

# Derech Ha-Rif

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

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## First Shabbat Meal

Also, a mixed multitude (Erev Rav) of people ascended (with the Jewish People) from Egypt; much sheep, cattle, and a large number of livestock."

**The Mitzva of Charity protects one's money and belongings.**

The Midrash (Mechilta) presents a wondrous commentary on the above verse. "And as Hashem promised Avraham that after the enslavement of the Jewish People, they will depart with much wealth." This promise was fulfilled, as the verse says "A mixed multitude ascended with them, and so did much livestock." That the Jewish people ascended with much livestock is evidence of the promise being fulfilled. But what is the connection of the Mixed Multitude (Erev Rav) of people to this promise, which is cited in the midrash as part of the fulfillment of Hashem's promise?

To explain the association of the Erev Rav to the promise of leaving Egypt with wealth being fulfilled, we turn to the Mitzva of Tzedaka, charity, and its power to safeguard one's wealth. The Midrash Shmuel on Pirkei Avot (3:17) explains that one who does not give charity can be sure to lose their wealth. The greatest protection for one's wealth is the giving of charity. Over the years, we took careful notice of wealthy individuals who had difficulty giving charity; came a time and they lost their wealth. There were many others who made an effort to give charity, even if at times it seemed to them that they were perhaps detracting from their wealth. These people were always protected by Hashem from losing their wealth. It's worth mentioning that it is a much greater misfortune for a wealthy person to lose their wealth than for a poor person to continuously endure poverty.

With this information in hand, the purpose of the Erev Rav at the Exodus played a role in safeguarding the great wealth of the Jewish people. The Talmud (Bechorot 5b) relates that each Jew left Egypt with no less than ninety donkey loads of treasures. With so much wealth, with whom could the Jewish people observe the Mitzva of charity so as to protect their wealth from any misfortune?

Hence the Erev Rav; Hashem had them come along so that the Jewish nation could give them charity. As the Erev Rav were not members of the Jewish Nation, rather converts from various nations, they were not included in Hashem's promise to be granted great wealth upon leaving Egypt.

A practical lesson that every person must apply regarding charity is that whenever one has a great expenditure for themselves, say a wedding for their children, they must be very careful to give charity. In the case of wedding, or something similar, they must make sure to invite poor guests to partake of their joyous occasion; such acts of charity are the only things that will protect them from the Evil Eye or any harm. Actually, not only will it prevent any loss or harm coming about, but it will also bring much blessing to the event. It is good practice to always perform some act of charity or generosity when one is doing something for oneself. This will draw much blessing to the person and occasion.

In conclusion, Hashem made sure the Erev Rav accompanied the Jewish people upon leaving Egypt, so that the Jewish people would have whom to give charity to.



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## Soul Of the Rif

Perfection means to have perfection in the heart, combined with purity of the heart. Things which are complete and have purity of heart possess both roots and a future. A person who resides upon a tower which he built with dishonesty, will see them topple, for they lack foundations. A strong wind will come and all the cunningness with which such a building was formed will crumble and fall. This is something which has already been seen over the course of life. Everyone who ever thought they could use intelligence and dishonesty to build things ended up destroyed; everything that they did met the fate explicated in the verse "and all of their wisdom was swallowed up (Tehillim 107:27)." When a person has purity of heart, with true perfection, combined with the necessary wisdom which a person must have in life, then they are personifying that which Yaakov, our father, had. On account of Yaakov's perfection, he was called "a wholesome man who dwelt in tents;" yet he also possessed the wisdom of wholesomeness to deal with the greatest swindler in the world. It was through this breadth of character, that Yaakov combatted Lavan and became exceptionally wealthy.





## 2nd Shabbat Meal

**"In order that you will relate in the ears of your son and your grandson how I made a mockery of Egypt (Shemot 10:2)."**

**The story of the wicked is to ultimately eat that which they cooked, to receive lashes and to pay for it.**

The weekly portion states: "In order that you will relate in the ears of your son and your grandson how I made a mockery of Egypt." Rashi explains that Hashem was informing us that He had mocked the Egyptians, through replicating the way in which they had sought to mock Him. The Midrash (Mechilta, Bo 14) brings a parable of what Hashem did to Pharaoh and Egypt. It compares it to a nobleman who made a great feast and sent his servant to acquire fish; the servant went and bought a fish, however the fish was mouldy and inedible. When the time came for the fish to be offered at the banquet, the guests saw that the fish was rotten. In his fury, the master said to the servant, 'You have three ways to exempt yourself.

The first is that you pay one hundred silver coins; the second is that you receive one hundred lashes, and the third is that you eat the fish.' Our Rabbis state that the servant began to eat the fish, he ate ninety percent of it but was unable to finish it. At this point, he told his master that he would receive the lashes instead. They began to whip him, but after ninety lashes, he said to his master, 'Stop, I cannot complete the sentence of ninety lashes, I will pay the money.' Ultimately, it emerged that the servant ate the fish, received the lashes and paid the money - he underwent all three punishments.

This is what Hashem did to Pharaoh. On account of all that he did to Bnei Yisrael, Pharaoh was made to receive lashes, eat the putrid fish and pay. He ended up releasing Bnei Yisrael at great expense, giving them an incredible bounty of valuables.

This is what Hashem does to Resha'im (wicked people); they are made to eat, receive lashes and pay. However, when a person follows in the path of Hashem, they will be surrounded by His kindness. He will save such a person from all forms of evil, and such a person will only go from one success to another.

**"And against all of Bnei Yisrael, no dog sharpened its tongue (Shemot 11:7)."**

**A person who does Teshuva for the Lashon Hara (Slander) which he spoke, makes the matter forgotten from those who heard it.**

The weekly portion states: "And for all of Bnei Yisrael, no dog sharpened its tongue." The Gemara (Pesachim 118a) records that Rav Sheishet said in the name of Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya that whoever says Lashon Hara, or hears it, or falsely testifies about his friend, deserves to be thrown to the dogs. The Torah teaches that "no dog sharpened its tongue against Bnei Yisrael," because Bnei Yisrael did not speak Lashon Hara about each other, for they had cleansed themselves of this sin. The extent to which one must be careful to avoid Lashon Hara is known, there is nothing worse and more damaging, it causes the most destruction and people lose their entire lives on account of Lashon Hara.

There is a tremendous concept which Rav Yoel of Satmar would say. We understand that one who speaks Lashon Hara causes immense destruction, however if they do Teshuva afterwards, Hashem will forgive them for it. Rav Yoel asked, if a person spoke Lashon Hara and other people heard and accepted it, then how can Hashem accept their Teshuva if the effects of the sin remain in this world? For example, if a person reported that another person is of evil character, how can Hashem accept the speaker's Teshuva and atone for him?

Rav Yoel answered that if a person spoke Lashon Hara and performed genuine Teshuva for having spoken Lashon Hara, then whoever heard it from him will forget what they heard, or they will cease to believe it. Not only this, but other Lashon Hara which they spoke will be forgotten. Therefore, the moment that a person does Teshuva for the Lashon Hara which they uttered, they cause all those who heard it from them to no longer believe it, or to forget that which they heard. Therefore, a person should endeavour to perform heartfelt Teshuva for Lashon Hara, for by doing so, they can repair the great sin that they have done to other people.

## Q & A with the Rif



### Question:

**Dear Rabbi, my son is twenty-three years old, and G-d help him, he is suffering from an illness. I accepted upon myself to dress in a modest way and I have torn up my immodest clothing. I am careful about Negiah (not touching members of the opposite gender), and I am strengthening myself and seeking to cause merit to the masses. I spoke to a certain rabbi about my son, he said that at the very least, my son should put Tefillin on. We do not know how to influence him for currently he does not wish to speak to us, in light of this, would the Rabbi advise that we still seek to encourage him to lay Tefillin?**

### Answer:

**It is forbidden to force anything, indeed, it is forbidden to return in Teshuva out of fear. With G-d's help, he will be healthy, strong and overcome this challenge, Tzaddikah (righteous woman), you are worthy of praise for being strong and going in the path of Hashem, He should grant you merits, and the strength to ascend further. A key concept which one must be aware of is that there is no such thing as coercing people through fear, telling them, "you must do this," and "do that." This is sometimes difficult. With wisdom and understanding, Hashem will guard and bless him. Please G-d, He will also grant him the necessary clarity of mind and he will fulfil the Torah and the Mitzvot with understanding and go in the path of Hashem.**







## 3rd Shabbat meal

And Hashem said to Moshe, "Come to Pharaoh (Shemot 7:26)."

During the plague of darkness, the Tumah (Contamination) of Pharaoh who made himself into a Deity, was broken.

The holy Zohar (34a) comments on the weekly portion, recounting how Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai spoke to nine of his students. Including Rabbi Shimon himself, there were a total of ten, incredible Tzaddikim, who wrote the holy Zohar. He told them, "Come and I will tell you secrets which no ear has ever heard, exceptionally holy matters." He then told them to write the verse "come to Pharaoh for I have hardened his heart." The verse should have said "Go to Pharaoh," the use of the term "come" does not fit. It can be explained that this meant to say, "come to Me" but He did not say it in such a formulation. What is the meaning of this phrase, "come to Pharaoh?"

Rabbi Shimon answered that when Hashem wanted to send Moshe to Pharaoh, he was very afraid that he would be affected by the Tumah (power of impurity) that could influence him negatively. Pharaoh was the pinnacle of Tumah and had reached the lowest level. Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai explained that Hashem said to Moshe "come to Pharaoh, as I will come with you. We will go together to Pharaoh." As it were, the Shechina (Divine Presence) entered into Moshe in the strongest form and told him, "Let us go together to Pharaoh, you will not go alone."

In order to send Moshe alone to Pharaoh, it would be fitting to say "go to Pharaoh" but Hashem told him to "come," for Hashem Himself would go with him. Were he to go in unaccompanied, he could be affected by the Tumah of Pharaoh which would be dangerous. Wherever there are evil people, any connection with them is dangerous and particularly bad. Hashem told him that He would go with him, and after hearing this, Moshe was willing to go.

Our holy Rabbis comment on the ten plagues in Egypt, which began with blood and concluded with the death of the firstborns. The plague of blood was the lightest, it was followed by the plague of frogs which was more severe and then lice, until the final blow was the death of the firstborn, the harshest punishment. As the plagues continued, they became more heavy and severe. This is similar to how a person pressures another with light pressure, if this does not achieve the desired aim, they increase the pressure until it is difficult to withstand; the same was true of the plagues in Egypt. The final plague of the death of the firstborn was the harshest of all of them. Our Rabbis ask why Hashem brought ten plagues to Egypt and not twenty-six like the numerical value of His Name, or why not five or thirty? Why did He specifically bring ten plagues against Egypt?

Our Rabbis teach a key concept. The Mishna (Avot 5:1) teaches: "With ten utterances, the world was created." Together with the ten statements with which the world was created, there were the Aseret Hadibrot (Ten Commandments) on the holy side, and on the other side, there were ten powers of Tumah. As King Shlomo writes, "Hashem created opposite things for each thing within creation (Kohélet 7:14)." Each of the Aseret Hadibrot corresponds to one of the statements with which Hashem created the world, as well as one power of Tumah. The plagues which were brought upon the Egyptians went from light to harsh. The plague of blood which was the lightest does not match "In the beginning, Hashem created (Bereishit 1:1)," which was the first statement in creating the world. Similarly, it does not match "I am Hashem your G-d who brought you out from the Land of Egypt (Shemot 20:2)," which is the most important of the commandments. In light of this, it is not the case that each plague is equal to the equivalent number statement in the series of ten. Rather, one needs to reverse the order of the plagues, so that the first command, "I am Hashem your G-d" and the first statement of creation, "In the beginning, G-d created" match the final plague of the death of the firstborn. The plague of blood which is at the top of the list of plagues matches the final statement of creation and the last of the Aseret Hadibrot.

Based on this, a key concept can be developed. The final conversation between Moshe and Pharaoh took place just before the plague of darkness. If one looks closely, something very significant happens. Moshe went to speak to Pharaoh, the darkness lasted three days but it still did not show its truest glory, for the plague of darkness had two levels, it started weaker and became stronger. Moshe told Pharaoh to release Bnei Yisrael, but Pharaoh did not agree and told him, "Go away from me, guard yourself, do not continue to my face again, for on the day that you do, I will die (Shemot 10:28)."

During the plague of darkness, in Pharaoh's house, something new happened which did not occur during the other plagues. Until this time, if Moshe received a Nevua (prophecy), he would go out of the city which was filled with idols and Tumah to receive communication from Hashem. However, during the plague of darkness, for the first time, he received Nevuah while in Pharaoh's house. Moshe told Pharaoh that there would be a plague of the death of the firstborn. He told him: "So says Hashem, at around midnight I will go out within Egypt. And every firstborn in the land of Egypt will die, from the firstborn who sits on his throne to the firstborn of the maidservant who is behind the grindstone and all of the firstborn of the cattle." Let us ask the question, why was it the case that Moshe went out to receive prophecy during all of the other plagues, and here, during the plague of the firstborn, he stood in the royal palace and was told about the plague? As mentioned, the first nine plagues were to reduce the power of the Yetzer Hara (Evil Inclination), the power of impurity. The plague of blood reduced it a little, the frogs went further, each plague continued this reduction effect, until the plague of darkness when Pharaoh's Tumah was very weak indeed. The plague of darkness corresponds to "you shall have no other gods before Me." This came before the death of the firstborn which is equivalent to "I am Hashem your G-d." Pharaoh, who declared himself to be a deity, felt that his strength was very weak and that Moshe was breaking his impurity, subjugating the Yetzer Hara. He therefore began to conduct himself with violence towards Moshe, threateningly telling him "be careful not to see me ever again."

When Moshe saw that Pharaoh was weakened by the plague of darkness, he had the power to warn him about the plague of the firstborn which matches "I am Hashem your G-d" and "In the beginning Hashem created [the world]." Therefore, Moshe did not go out of the city to prophesy, instead he did so in Pharaoh's palace, for he saw that his power was weakened, and the ten powers of Tumah, which matched the ten statements of creation and the Aseret Hadibrot, would soon be destroyed.

**מי לא רוצה ישועה? מי לא רוצה רפואה?**  
 מי לא רוצה את משה רבנו מליך ישר עליו בשמיים

עֵתֵךְ וְיִבְרִיחֶם  
 אֲנֹתָם מֵעֵשֶׂה רַבְּנֵנוּ

השבת זה הזמן בקבוצת כבוד האדמו"ר רבנו יאשיהו יוסף פיננס שלי"א  
 זהו צו השעה כולם מזכים עוד שני תורים לקרא ספר דברים בשבת קודש  
 , וזוכה כולם לקדש שם שמיים ולקיים את דברי ה' זכרו תורת משה עבדי  
 ספר דברים צוואת משה רבנו זיע"א

## Treasure charms from the Rif

The holy Sefarim (books) record the following powerful Segulah (charm). The charm is to give ninety-one coins as Tzedakah to the poor on the fifteenth of the month of Shevat. This is a worthwhile practice, seeing as ninety-one is the numerical value of the Hebrew word for tree, "lan," which we seek to refine on the fifteenth of Shevat. Moreover, it also corresponds to the Hebrew word for water, "Mayim," in that the fifteenth of Shevat, marks the water beginning to enter and nourish the trees.

The Tzaddikim strived to hand out ninety-one coins on this day, and it is virtuous for us to emulate their practice, and through this may we merit the coming of the redeemer in our days.





## The fourth Post Shabbat meal

## Stories from the Rif

Rabbi Shalom Sharabi, known as the 'Rashash,' was one of the most extraordinary Rabbis in our history. The Rashash, in a certain sense, can be compared to the Ari HaKadosh. In the same way that the Kabbalah we study today is rooted in the works of the Ari HaKadosh, so too, all the Kavanot (specific intentions) in prayers which we study, are rooted in the teachings of the Rashash. Below is a story involving the Rashash.

In his younger days, the Rashash lived in Yemen and worked as a peddler. He would travel far and wide peddling his wares. One day he entered the home of a wealthy family, intending to sell them some items. It happened to be that the lady of the house was in fact the daughter of the king and only she was home at that point in time. Once the Rashash entered, the lady locked the door and trapped the Rashash inside. She looked at the Rashash and sought to seduce him. The Rashash steadfastly refused, unable to bear the thought of sinning with the young lady. He thought back to holy Sefarim which relate that if one sins with a non-Jewish woman, none other than Abraham our forefather, will block them from entering the Garden of Eden. The Rashash therefore informed her that under no circumstances would he sin with her. The woman refused to give up, and told him that if he continued to refuse, she would hand him over to her father, the king, and request that he kill the Rashash.

The Rashash realised the gravity of his predicament and started looking around for an escape-route. He spotted a window but saw that it was too high to jump from; jumping from it would lead to certain death. However, seeing no alternative, the Rashash turned to Hashem and said: 'Master of the Universe, I see no option other than to jump from this window. If I die, please forgive me for jumping, for I see dying as preferable to sinning with this lady. But if through Your mercy I survive, I make a vow that I will immediately move to Eretz Yisrael, to Yerushalayim, and will devote my entire life towards sanctifying Your name.' With newfound conviction, the Rashash threw himself from the window and miraculously survived the drop. Without hesitation, he fled the scene and made his way to Eretz Yisrael.

Upon reaching Yerushalayim, the Rashash sought out an appropriate Yeshiva and stumbled upon Yeshivat Beit El, the premier Yeshiva for the study of Kabbalah. The Rashash approached the Rosh Yeshiva, Rabbi Gedaliah Hayon, a renowned Kabbalist, and explained his situation. He explained that he was an unlearned young man from Yemen and was wondering if there was any work he could do in the Yeshiva. Rabbi Hayon took kindly to the young man and hired him as a worker in the Yeshiva. Delighted to have been hired, the Rashash began to sweep the Yeshiva floors, clean the windows, and serve the Rabbis and students their food.

All the while he was working in the Yeshiva, the Rashash would listen in to the Shiurim (classes) in the Yeshiva. Every so often a question would be raised, and Rabbi Chayon wouldn't know the answer. In the evening Rabbi Chayon would open his Sefer seeking to locate the answer, and as if miraculously, his Sefer would contain a handwritten note with the answer. Initially, Rabbi Chayon thought that maybe this was a special miracle from Hashem, yet as the weeks progressed, the phenomenon repeated itself and Rabbi Chayon would find the answer to any unanswered question written in his book.

After a full month elapsed, Rabbi Chayon resolved to discover who was writing the answers in his Sefer. Rabbi Chayon hatched a plan, and one evening, he hid behind the bookcases and intently peered towards his Sefer. To his shock, the cleaner approached his Sefer and wrote the answer inside. The next night, Rabbi Chayon hid again, and sure enough the scenario repeated itself, and the simple cleaner wrote down a perfect sophisticated answer.

Rabbi Chayon, unable to believe his eyes, jumped up from his hiding place and accosted the Rashash. He asked who he was, and why he had hidden his incredible greatness from the Yeshiva? He then beseeched the Rashash to join the Yeshiva and reveal his greatness to all. The Rashash listened patiently but explained that he preferred to continue as a simple worker in the Yeshiva. He implored Rabbi Chayon to keep his secret and continue to employ him as a simple worker. Rabbi Chayon persisted and sought to persuade him to reveal himself, but upon seeing that the Rashash could not be swayed, Rabbi Chayon agreed to keep it secret. He rationalised that in the same way that "Hashem does the will of those who fear Him (Tehillim 145:19)," so too he must respect the Rashash's wishes and keep his secret. Sure enough, many years passed, and all the while, the Rashash continued to work as a simple worker in the Yeshiva, cleaning the floors and serving the food.

Some years later, Rabbi Chayon passed away and his disciples opened his will. To their shock, he had written that he wished for the simple cleaner to become the new Rosh Yeshiva in his place! The disciples were aghast - how could this simple cleaner lead the Yeshiva which served as the home of some of the greatest Tzaddikim of the generation! However, not wishing to ignore the wishes of their great teacher, the Rashash was appointed as Rosh Yeshiva. On the day of his appointment, the Rashash sat in the Rosh Yeshiva's chair, and the disciples immediately discerned the greatness of his countenance. He had a magical radiance which permeated the hearts of all those who saw him. From then onwards, with the Rashash at the Yeshiva's helm, Yeshivat Beit El flourished to new heights.

In light of the Rashash's journey, we can learn that there are times during which it is proper to declare things to the world, and times when it is fitting to be silent. The greatness of a Tzaddik is expressed in being able to differentiate between these two times. It is a tremendous skill to know how and when to withhold certain thoughts which arise in one's mind, and to know when to express them. Indeed, our sages say that just as it is a Mitzvah for a person to say that which will be heeded, so too is it a mitzvah for a person to withhold saying that which will not be heeded. There are times when one ought to exert oneself to be heard, and other times when remaining silent is preferable. Knowing which mode of expression is appropriate, is one of the key hallmarks of a true Tzaddik, such as the Rashash.

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