

# Derech Ha-Rif

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

For the Torah portion of Vayetze | Volume 51 | 12 Kislev



## First Shabbat Meal

**"And he gathered from amongst the nearby stones ... and he seized the stone which he had placed beneath his head (Bereishit 11:28, 18:28)."**

**The paths of those who dedicate themselves to Torah study and those who financially support them are integral to one another. One must choose a path a focus and dedicate himself to it.**

Ever since the birth of the Jewish nation, there have been two adjacent paths which every Jewish person has had to decide between: the path of Yissachar and the path of Zevulun. Yissachar represents the one who dedicates himself to the study and dissemination of Torah, whilst Zevulun represents the one who financially supports his Torah-focused brethren.

At the very beginning of creation, with the births of Cain and Hevel, Hashem put this system in place. The brothers were meant to complement one another, with Cain focusing on providing financial support to Hevel's dedication to Torah study. Cain however, wasn't willing to provide his share of the deal. Instead, he garnered jealousy and hatred towards his brother, and ultimately murdered him.

Years later, another opportunity was created by Hashem to attempt this partnership, with the births of Yaakov and Esav. The Torah describes Yaakov as a "wholesome individual, who dwelled in the Tents (i.e. Beth HaMidrash of Shem and Ever)," who was intended to be supported by his brother, Esav, a worldly man "of the fields." As with Cain and Hevel, Esav garnered jealousy and hatred towards his brother and refused to fulfill his destined role of financial supporter of the Torah.

With her fine intuition, Rivka grasped Esav's objection and understood that Yaakov's future - his own and of his descendants - would be very shaky if he were left without financial support. Furthermore, the responsibility of Yaakov having to support himself would be made all the more difficult if Esav were to receive the blessings of "Veyiten Lecha," which speaks of blessings of material wealth. Through whatever means Yaakov had to obtain these blessings so that his future would be secured.

After managing to secure the blessings for himself and his descendants, Yaakov was presented with an additional challenge to his reality: how to combine the world of focused Torah study and the world of providing for himself financially. The Midrash relays that before heading out to Lavan to find his wife and begin his family life, Yaakov spent fourteen years studying in the Yeshiva of Ever (a grandson of Noah). Yaakov had spent many years prior studying in his father's Yeshiva and that of Shem, but his studies in the Yeshiva of Ever were different.

In the Yeshiva of Shem he learnt the Torah as it would be learnt by Yissachar (i.e. someone whose life is entirely dedicated and focused only on Torah study), but in that of Ever, Yaakov learned the Torah as it would be studied by Zevulun (one who works and is exposed to the outside world).

Yaakov understood that he needed to learn Torah from a different perspective, from that of a person who is exposed to the outside world in his daily affairs (i.e. the financial supporters of Torah), because he and many of his descendants were going to be living such a life.

After learning Torah in both Yeshivot, Hashem had an important lesson to transmit to Yaakov. Yaakov experienced his famous dream of the angels rising and descending the ladder to heaven. Following the dream, when he arose in the morning, the verse noted that Yaakov took "the stone" upon which he had rested throughout the night. This stone, the Sages reveal, was initially twelve stones that were transformed into one overnight. While Yaakov was asleep, the stones were debating who should be the worthy one to be the pillow for Yaakov's saintly head.

Metaphorically, the argument was about who has greater importance in the context of the nation as a whole: those that study Torah, or those that support it? Hashem fused them into one stone, thereby conveying to Yaakov an allusion that both elements of the nation are equally important, the person that studies Torah and the one who supports him.



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## Soul Of the Rif

A person must work on themselves to ensure their soul is healthy, that their mind is healthy, and that their Middot (character traits) are healthy. Moreover, one must know that it is impossible to be healthy in regard to any of these without a person working on themselves, and this can only be achieved through the fulfillment of the Torah and Mitzvot. The Mishna (Avot 4:2) teaches that one sin leads to another. The evil within one's soul begins to accumulate and starts to cause one's Middot to be corrupted.

This does not happen overnight, rather, there is a steady descent, which leads to another bad thing, and another, and through this, a person forms sizable unhealthy blots in their soul, and a small spark becomes a great sin. A person begins to accumulate a small disease within their heart and then the inferno starts.



## 2nd Shabbat Meal

**"And Yaakov went out of Be'er Sheva and went to Charan (Bereishit 28:10)"**

**Dedication in the study of Torah and service of Hashem sweetens anger, and lightens difficult times.**

The holy sefer, Imrei Noam, brings in the name of the author of the Megaleh Amukot, that the letters of the word 'Vayetze' (Vav, Yud, Tzaddik, Alef) are an acronym for Vayar Yaakov Tzurat Alef - 'and Yaakov saw the image of an Aleph.' The commentators try to understand the meaning of this. The Megaleh Amukot was an exceptionally holy person, and undoubtedly his teaching contains lofty secrets - what is the depth of this teaching?

Perhaps, a major concept can be suggested. The twenty-two letters of the Alef Bet with which the Torah is written are pipelines which bring blessing to the world. At the time of the creation of the world, the letter 'Aleph' was not written as it is now, they would pronounce it without the Lamed. It is known that the resulting word, 'Af,' means anger.

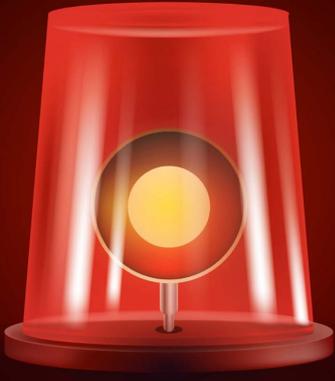
When the Jewish people toil in the holy Torah, with kindness and mercy, Hashem adds the letter Lamed into this letter, and it is then pronounced Alef. It is specifically this letter which is added because it symbolizes kindness and mercy, because the lamed is formed from the letters Kaf and Vav. These two letters have a combined total of twenty-six, matching the Name of Hashem. The Midrash (Kohelet Rabba) expounds on the verse "Only my wisdom stood for me" which means that Torah which I learn with 'af,' while there was pressure and difficulty, stood for me.

It is necessary to be aware of a key concept, that when a person is under pressure and has difficulties with their livelihood, and is undergoing disturbances and other undesirable things, if despite this, they struggle to toil and learn Torah, this sweetens the burning anger (af), and brings the letter Lamed, making it into Alef, and then blessing, Divine help, mercy and kindness descend upon a person. Whenever there is Divine anger in the world, and the Attribute of Judgment is present, by bringing the letter Lamed into the Alef, the Torah which one learns through difficulty stays with a person. This merit remains with a person and saves them, removing them from any trouble and any bad thing.

Based on this, the above verse and teaching can be understood. Yaakov saw the letter Aleph without the Lamed. Through the suffering which he had endured until now, he fled from Esav to an unknown place, he saw the letter Aleph to which the Lamed is added, and then he was happy, for he understood that through toil in Torah, during difficult times, this sweetens the judgment, giving a person strength, and this is what enabled him to be saved.

The current time is a time of distress for Yaakov [i.e., the Jewish people], we must strengthen ourselves with all our might in the study of Torah, and thereby add the Lamed, forming the Alef, and through this, there will be blessing, joy and a sweetening of judgment.

**"המנורה האדומה נדלקה"**  
**"העולם כולו נגרר אחרי המצב בעם ישראל"**  
 האדמו"ר רבי יאשיהו יוסף פינטו שליט"א  
 ליל ראש חודש אייר, לוס אנג'לס



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 ספר דברים צוואת משה רבנו רע"א מדימונא  
 כתקנת האדמו"ר רבנו יאשיהו יוסף פינטו שליט"א



## Q & A with the Rif



### Question:

Dear Rabbi, we have days which are known as "days of love" and others which are known as "days of hatred." There are days in which our brains feel weak, and we do not know how to deal with them. Would the rabbi be able to give us some advice about how to handle this?

### Answer:

If a person is always feeling high, i.e., on top of things, this is not healthy. Life is like a bird which goes up and down. Therefore, a person needs to be aware of the reality that sometimes, they will feel down, and at those times one needs a lift-up in order to get higher. During a time of descent, one needs to gather oneself, and ask why they feel headed downwards and weak? The answer is that this reality exists so that when you are headed upwards tomorrow, it will be a stronger ascent. One needs to know, if I am at such a peak, how did I go down? A day after going down, a person already needs to be in a higher place than the day before. One cannot remain there, every time this happens, a person must maximize the descent in order to ascend. If you have maximized the descent in order to ascend higher, then the next time you go down, you will only go down as far as you were positioned the previous time. If such is one's way, then every descent will only be an opening and a beginning to another ascent and this a major part of life.





## 3rd Shabbat meal

### "And Yaakov went out of Be'er Sheva and went to Charan (Bereishit 28:10)"

Even if a person is in a situation where Hashem is very much concealed from them, they must strengthen themselves in Emunah (faith) and find the light of Hashem within the darkness. The author of the Megaleh Amukot comments on this verse with a frightening thought which contains secrets of the Torah. He says that the word 'vayetze' stands for Vayar Yaakov Tzurat Alef - 'And Yaakov saw the image of an Alef.' The commentaries try to understand what this means.

A tremendous concept can be suggested in answer to this question. The Toldot Yaakov Yosef was a Talmid (student) of the Ba'al Shem Tov. In Parshat Bereishit, (siman 1), the Toldot Yaakov Yosef comments on a verse from the song at the sea. The verse reads as follows:

"The enemy said, 'I will pursue, I will catch them, I will divide spoils' (Shemot 15:9)." He comments that the five appearances of the letter Alef hint to the Chief (Aluf) of the world, namely Hashem.

Whenever a Jew sees themselves in a reality in which Hashem seems completely hidden, there are five levels of darkness which a person passes through. During the thickest and most difficult darkness, enemies come and say five harsh words (these are the words of the above verse.) When the Jewish people were in the Red Sea, after two hundred and ten years of slavery working for Pharaoh, after Pharaoh's decree to throw the Jewish boys into the river, and after all of the decrees and the greatest pain, the Jewish people were leaving Egypt. They came to the Red Sea, a deep ocean lay before them, they could not cross it, the armed Egyptians were behind them, and there were wild animals on either side of them.

They were in one of the toughest times they ever underwent as a nation, and there was nothing that they could do. The Egyptians came and announced all of the nasty things that they wished to do to the Jewish people, who at that moment were in a situation in which they felt that Hashem had completely hidden His face from them. However, despite such a situation, a person must know that it is forbidden to break down, one needs to remain with the strongest levels of faith. The Alef represents the Chief of the World. Even if enemies are threatening and the Chief is hidden, it is forbidden to break down, one must remain with trust in Him and with faith of the highest level, and extract the light of Hashem from within the hiddenness and to cling to Him.

It is known that the commentaries teach that of the twenty-two letters of the Alef Bet, the Alef is the holiest and most uplifted of these letters because it represents the Master of the Universe. The opening line of the Aseret Hadibrot (Ten Commandments) is "I am Hashem your G-d, Who took you out of Egypt (Shemot 20:2)," which opens with an Alef.

The letter Bet is like an envelope and a wrapping for the light of the Alef, and is less holy than the Alef. A second wrapping is the letter Gimel, and a third wrapping is the letter Dalet, and so on. The further one moves down, the greater the concealment, until the letter Tav, which is the last letter, which hides the Alef with four hundred powers of Tumah (impurity).

Therefore, when Esav wanted to kill our father Yaakov, he came with four hundred soldiers, which is representative of the four hundred around the letter Alef. A person needs to know all of the holy letters, but the letter Alef is the most uplifted, and all of the letters which come after it are to hide the Chief of the world. Opposing the letter Alef, which is sanctity, is the power of Evil Inclination. We need to extract the incredible power of the Alef from the lowest place, where the letter Alef is covered, and with this light, we can illuminate the letter Alef, which

represents the Chief of the Universe.

The highest level with which the light of the Alef can easily be extracted into the world and given strength is found in our Shabbat Mussaf prayer. We say: 'You prepared the Shabbat, You wanted its Korbanot (offerings) ... they chose greatness.' This section starts with the letter Tav and ends with an Alef. On Shabbat, there is power to fix without descending from the heights, descending from the letter Alef to the Tav. On Shabbat, there is power to fix from the bottom upwards, to bring down the levels of the letter Tav, and then the letter Shin etc. until one reaches the word, az, which opens with the letter Alef, which represents the Chief of the World, and illuminates the entire universe.

This is the meaning of the teaching of Rabbi Akiva. He would expound on the verse "Hashem your G-d, you shall fear (Devarim 10:20)," that the word 'et' comes to include the obligation to fear Talmidei Chachamim (Torah scholars). The word 'et' (spelt alef tav) represents from Alef to Tav. When a person has fear and is subjugated before Talmidei Chachamim, when he is subdued before his teacher, and he does not allow the Satan to enter, nor allow pride, bad thoughts and haughtiness into his heart, he fixes this concept of "Hashem your G-d you shall fear," from Alef until Tav, which includes Talmidei Chachamim. A person then merits to all of the advantages and levels of the high and holy places.

Let us adhere ourselves, righteous people to the Chief of the World, Hashem, through the holy Torah, and through service of Hashem with humility, despite all of the difficult things that we see, we should merit blessing, success, Heavenly assistance and great light.

### "And your father tricked me ... but Hashem did not allow him to harm me (Bereishit 21:7)."

There are times to act with innocence and there are times not to. The Torah describes Yaakov as a "wholesome/innocent man, who sat in tents (Bereishit 25:27)"

The name and symbol of Yaakov is innocence. However, if we look at our father Yaakov, something peculiar emerges, the term 'tam' - wholesome, does not seem fitting for him.

He acquires the Bechora (birthright) from Esav. Esav has come in from battle against Nimrod in a tired and weakened state, feeling like he is going to die, and wants to eat. Yaakov tells him that if he wants to eat, he should sell him the Bechora, and with trickery, he acquires the Bechora for a bowl of lentils. After this, he hears from Rivka that Yitzchak wishes to bless Esav. He then wears Esav's clothing and places fur on his hands, and goes to Yitzchak, declaring "I am Esav your firstborn (Bereishit 27:19)." Yaakov, who is called "a perfect man" does not show perfection. How is such a thing fitting? When he is with Lavan and is tricked out of his wages, Yaakov takes rods with images, and makes the sheep of Lavan give birth to lambs in the type due to him, for he needed to receive his wages. Where is the perfection of Yaakov, the wholesome man who dwelt in tents?

Perhaps we can explain that the way that the world understands innocence means someone who can be cheated and lied to, someone who believes everything. However, this is a huge mistake. Being innocent and wholesome does not mean that one should be a person who can be told stories and quickly be misled. Innocence and wholesomeness means a person who walks with wholesomeness with Hashem, but is alert and wise in regard to matters of this world. When such a person needs to stand their ground, they do so with strength and protect that which is theirs with all their strength.

## Treasure charms from the Rif



One should be familiar with the following foundational charm.

If one struggles to perform a certain Mitzvah, then it is virtuous to identify the verse in the Torah from which that Mitzvah is learnt. Once located, one should learn that verse, and seek to understand the meaning behind it; this will assist a person in combating the Yetzer Hara (Evil Inclination). Indeed, learning the nuances of that Mitzvah will generate a Divine flow which will dampen the power of the Yetzer Hara, such that one will find it easier to fulfill that Mitzvah in the future.



The Maharshal, Rabbi Shlomo Luria, was the author of the 'Yam Shel Shlomo,' an exquisite work on the Talmud. Additionally, he was a tremendous Halachist, whose opinions are recorded throughout the commentaries on the Shulchan Aruch.

Below is an insightful story involving the Maharshal. The story was related by the Imrei Emes, the Rebbe of the Gur Chassidic dynasty. The Imrei Emes stated that he came across this story written in the community register of the great community of Lublin, Poland.

It is recounted that the Maharshal headed a prestigious Yeshiva (Talmudic academy). His Yeshiva was the premier Yeshiva of his day, with all promising young students seeking to be admitted. Indeed, the most talented and motivated students of the day learnt in the Yeshiva of the great 'Yam Shel Shlomo.' A certain couple lived during this time. The couple lived in a small village and were exceptionally poor. Additionally, they had not merited children. The one thing they had was a dream, and the dream was for the husband to learn in the famed Yeshiva of the Maharshal.

The husband and wife discussed it and agreed that they would travel to live in the holy city of Lublin. The husband would learn in the Yeshiva, and his righteous wife would work to support her husband's learning. And indeed, this is what happened. They journeyed to Lublin, and while the husband learned in the Yeshiva, his wife eked out a living to support them. She worked as a clothes launderer, going from house to house to wash people's clothes. The work was difficult, but the couple were forthright that this was the right way for them to live, and felt content and blessed to live in the presence of the holy Yeshiva. They lived as such for some years and the husband grew in his Torah learning and Yirat Shamayim (fear of Heaven), to the point that after some years he became one of the most esteemed students of the Maharshal. However, whilst he had grown in the Yeshiva, the financial strain of supporting them had taken a toll on his wife. Her health had begun to deteriorate to the extent that one day, when her husband returned from the yeshiva, she said the following to him:

'We have already been married for ten years and have not been blessed with children. Moreover, my health has deteriorated, and I feel that I am slowly dying. I have dedicated my entire life to supporting your Torah learning, to enable you to develop in the way you wanted. In return, I would like you to make the following vow to me. I would like you to vow that if I die, you will not marry another woman.' Her husband was taken aback, and being a Tzaddik, sought to reassure his wife. He told her that she wasn't going to die, but would live, and with G-d's help, they would merit to have children together. Yet despite his assurances, she again requested that he make the vow. Her husband responded that if she insisted, and it would make her happy, he would make such a vow. She nodded, and he proceeded to make the vow. When recounting the story, the Imrei Emes said that as soon as the husband finished making the vow, the woman closed her eyes and passed away. The husband was shocked, in utter disbelief that his dear wife had passed away. She was buried in the town, with a large crowd flocking to the funeral, and the husband was broken. A month passed, and then two, until a couple of years had passed. All this time, the man kept to his vow and did not remarry, instead, he remained in the Yeshiva, totally immersed in his learning. However, as time progressed, he began to become depressed, he stopped conversing with others in the Yeshiva, becoming overcome with loneliness.

The Maharshal sensed his student's despair and approached the man. He asked why he was so miserable. Indeed, he explained, Torah learning ought to be a pleasurable experience, personifying the verse: "Serve Hashem with joy (Tehillim 100:2)." Therefore, why was the man so despondent? The man, not wanting to bother his great Rabbi, sought to deflect the question with various excuses, however the Maharshal sensed that there was more to the situation. He therefore persisted, and asked the man what was actually going on.

The man relented, and explained that before his wife had passed, he had vowed that he would not marry another woman after her passing. He explained that two years had elapsed since his wife's passing, and in keeping with his vow, he had still not remarried. However, within his heart, he desperately wanted to remarry and merit to fulfill the Mitzvah of having

children. The Maharshal listened patiently, understanding his student's plight and nodded his head. He said to him that he could go and remarry. The man was shocked and retorted that surely he was bound by the vow. Indeed, he continued, there is a special Mitzvah to uphold requests made by a person shortly before their passing. The Maharshal responded that his promise to his wife was not to be treated as a vow; rather he should focus on his obligation to have children and go ahead and remarry. The Maharshal concluded by assuring the man that he should not worry, as he, the Maharshal would take responsibility for this decision and indeed he would locate a suitable match for the man.

The Maharshal beckoned his assistant and asked him to seek a suitable match for his prized student. The assistant acquiesced and following some investigations, found a suitable lady. The man met the lady and they decided to marry; the wedding date was fixed to be two months later.

The two months passed speedily and everyone eagerly anticipated the joyous occasion. However, to everyone's horror, just a few hours before the wedding, the man collapsed and passed away. Everyone was besides themselves, unable to comprehend the shocking turn of events; they turned to the Maharshal for an explanation. They asked him, how could it be that he had permitted this man to remarry, yet the man had died in such dramatic circumstances? How could it be that the Maharshal had located such a perfect match for this man, and he had died in this manner? The Maharshal, like the townspeople, was distraught, yet he gathered himself and instructed them to prepare the funeral and call him when they reached the entrance to the cemetery. Sure enough, the townspeople prepared the funeral, immersing the man and clothing him in the customary burial shrouds. They walked the coffin from the Yeshiva to the entrance of the cemetery, at which point, as instructed, they called the Maharshal. The Maharshal arrived, holding a piece of paper and pencil. He proceeded to write the following letter to the Heavenly Court: 'I ruled that this man's vow was not a vow, and that he was permitted to remarry. Please, return my beloved student to me!' With that, the Maharshal raised the man's Tallit and burial shroud, and placed the letter in the hand of the dead man. The Maharshal turned to the townspeople and said that they could now bury him. The fellow Yeshiva students proceeded to eulogize the man; whilst the Maharshal quietly left the cemetery. The students sung the man's praise, praising his Yirat Shamayim and exceptional character traits. Indeed, he had been a pillar of the Yeshiva and was beloved by all. Once the eulogies were concluded, they buried the coffin and returned to their homes.

A couple of hours passed, and suddenly the townspeople saw the dead man running in the city, adorned with the burial shrouds. Everyone was terrified, and fled, simply unable to believe their eyes! As for the man, he ran straight to the house of the Maharshal. He entered his great Rabbi's house, and said: 'Rabbi, I was in the Heavenly Yeshiva, and told the judges what you had requested. The judges reviewed your request, and responded that you were correct, and that I should return to this world.'

The Lublin community records continued the story, stating that after the man's miraculous revival, the Maharshal instructed his student to return to learn in the Yeshiva. The man learnt there for a couple of months, and then sought his Rabbi's advice about the future. The Maharshal advised him that the time was ripe for him to seek a suitable match. The man sought to locate a suitable match; however, he was unsuccessful, all the local women were fearful of marrying the man. The man returned with a forlorn demeanor to the Maharshal and informed him that all were hesitant to marry him, seeing as in their eyes he was still a dead man.

The Maharshal told the man not to worry. He informed the man that he would instruct the Heavenly Minister of Forgetfulness to bring forgetfulness over the entire city, so that no one would recall the man's prior dying. Alas, this is what happened, and a couple of months later, the man married a wonderful lady, and they built a beautiful family together.

The above story was repeated by the Imrei Emes of Gur. He saw it written in detail in the community records of the town of Lublin. These records were written punctiliously, intended to record the happenings of this special town for posterity. This story is shocking in every way, yet exhibits that one who walks in the ways of Hashem, performs Mitzvot and listens to the advice of wise Torah scholars will be looked after by Hashem.