

Derech Ha-Rif

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

For the Torah portion KORAH | Volume 72 | 30 SIVAN



First Shabbat Meal

"In the morning, Hashem will make known who is His, and who is holy, by granting direct access (Bamidbar 5:16)."

Only through discerning all of one's actions, can one ascertain whether one's actions are truly the will of G-d or not.

In our Parashah, we see that after Korach and his supporters, created an uproar amongst the Jewish people, Moshe turned to them and said: "In the morning, Hashem will make known who is His, and who is holy, by granting direct access; the one whom He has chosen will be granted access."

The question is: Why did Moshe suggest waiting until the following morning, rather than simply putting an end to the matter then and there?

Perhaps we can suggest an answer based on the following two questions of the Baal Shem Tov:

Question 1: The Talmud (Shabbat 75a) relates that one who desecrates Shabbat, by slaughtering on it, transgresses the forbidden act of 'coloring.' Homiletically, the Baal Shem Tov explains that the Malach HaMavet (Angel of Death) is the paradigm slaughterer. Moreover, the Talmud (Sukkah 52a) relates that the Malach HaMavet is none other than the Yetzer Hara (Evil Inclination). It follows, explains the Baal Shem Tov, that the Yetzer Hara is guilty of colouring. What does this mean?

Question 2: Additionally, the Talmud relates that in the future Hashem will slaughter the Yetzer Hara. However surely Hashem created the Yetzer Hara for a set purpose, namely to trick mankind. If it has this set purpose, why will Hashem punish it in the future by slaughtering it, it has simply fulfilled its purpose?

The Baal Shem Tov explained that Hashem created the Yetzer Hara to present man with the opportunity to do Aveirot (sins). It was not however created to persuade man to do Aveirot. It follows that if the Yetzer Hara acts beyond its remit and seeks to persuade man to sin, by colouring sins and dressing them up as Mitzvot (good deeds), then it is in fact guilty. This, concluded the Baal Shem Tov, was the reason that Hashem will slaughter the Yetzer Hara, for it deserves to be punished for colouring over and misrepresenting Aveirot as Mitzvot.

The Baal Shem Tov's enlightening idea highlights the following: Sometimes we view certain deeds as Mitzvot, however they are in fact Aveirot, which the Yetzer Hara has dressed up as Mitzvot in our minds. Therefore, we require a litmus test to ascertain whether the deed is in fact a Mitzvah or Aveirah.

The litmus test is to analyse the other Mitzvot which one does. If one feels that the other Mitzvot engender a sense of closeness and warmth towards Hashem, stimulating a desire to do more Mitzvot, one can interpret that as a sign

that this deed is a Mitzvah. However, if one discerns that his other deeds are in fact distancing him from Yirat Shamayim (Fear of G-d) and from Hashem, and this deed stems from a momentary excitement, then this deed is merely an Aveirah dressed up as a Mitzvah.

The above answers why Moshe asked Korach to wait until morning. Korach and his followers maintained that their behaviour was L'Shem Shamayim (for the sake of Heaven) and Moshe was uncertain whether this was true, or merely a product of the Yetzer Hara. He therefore surmised to wait until the morning to be able to observe their other Mitzvot. In the morning he would observe them praying with their Tefillin, and see whether these other Mitzvot were performed with closeness to Hashem. If they would be, then it would be a sign that their claims were truly L'Shem Shamayim. However, if their other deeds were not performed with conviction, and only their battle with Moshe was, then it would be a sign that it was in fact the product of the Yetzer Hara.

To conclude, if one has an urge to do a certain Mitzvah in a different manner to his other Mitzvot, with more gusto than the others, then he is surely being guided by the counsel of the Yetzer Hara. Rather, one's spiritual journey should encompass all of one's Mitzvot, to form a healthy and wholesome growth in one's relationship with Hashem.



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Soul Of the Rif

Whenever a person is surrounded by thoughts of what to do, how much to do and where to do it, a person's entire life is silent and bitter. One can be rich, one can be wise, one can be intelligent, but in regard to everything, they are sad before, during and after. This happens when a person goes after only their thoughts, whatever occurs to them in their minds, whatever they hear as well as all the fears and trepidations of the Yetzer Hara (Evil Inclination). However, when a person lives based on the holy Torah and knows that it is the Torah of Hashem, about which it is said, "The Torah of Hashem is perfect (Tehillim 19:8)," life is different. When a person knows that they know the true Torah, if they see something uncomfortable, or if they are in an unpleasant situation, even if they are found in what they think is difficult, and are unsure what to do, when they cast everything on Hashem, "Throw your burden upon Hashem and He will support you (Tehillim 55:23)," making the necessary efforts that one must and praying fervently that no mishap come about through them, they are helped. "Hope to Hashem, strengthen and fortify your heart and hope to Hashem (Tehillim 27:14)." Such a person looks at things the proper way, in a manner that the Torah commanded us to view things.



2nd Shabbat Meal

"And Korach, son of Yitzhar, the son of Kehat, the son of Levi took (Bemidbar 16:1)."

A Person Needs to Have Complete and Perfect Faith and only then Can One Increase Faith through Investigation

The Midrash (Bamidbar Rabba 18:3) states that Korach stood and questioned Moshe, asking difficulties and rebelling against Moshe entirely. One of the subjects of his arguments was about Tzitzit. Upon hearing all of the laws of Tzitzit which Hashem commanded Moshe, Korach stood in front of everyone and asked, "If a garment is comprised entirely of Techeilet (a turquoise dye), does it still require a thread of Techeilet on each corner?" Moshe answered that it definitely does. The following question must be asked: Why, of all the six hundred and thirteen Mitzvot did Korach specifically choose Tzitzit as his point for questioning Moshe?

This can be answered based on a tremendous concept. There are two kinds of Emunah in Hashem. One is the faith that a person investigates and asks, and from that investigation, a person goes onwards becoming constantly stronger in their faith in Hashem. A second approach is perfect faith in Hashem, a person believes because his father and grandfather believed in Hashem, and such was the case all the way back to our holy forefathers how had perfect and total faith in Hashem. Our holy Rabbis say that a person first needs to have complete faith from all former generations. Once one attains the level of strong faith in Hashem in its perfect form, only then can a person add to this through investigation, however, the foundation of faith needs to be an Emunah of perfection.

It is known that during the Spanish Inquisition and the expulsion of the Jews from Spain, all the ordinary people who had perfect faith remained faithful Jews, and even if they were killed, slaughtered and made to suffer all forms of harsh punishment, they did not budge from their beliefs. However, the people who believed in Hashem through investigation, even if they were great people, ultimately denied Hashem. When a person bases his faith on investigation and reaches a situation where something does not fit with their findings, then their faith is not well rooted, and can, G-d forbid, lead them to descend from believing in Hashem. A Jew needs to know that his faith needs to be perfect faith, and even in the present generation, when there are tough tests and challenges, many things cannot be answered by logic,

it is therefore necessary that the foundation of one's faith be complete faith, and if one wants to add after that by building faith through investigation, one can do so.

Korach's faith was built upon investigation. His eye misled him, as he wanted to see and understand, to investigate and delve into everything, whereas Moshe had complete faith in Hashem. The Mitzvah of Tzitzit represents the two beliefs, namely, the perfect faith of "You shall be perfect/complete with Hashem your G-d (Devarim 18:13)" which has the aspect of the white threads, and the faith through investigation which relates to Techeilet. One needs to look at the Techeilet thread which reminds one of the sea, the sea reminds one of the sky and the sky reminds one of the Throne of Glory. Through this one attains faith.

Korach came and asked Moshe about a Tallit which was entirely Techeilet, for his entire pathway in faith was through investigation. Korach asked if this was permitted or not, Moshe answered that it was forbidden and that white was needed also, i.e., there is no reality of faith attained only through investigation, it is imperative to also be based on absolute belief in Hashem, as this is the first foundation stone in having faith in Hashem. In this generation, it is necessary to strengthen one's faith in Hashem even more, the war of the Yetzer (inclination) is against a person's faith. We need to remain complete with Hashem and educate our children to have perfect faith, as the Yetzer fights that all should be proverbial Techeiles, i.e., faith should only exist through investigation. We learn in the street that everything needs investigation and examination, an outlook of "I want to understand" and "I want to say." When this enters a person's soul, they lose their perfection and their faith and it does not reconcile for them within their mind, and they lose their world. We must therefore go in the way of Moshe our teacher, going innocently with Hashem. If there is a Tallit which is entirely of Techeilet, it needs the white threads which represent wholesomeness. The key point of this week's portion is that one must distance oneself from dispute and have the greatest perfection in terms of belief in Hashem. One must know that perfection is a key foundation, through one's perfect faith, they can attain all the great levels. Our grandfathers in Morocco had this; I do not know how many knew deep Talmudic discussions, but they were perfect in terms of complete trust in Hashem, which is impossible to quantify and/or describe. Through the strength of their faith, they reach incredible attachment to Hashem and great spiritual achievements.

Q & A with the Rif



Question:

Dear Rabbi, my wife degrades and disgraces me all the time. What should I do?

Answer:

In regard to a wife who is difficult for her husband to handle, this is not a straightforward matter. Every difficulty between people is violence of some form. A person who screams or a child that screams, or hits, there must be something which is causing them discomfort. There is clearly something which is bothering her. She may be imitating her mother (it is necessary to explain to her that this is not good), perhaps something internal is disturbing her and that is why she is acting this way.

You are married, this is life, you have children, therefore do not break or dismantle that which already exists. A person needs to get down to the root of the problem and then try to fix it. If a table moves, someone must be moving it, likewise, there is nothing in life which does not have a cause. Regarding a person who is difficult, there is a reason why they are difficult. If a wife is sometimes difficult and sometimes easy to deal with, it must be that something is making things challenging for her, perhaps it is because of financial burdens, looking after children, it may be your conduct; it may be one cause or another. One needs to determine the root of the problem and then it can be solved.

There are definitely exceptions to the rule, but a person needs to have comprehension and to look at things with understanding. Every person needs to know that every problem is subject to a solution, even if you may not have got to the depths of the issue to discover the solution to the problem. Leaving the problem to continue entails adding to it, fighting against addressing a problem only adds to it and that is not a good thing.





3rd Shabbat meal

"It is too much for you, sons of Levi."

A Person needs to be clever, not wise, for Wisdom only exists Together with Yirat Hashem.

In this week's Parashah, we find that Moshe stands and tells Korach and his followers, "It is too much for you, sons of Levi." Rashi comments that Korach was a clever person explaining that he was misled by his own eyes, as he saw a chain of great people emerging from him, including Shmuel who is equal to Moshe and Aharon. On account of him, Korach reasoned to himself that he was justified in his rebellion. Korach's strength and the foolishness of standing against Moshe, the faithful shepherd was on account of his vision of Shmuel the prophet, about who it is said, "Moshe and Aharon were among His Kohanim and Shmuel among those who invoke His Name (Tehillim 99:6)." The fact that someone who was equal to Moshe and Aharon would be among his descendants gave him the strength to rise and argue against Moshe. A difficulty must be asked, namely, Rashi describes Korach as being a clever person, it would be more correct to term him a wise person. Why does he depict Korach as being clever rather than wise? Perhaps it can be suggested that wisdom is a combination of several things, one of which is Yirat Shamayim. Without Yirat Shamayim, it is impossible to attain great wisdom. David said "The beginning of wisdom is fear of G-d (Tehillim 111:10)." The beginning of wisdom and the first foundation which is an ingredient of wisdom of Yirat Hashem. Without it, there is no wisdom. A person may be clever [without this attribute], but they are not wise. About wisdom without Yirat Hashem, it is written "And all their wisdom will be swallowed up (Tehillim 107:27)." This is not true and lasting wisdom, it is a wisdom which will lead nowhere.

Based on this definition, Korach was clever but not wise, as he arose to argue with Moshe. Cleverness without wisdom will not lead a person anywhere positive. A person may be clever or cunning, but this is not wisdom. To achieve something through cunningness or cleverness is not stable, it will not be long lasting and will ultimately fall. Korach's cleverness led him to destruction and ruin. Therefore, if a person thinks that he is wise, he first needs the foundation stone of wisdom with Yirat Hashem, and then his wisdom will be sturdy and his deeds will be wise.

"And all of Yisrael that were around them fled at their sound, for they said, 'Lest the earth swallow us' (Bamidbar 16:34)."

The Talmud (Sanhedrin 110a) tells us that Rabba bar Bar Chana was once walking and met an Arab merchant, who told him that he would show him the place where Korach was swallowed. The merchant took Rabba bar Bar Chana to the desert and showed him two holes in the ground from which smoke was emerging. He told him that throughout the month they hear that they are being burnt by fire and that once a month, there is a pause. During the pause, they can be heard saying, "Moshe and his Torah are true and we are liars." Let us ask, what is the concept of the two holes and the shout that Moshe and his Torah are true?

The holy Torah tells us "And all of Yisrael who were around them, fled at their sound, for they said, 'Lest the earth swallow us'." When the earth opened and Korach saw that he was about to be swallowed, he immediately began to engage in Teshuva and shout that Moshe is true, his Torah is true, and we, who questioned this assertion, are liars."

When everyone heard Korach cry out and begin to return in Teshuva, they fled from the voice of Korach, who was declaring that Moshe was true and genuine. When they heard Korach's shout, they began to flee as they knew that there was a problem.

Korach died specifically in this manner, because, the Talmud (Shabbat 88a) tells us that when the Torah was given, Hashem suspended the mountain over their heads like a barrel, warning them that if they accepted the Torah, all would be fine, and if not, then they would be buried there. The following difficulty must be addressed: Bnei Yisrael had already declared "Naaseh Venishma [we will do and we will hear]" so why was it necessary to invert the mountain over their heads?

The answer is that they had declared Naaseh Venishma in regard to the Written Torah, but not the Oral Torah. One who only accepts the Written Torah but not the Oral Torah is not considered. Therefore, the coercion through the mountain over their heads was in regard to the Oral Torah. Korach denied the Oral Torah, as the Midrash (Bamidbar Rabba 18:3) brings: Korach jumped and said to Moshe, "A Tallit which is entirely composed of Techeilet, is it exempt from Tzitzit?" Since Korach denied the Oral Torah, he was punished in an equivalent manner to having the mountain come down on him, as he was swallowed by the earth.

Therefore, whoever does not honour Talmidei Chachamim (Torah scholars) is fit to be buried alive, like Korach and his followers, who did not honour a Talmid Chacham, namely Moshe, as Korach did not argue on Hashem or the Written Torah, only against Moshe. His declaration that "Moshe is true and his Torah is true" was stated in reference to the Oral Torah. Based on this, the concept of the two holes in the desert are understood, one represents the Written Torah and the second represents the Oral Torah.

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Treasure charms from the Rif



The fourth meal, that of Melaveh Malka, possesses tremendous significance. One ought to strive to perform Netilat Yadayim over this meal, even if he eats only a small amount, for Netilat Yadayim during this meal is especially propitious. It is written that partaking in Melaveh Malka can reduce a woman's labour pains. Moreover, Melaveh Malka also has the power to relax one who is in a state of unrest and anger.



The fourth Post Shabbat meal

Storys from the Rif

In a single moment, one is able to ascend to the highest heights.

Historically, before the days of Yosef HaTzadik, one who found himself in a trying situation, had to extricate himself from it gradually. However Yosef HaTzaddik's exponential rise upon being freed from prison altered the fabric of the Jewish people forever.

The verse states: "Thereupon Pharaoh sent for Yosef, and he was rushed from the dungeon. He had his hair cut and changed his clothes, and appeared before Pharaoh (Bereishit 14, 41)." Yosef had been stranded in prison for twelve years, having been bedraggled and unkempt. However, come Rosh HaShanah, he was removed from prison, had his hair cut, and was immediately elevated to become the de facto leader of Egypt. Indeed, Pharaoh announced: "You shall be in charge of my court, and by your command shall all my people be directed; only with respect to the throne shall I be superior to you. Pharaoh further said to Yosef, "See, I put you in charge of all the land of Egypt" (Bereishit 40-40, 41)." From this moment onwards, any Jew who finds himself in the lowest place, has the ability to elevate himself instantaneously, without being restricted to ascending in a gradual sequential manner. In the same way that Yosef progressed from the dregs of society to become the de facto leader from one day to the next, so too, all of us can undergo tremendous elevation from one moment to the next.

Self-elevation is a product of a positive mindset. If one goes to sleep one evening, feeling miserable, then this will carry over into the next day and the next, paving the way for limitation. This mindset will likely bring him to a lack of belief in both himself and in Hashem and only serve to restrain his future growth and happiness. However, if one seeks to see the world through a lens of optimism, then even if imprisoned for twelve years, they will be able to rise to become the leader of Egypt.

One needs to set boundaries for both himself and others

Things which belong to someone, belong to him and no one else. It is incumbent upon a person to maintain a firm grip over that which is his. In this vein, if one chooses to do Chesed (kindness) to others, they should begin by clearly demarcating the items which belong to them, and those items which are free for others' use. The rationale behind this is that setting boundaries, by clearly demarcating which items belong to us, and which are free for others to use, is key for healthy living.

On this theme, the Ben Ish Chai would relate the following Mashal (parable): A wealthy gentleman once left his city upon his horse. On his journey, he spied a sorry man, with deformed legs, crawling on the ground, collecting Tzedakah (charity). The wealthy man descended from his horse, gave the man some Tzedakah and asked the man where he was heading? The poor man thanked him and explained that he would appreciate a ride to the city from which the wealthy man had just departed. Despite the inconvenience, the wealthy man had pity on the poor man, and agreed to take him back to the city. He lifted the man onto the horse, passed him the reins and led the horse back to the city.

Once in the city, the wealthy man lent forward to help the poor man down from the horse, however the poor man resisted. The poor man turned to the wealthy gentleman and said: "this is my horse, how dare you try to remove me from it!" The wealthy man was aghast, furious that the poor man had lied, but what could he do, the poor man simply refused to come down!

At a loss of how to proceed, the two men went to Beit Din (court) to present their claims. Being well known to the local judges, the judges turned to the wealthy man and said as follows: "We all know that you are a righteous person and that the horse belongs to you. However, our hands are tied, for this poor man is still holding onto the horse's reins, and according to Halacha, the horse must go to whoever holds its reins!" Upon concluding its ruling, the Beit Din issued a final piece of advice to the wealthy man. The judges advised him to ensure that as much as possible, he should retain singular control over the reins of his other horses. For, they continued, whoever held onto the reins merited controlling rights over the horses.

The above Mashal teaches us the following lesson: It is imperative for one to clearly decide which of their possessions are for their exclusive use, and which they are happy for others to use. Moreover, they should make this abundantly clear to others. It is helpful to label items, stating that they are either free to use, or only to be used by the owner. So too, one's life follows the same rule: One ought to ensure that they demarcate certain boundaries over their own life and time, such that they don't become entirely Hefker (ownerless), as this can lead to many pitfalls. One should seek to carve out certain blocks of time for themselves, and in so doing, constantly re-affirm a clear sense of who they are.

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