

Derech Ha-rif

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

For the Torah portion of Beha'alutha | Volume 31 | 14 sivan



First Shabbat Meal

"And so Aharon did: he kindled the lamps towards the face of the Menorah"

When the Evil Inclination sees someone succeeding spiritually, he will oppose him with even supernatural means

The Torah portion begins with a description of Aharon's twice-daily task of kindling the Menorah. Rashi notes that Aharon was precise in completing his task to not deviate from Hashem's detailed command. This begs the question: what assumption can there be that Aharon would change anything from Hashem's directly communicated instruction? In kindling the Menorah, Aharon illuminated and uplifted the souls of the entire nation. What assumption is there that Aharon should deviate?

To understand the depth of Rashi's comment we turn to a Mishna in Pirkei Avot (5:5) which lists ten miracles which occurred to the Cohen Gadol during his Yom Kippur service in the Beth Hamikdash. One of the miracles was that the Cohen Gadol never saw a seminal emission during his service. However, when aware of the endless procedures the Cohen went through to prevent a seminal emission, this miracle begins to seem less impressive. Among the preparations were that he was forbidden to consume wine and meat seven days prior to his service and that he was recited different holy prayers and sobering portions of Eichah the day of and prior to Yom Kippur. With such preparations there's very little chance that the Cohen Gadol could come to a seminal emission. Where does the miraculous aspect play its part?

The Sages explain that, in truth, even with all the precautions, it was necessary for Heavenly Intervention in the form of a miracle because the Yetser Hara would employ supernatural means to cause the Cohen to sin. The sanctity and significance of the day and the task was so great that the Yetser Hara would find any way to bring about its failure. Thus, with all the preparations and precautions that the Cohen underwent, Hashem ensured the success of the entire Yom Kippur service by miraculous supervision and intervention. This point is important to keep in mind when one is succeeding and elevating themselves spiritually. The Evil Inclination arrives at specifically those moments and attempts to cause the person to fault and, Heaven Forbid, sin; a miracle is needed to come out unscathed. In the context of the Parsha, that Aharon succeeded in fulfilling Hashem's particular indications for the kindling of the Menorah was to Aharon's credit.

. Given the sanctity and significance of the Menorah service- the kindling and uplifting of the souls of the entire nation- the Evil Inclination made every attempt to distract him. Aharon fought all the extraordinary forms of distractions and obstacles of the Evil Inclination and performed the service exactly as Hashem commanded.

Hence, when one begins to grow spiritually, whether they decide to reinforce their Torah study, grow in their Parnassah, renew and improve their marital harmony, improve their interpersonal relationships, or any positive, constructive aspect of life, they should be aware that the Evil Inclination will make every effort for them to falter, fail and not grow and succeed. The solution to overcoming this often extraordinary form of Evil Inclination is to pray sincerely, to humble one's heart and to bind oneself permanently to Hashem.



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Soul Of the Rif

Once in a while- it may be once a day or once every three days- find a time to stop everything you are doing, contemplate, and spend ten minutes writing down everything that comes up in your mind at the time. Through this, you will know where you are holding spiritually- whether you are in a strong spiritual place, a medium one, or in a spiritual trough.



2nd Shabbat Meal

"When you kindle the lamps"

Only when one's Torah and livelihood are earned justly and fairly, may they reach the true way.

In this week's Torah portion, Hashem instructs of the lighting of the Menorah. The Midrash (Bamidbar Rabbah 15, 9) teaches that upon being instructed of the lighting of the Menorah the Jewish people prayed to Hashem: "Dispatch Your light and Your truth, they will guide me." (Tehillim 43, 3) The Gemara (Bava Batra 25b) teaches: "Rabbi Yitzchak said: One who wishes to become wise should turn (in prayer) to the South, and one who wishes to become wealthy should turn (in prayer) to the North, and your sign is that the Shulchan (the Table-representing wealth) was in the North and the Menorah (representing the light of the wisdom of the holy Torah) was in the South." However one should be cognizant that there is a bond between the Menorah and the Shulchan- One cannot say: I will learn Torah with great sanctity, devotion and piety, but simultaneously be as one who immerses in a Mikvah whilst holding a Sheretz (impure animal) by being dishonest in my business dealings- for then they will lose everything. The Torah studied in such a manner will have no lasting manifestation, for the Torah and livelihood must both be earned in a fair, just and good manner. This principle is what the Jewish people were praying for- when Hashem instructed them of the lighting of the Menorah, and the powers of Torah wisdom it symbolized, the Jewish people prayed "Dispatch Your light and Your truth, they will guide me.", that they will earn Hashem's light (the Torah) in an honest way of truth in both their livelihoods and their Torah study. Those who study Torah whilst being dishonest in their business dealings are defaming the Torah which they are studying. It is regarding this behavior that the verse (Yirmiyah 17, 11) states "One who amasses wealth unjustly; in the middle of his days it will leave him, and at his end he will be considered a scoundrel." One must ensure that both their Torah and their livelihood is earned justly and fairly. "Miriam and Aharon spoke against Moshe, regarding the Cushite woman he had married."

In this week's Torah portion, the Torah teaches that Miriam spoke Lashon Hara about Moshe Rabenu 'regarding the Cushite woman he had married'. How is it possible that the greatly righteous prophetess Miriam, who was like a mother to Moshe, and risked her life to protect him, would speak Lashon Hara about him and his Cushite wife.

A potential resolution to this difficulty lies in the principle developed below: The Gemara (Kiddushin 31b) teaches that when Rabbi Tarfon's mother wished to descend from her bed, Rabbi Tarfon would crouch so that she would be able to use his back as a step to descend from the bed. The Gemara (Yerushalmi Peah 3, 2) further teaches of Rabbi Tarfon's great honor of his mother- One Shabbat Rabbi Tarfon's mother was outdoors and her sandal had become damaged to the extent that it was unusable, and it was not possible to bring a replacement sandal due to the prohibition of Hotza'ah (carrying). Rabbi Tarfon placed his hands on the floor so that his mother could step on the palms of his hands and not scratch her foot on the ground. The Gemara (ibid.) teaches that Rabbi Tarfon once became deathly ill.

When the sages came to visit him, his mother beseeched them to pray for him for he was greatly pious in the Mitzvah of honoring one's parents. When the sages asked her in what manner he was so pious in this Mitzvah, and she told them the extent to which he had honored her, the sages responded that Rabbi Tarfon did not even reach half the required Mitzvah of honoring one's parents with his actions. The difficulty is raised- Rabbi Tarfon was deathly ill and in a precarious position with regards to Heavenly judgment- Why did the sages not praise his actions and provide a favorable perspective? Why did they find it necessary to say that he didn't even reach half the required Mitzvah of honoring one's parents.

We thought to answer as follows- If we say regarding a person that they have done good and have fulfilled all they ought to have fulfilled, then we are effectively giving them a death sentence, as they have nothing left to do in this world. However, if we say that the person didn't even start fulfilling what they ought to fulfill, we are saying that that person needs many more days to live so that they can fulfill what they ought to. In a similar vein, perhaps Miriam did not mean to disparage Moshe Rabenu vis-à-vis his actions marrying and then separating from the Cushite woman, but she was pointing out that his actions prove that he still had what to remedy, and should be given a long life in order to achieve this.

Q & A with the Rif



Question:

Dear Rav, my husband and I make great efforts to earn our livelihood, we give Ma'asrot (10% of income given to charitable causes), and do acts of Tzedakah and kindness. However, we feel that we have some sort of block on our livelihood. Could the Rav please provide us with advice so that our livelihood will open up more for us.

Answer:

Pray. The more one prays the more one opens up one's matters. There is no prayer that is in vain. If you have prayed for livelihood now and have not been immediately answered, know that Hashem is holding on to your prayer, so that when you will really need the funds He will answer your prayer. "Hope to Hashem; strengthen yourself and He will give you courage, and hope to Hashem" (Tehillim 27, 14)- One should not desist from praying to Hashem- Hashem will eventually answer their prayers.





3rd Shabbat meal

"And it'll be that when you go along with us, the good that Hashem will grant to us, we will give from it to you."
Teaching what one has learnt brings completion to that learning.

Yitro had come to the Jewish people to learn first-hand of the miracles of the Splitting of the Red Sea and the war with Amalek and to convert to Judaism. At the conclusion of his visit, Moshe pleads with him to remain with the Jewish nation because "we are traveling towards the land which Hashem has promised to his nation and from all good that Hashem will grant to us we shall give to you." Moshe attempted to persuade Yitro to follow the Jewish people to the ultimate destination of Israel.

It is not immediately evident what Moshe's intention was in very much wanting Yitro to be part of the nation's settlement in the land of Israel. Yitro had accomplished what he had set out to accomplish, and had given much good advice to the people. What more could Yitro do for the Jewish people that Moshe insisted he remain with them till their settlement in Israel?

To understand Moshe's intention we turn to the Chatam Sofer who reveals that the Mitzva of Torah study is incomplete if it hasn't been shared with others. The study of Torah is only the first part of the Mitzva; sharing that knowledge with others completes the Mitzva. This particular exigency is articulated in the Shema portion we recite daily. Hashem commands us to "teach it to your children, speak in it...(Devarim 6:7)." Also, the Talmud (Sukkah 49b) interprets the verse in Mishlei (31:26) "a Torah of kindness on her tongue" to mean that one must share the Torah they've learned with others. Only then does it take on the status of a "Torah of Kindness" and its teaching is complete.

With this teaching at hand we can understand Moshe's reasoning in wanting to have Yitro accompany the Jewish people into the Land of Israel. Moshe ultimately didn't enter the land, but if he had, the ultimate redemption would have been reached. Mashiach would have come, the Beth Hamikdash would have been built and death would have ceased from the face of the world. "Death is removed for eternity; Hashem shall wipe the tears from the face of every man (Yeshaya 25:8)." The ultimate objective of creation would have been achieved.

The world's relationship with the Torah would also change, in that Hashem would teach the Torah and it would have never been forgotten. There would be no need to teach the Torah to one another, to share one's understanding with one's neighbor. This situation, Moshe understood, would create an issue in drawing down heavenly blessing and goodness. Without the sharing of Torah, without this Torah of Kindness, we would have no means to influence kindness from Above and there would be something lacking from existence.

This is what Moshe was trying to prevent and prepare for when he insisted that Yitro accompany them into the Land of Israel. Being a convert, Yitro would be the ideal candidate with whom to share Torah in the future. Not only would he aid in completing the Torah study of the Jewish people in his generation, but also serve as the model for all future generations to teach converts.

This teaching is a lesson we must all apply in our personal lives. One may have learned much Torah and achieved much in spiritual matters, but that only is half the way. Sharing our knowledge completes an essential element of Torah learning and practice and keeps the Heavenly energies flowing from Above.

Treasure charms from the Rif

One should know that every time they recite the Pitum HaKetoret (the Incense Offering) they are purifying the Ketoret (incense) in Heaven from the impurity of Noga which is an impurity of good and evil combined. The Pitum HaKetoret was compiled by the early sages and is extensively discussed in the Holy Zohar. The Ariza"l taught that reciting the Pitum Haketoret saves one from the judgment of Gehinom, Yetzer Hara, submission to (foreign) regimes, death, plague, illnesses, negative judgment above and bad thoughts, and through it one merits to good in this world and the next. Rabbi Avraham Azoulay in his work Chessed LeAvraham (2, 46) writes of the great Segula of the recitation of the Pitum HaKetoret, writing that it has the power to disperse all negative judgments above.



The fourth Post Shabbat meal

Storys from the Rif

Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin.

There were (and there indeed still are to this day) greatly righteous people who would be meticulous not to eat or drink anything until someone else would be present to hear the blessing and respond 'Amen', for the completeness of the blessing is when there is a separate testimony of another who answers 'Amen'.

And so, it is told, was the practice of Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin, the founder of the Yeshiva world.

The contemporary concept of the Yeshiva where students sit to learn, eat and sleep was conceived by Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin. It is told that he went to his rabbi, the Vilna Gaon, and told him that he wished to set up a Yeshiva and asked for the Vilna Gaon's opinion on the proposition, but the Vilna Gaon did not answer him. Rabbi Chaim repeatedly asked the Vilna Gaon this question, with the Vilna Gaon refusing to answer, until after several months, the Vilna Gaon told him- 'Yes- you should go and set up a Yeshiva.'

Upon hearing the Vilna Gaon's approval of his proposition, Rabbi Chaim asked why the Gaon had waited a few months before providing the affirmative answer. The Gaon responded that often one gets excited and commits to do something but they do not have the perseverance to follow through and they then approach the matter half-heartedly and it falls through. I wanted to see the level of your perseverance. When after a few months I saw that your proposition was not just the product of fleeting excitement, I told you to go ahead and action your proposition.

To this day, we can see the fruits of Rabbi Chaim's labors- Bli Ayin Hara (let there be no evil eye)- see the Torah world- how many Yeshivas and Torah study halls with thousands of students there are.

Rabbi Chaim would be meticulous not to utter a blessing on food or drink until someone else would be present to respond 'Amen' to achieve the completeness of the blessing through the testimony of the 'Amen' response. One night he was unwell, and was extremely thirsty.

A child appeared, and so Rabbi Chaim was able to recite a blessing with the child answering 'Amen', and quench his thirst. It is believed that this child was Eliyahu Hanavi who came to hear the blessing and answer 'Amen' so that Rabbi Chaim could achieve completeness of the blessing.

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