a people just because they were many in number?

Another difficulty that is raised is why Balak says regarding the Jewish people "It has covered the eye (Ayin) of the earth". The earth has no eyes, it would have seemingly been more appropriate to simply say "It has covered the earth"!?

Perhaps we may resolve these difficulties with the following principle. David Hamelech writes in Tehillim (33, 18) "Behold! The Eye (Ayin) of Hashem is to those who fear Him". The mystical writings explain that Hashem granted the saintly Tzadikim power over the letter Ayin- The two most terrible matters in the world are death (Mavet) and hunger (Ra'av). (Indeed our Sages teach that a destitute person who does not have what to eat is likened to a dead person.) However, if the letter Ayin is removed from the word Ra'av (hunger), the remaining letters form the word Rav (plenty) or Bar (food). If the letter Ayin is inserted into the word Mavet (death), the word Ma'ot (monies) is formed. The mystical writings teach that the "Ayin of Hashem is to those

who fear him"- Hashem granted the Tzadik the power to take Mavet (death), and insert the letter Ayin to form Ma'ot (monies)- monies of Tzedaka, and the power to remove the Ayin from Ra'av (hunger) and form Rav (plenty) or Bar (food).

This is what the verse intends to say when it teaches us that Balak was afraid of the Jewish people "because it was Rav (numerous)". The Jewish people had left Egypt and were traversing the wilderness, a place where there is naturally no food and no water. How come the Jewish people were not in Ra'av (hunger)? It was because "It has covered the eye (Ayin) of the earth"- Hashem granted them the power over the letter Ayin to remove (cover) it from Ra'av (hunger) and form Rav (plenty) or Bar (food) as explained above. Balak had good reason to be afraid of the Jewish people who had power over the letter Ayin and by extension over death and hunger.

**"But only the thing that I shall speak to you- that you shall do."  
Sometimes what appears to be a blessing is actually a curse.**

Initially Bilaam intends to go with the officials of Moav to curse the Jewish people, but Hashem does not give him permission telling him "You shall not go with them. You shall not curse the people, for it is blessed." When Bilaam pleads with Hashem to let him go, Hashem responds "If the men came to summon you, arise and go with them, but only the thing that I shall speak to you- that you shall do." Now Bilaam is all of a sudden willing to go and bless the Jewish people as Hashem will command him. Why in one moment does Bilaam wish to curse the Jewish people, and the next moment he is willing to go and bless them?! Our Sages answer that Bilaam wanted to bless the Jewish people a "blessing" that is truly a curse in the vein of the verse (Devarim 32, 15) "Yeshurun became fat and kicked"- that they shall have plenty, and from that plenty become spoiled.

We often find that a wicked person materially succeeds- but in truth the material blessing is nothing but a curse that will eventually bring him down. This is akin to an animal being fattened, and appearing strong and healthy- but in truth it is only being fattened for the purpose of slaughtering it.

Similarly, Bilaam intended to curse the Jewish people with "riches hoarded by their owner to his misfortune".

## Q & A with the Rif



### Question:

**Dear Rav, when Shabbat comes I am filled with negative feelings and triggers- I don't understand why! How can I improve my feeling and glean from the sanctity of Shabbat and enjoy it?**

### Answer:

**Shabbat is the holiest time- when the Neshama Yetera (additional soul) enters a person. The Yetzer Hara attempts to ruin this great time. The more one spiritually strengthens themselves and hence has a more spiritually elevated Neshama Yetera, the stronger their internal battle is.**

**If you feel on Shabbat a great battle with the Yetzer Hara- it is a sign that your Neshama Yetera is at a very lofty level. The more you sanctify your body and thoughts the easier you will make it for your Neshama. The Neshama is like a guest- if a guest arrives at a home which is disorganized, they do not feel comfortable. The Neshama comes on Shabbat and if the body is not well prepared for the Neshama's arrival, the Neshama feels uncomfortable.**

**Ensure you prepare your material body by sanctifying it and spiritually ascending, so that the Neshama on Shabbat will feel comfortable and at ease.**





## 3rd Shabbat meal

"Now, the nation will consume all the resources in our surroundings as cattle which graze pasture."

One should focus on amassing Torah and Mitzvot through their own effort and not by comparison through those that are weaker.

The Parasha describes Balak and Bila'am's plot to harm the Jewish nation as they neared their land. The incidents described in the Parasha are an example for all generations, how nations plot in every manner to annihilate the Jews, and how the Jewish people must have faith and trust in Hashem wholeheartedly.

one who toils in Torah in an environment which isn't conducive to Torah study, for example among people who don't value Torah, his study has very much more value.

The Midrash Rabba (Bereshit 50:11) describes two Torah characters who expressed identical ideas in regards to relative righteousness. Tzorfite and Lot each expressed how their actions were righteous relative to their community, until a certain incident took place. "Rabbi Berechya and Rabbi Levi taught in the name of Rabbi Chama bar Chanina: Tzorfite asked Eliyahu why had he come to her abode? In doing so he turned her from being considered righteous relative to her community to being considered a sinner when standing beside Eliyahu."

Lot excited expressed a similar concern, continues the Midrash. Following the destruction of Sodom, he wished to flee but not in the vicinity of Avraham. Compared to Sodom he was righteous, but to Avraham, the very opposite.

One can have only a small number of good deeds to their kudos, but when it's within an environment and vicinity that is sinful in nature, the deeds carry so much more value.

During Yom Kippur, there is one prayer which asks Hashem that "the Jewish people should not need one another for their sustenance nor help from other nations. Aside from the literal meaning, we also ask Hashem to allow us to gain our own merit and not because of a level which is relative to others.

Avimelech, king of the Pelishtim during Avraham and Yitzhak wished to belittle Yitzhak after the punishment he received for taking Rivka to his palace. Avimelech tells Yitzhak to leave Azza, and tells him that he has become rich through his own merit, but only because he is found in the midst of sinners. However, Avimelech retracts his insult when he asks to make a peace- treaty later on.

Similarly, in our Torah Portion, Bilaam feared that the arrival of the Jewish people to his area would rid his nation of all good merit when they would inevitable be compared to the Jewish people. He made a fundamental mistake- due to his ignorance. He didn't know that the Jewish nation is unique and Hashem will never draw comparison to the Jewish people from other nations.

This teaching is a very important to have in mind. Each person should focus on being the best they could and doing as many mitzvot and Torah study study. One should not be focused on relative goodness, that is righteousness when compared other people. We shouldn't rely on one another for sustenance (and merit?), but be focused on amassing our own, hard earned Torah and Mitzvot.



**קריאת קודש**  
 לאור מצבו הרפואי של האדמו"ר  
 רבי 'אשיהו פינטו שליט"א  
 שאמוד לעבוד בשבוע הקרוב טיפול רפואי ארוך ומורכב  
 מקראים בזה כל איש ישראל אנשים נשים וטף לקבל על  
 עצמם חיזוק רוחני, ולהעתיך בתפילה לרפואת האדמו"ר  
 רבי 'אשיהו יוסף בן זרי  
 לרפואה שלמה  
 ודן א-ל כבוד לא ימאס תפילת רבים

**כר יחוא**  
**יסוד עולם**

**ספר דברים**

## Treasure charms from the Rif

Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Rimanov taught that a great Segula to be saved from bad thoughts (which can cause terrible spiritual destruction) is to recite the passage of purifying vessels (Bamidbar 31, 21-24)

"Elazar the Kohen said to the men of the legion who came to the battle, 'This is the decree of the Torah, which Hashem commanded Moshe: Only the gold and the silver, the copper, the iron, the tin and the lead- everything that comes into the fire- you shall pass through the fire and it will be purified; but it must be purified with the water of sprinkling; and everything that would not come in the fire, you shall pass in the water. You shall immerse your garments on the seventh day and become purified; afterwards you may enter the camp.' The passage of purifying vessels is a remedy for bad thoughts- thoughts of immoral intimacy and general negative thoughts.



### Rabbi Chaim Ben Atar, the Or HaChaim HaKadosh.

The following terrifying story is told of the Or HaChaim. The Or HaChaim was once on a ship, when the waters suddenly became choppy and a great storm struck. The ship did not last long in the face of the storm and broke apart, with all the passengers being thrown into the sea. The Or HaChaim was miraculously able to hold on to a loose piece of wood to keep his head above the water, and eventually make his way to land.

The Or HaChaim, weak, battered and close to death, reached a desolate shore. He wasn't able to walk, and so, hungry, thirsty and fatigued, he crawled on all fours looking for someone to help him. He noticed a far off hut, and with the last of his strength made his way there and knocked on the door. There was no answer.

The Or HaChaim gently pushed the door open and inside he saw a warm house with a laid table and set bed. The Or HaChaim being so weakened and close to death, due to the principle of Pikuach Nefesh (saving life) entered, sat at the table to eat the food which was not his, and rested and passed out on the bed.

All of a sudden the Or HaChaim was awakened by a group of bandits to whom the home belonged. These bandits chastised the Or HaChaim for stealing their food and sleeping in their bed without permission, and decided that the Or HaChaim will be tried by the leader of the bandits, who will decide what punishment he should receive.

The bandits wished to put the Or HaChaim to death, to which the Or HaChaim responded "Please do as is fit in your eyes- kill me, or allow me to repay you for what I have benefitted- please do with me as you see fit."

As the Or HaChaim started speaking, the leader of the bandits turned to him and told him that he sounded familiar and that he thought he recognized him from somewhere. The Or HaChaim told him that he served as the rabbi of a certain city. The bandit said that indeed he used to live in that city over twenty years ago. The Or HaChaim then asked him for his name and from which family he was. When the bandit told him his name and the name of his family, the Or HaChaim exclaimed "Why I know your family well- they are good people- what made you become a murdering and thieving bandit?" The bandit replied that, as a child, his parents would chastise him often and put pressure on him, and he rebelled against the, eventually leaving the home and became a successful bandit, eventually becoming the leader of the bandits.

The Or HaChaim continued to talk to the leader of the bandits, and the leader of the bandits started having feelings of repentance and began crying. He said to the Or HaChaim "We will leave you in peace and will not do anything to you, but please tell me how I may repent- I have distressed my parents, stolen, murdered and committed many terrible deeds. How can I atone for my sins?"

The Or HaChaim told him- I can give you a remedy by which Hashem will forgive you for your sins. When the leader of the bandits asked what this remedy was, the Or HaChaim replied that the leader of the bandits should take a newly hatched venomous snake and place it in a small cage that he will carry on his back, and feed it a few grains every day for seven years. At the end of seven years he should release the snake which will strike him and kill him. This will be his atonement for his sins.

The leader of the bandits, upon hearing the remedy of the Or HaChaim, and recognizing his great righteousness resolved to do as the Tzadik said. He found a newly hatched venomous snake placed it in a small cage that he carried on his back and fed it every day for seven years. After seven years he released the snake which struck and killed him.

A few days after his death, the leader of the bandits appeared to the Or HaChaim in a dream telling him that for the completion of the Or HaChaim's remedy he was brought up to a very lofty place in Heaven.

The Mussar sages explain this story based on the following principle. In the Tefilla we recite the verse (Tehillim 79, 8) asking Hashem "Do not remember for us our early sins". Surely we do not want Hashem to remember and hold against us any of our sins. Why do we only mention the early sins?! The Mussar sages explain that it is the early sins which bring about the later sins. The precedent is set by the early sins. Were the early sins to fall away, the later sins would fall away too. The key sin that we ask Hashem not to remember for us is the early sin- the first lie, the first speech of Lashon Hara, the first theft which brought about all the later sins.

What was the early sin of this leader of the bandits- it was his lack of gratitude and disrespect of his parents who fed and nurtured him. Therefore, his remedy was to take a newly hatched snake, feed and nurture it for seven years- and then experience its ingratitude when it struck and killed him.

One must be extremely careful when it comes to the "early sins"- honoring one's parents, the fundamentals of the Torah, the ten commandments- "Honor your father and your mother", "You will not steal", "You will not murder", "You will not commit adultery". It is upon these foundations that the entire Torah rests.

In the ten commandments there are 613 (Tarya"g) letters and an extra seven letters which numerically come up to 620 (Keter-crown). The ten commandments are the Keter (crown) of the holy Torah.

One should be very careful to fulfill all of the Mitzvot and remember that every good action will be remembered. You do not know when you will be rewarded for it. Just be cognizant that no one has ever ultimately lost out from doing a good deed.

