

# Derech Ha-Rif

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

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## First Shabbat Meal

On Rosh Hashanah, we come to Hashem from the depths, asking to be forgiven for all the wrong that we have done.

The Maggid of Dubno comments on the following verse from Tehillim (130:1): "A song of the ascents: From the depths, I called to You Hashem." He brings a parable with a lesson which carries tremendous encouragement. There was a very poor man, who had nothing to eat in his house. He went to a rich man and requested that he give him something to eat and a livelihood. The rich man had mercy and quickly brought him into his house, telling him that he should eat and live in his house, until a home and a job could be found for him. The poor man felt great joy, and remained in his house for a long period of time.

One day, a great temptation of the Yetzer Hara (Evil Inclination) entered the poor man. He arose in the middle of the night and stole all the money and clothing of the homeowner and fled. The owner woke in the morning and saw that all his money and his clothing had been taken. The man took all the silver, but there is no good that results from theft. Every form of dishonesty ultimately collapses; in the end, one always loses as a result of theft. Rabbi Eliezer Pappo in the 'Pele Yoetz' says that if a person has money, he should not enter a partnership with a thief, because since the thief's money will be lost, if one's own money is alongside it, one will lose, for as our Sages teach, "Woe to the wicked one, and woe to his neighbour."

The thief lost all his money and once again began knocking on doors, asking for charity. One day, that same wealthy man was walking in the street and the poor man, who by this time had reached the point that he was penniless with nothing to eat, saw him. He entered into a pit, and began to cry out to the rich man to have mercy on him, saying "I stole money and clothing from you, even what I am wearing now was stolen from you. I fled and behaved improperly, and have now become the lowliest person. Nonetheless, please have mercy on me and forgive me for all I have done to you. Throw a penny into the pit, because I am embarrassed and unable to look at you.

The Maggid of Dubno explained that the same is true of us in the month of Elul and during Rosh Hashanah. At this time we stand before Hashem and say to Him, "Master of the Universe! How much good have You done for us this year! In the morning, we awaken and open our eyes, the light we benefit from was given to us by Him, our ability to hear is from Him. The tastes which our mouths enjoy were given to us by Hashem. Every time a person leaves the bathroom, they should think that if Hashem were to close the openings in the limbs of a person, they would be unable to withstand such pain, every moment is a miracle. Yet, what have we done to the Holy One? We have robbed Him and lied to Him! A person who eats without making a blessing first is as if they have partaken in theft. We have done all sorts of harsh things against Hashem.

The Maggid continued: We stand in the pit, and from the depths, we cry out to Hashem, "A song of ascents, from the depths I called to You Hashem." We hide and are unable to look at you. Like the thief who stole from the wealthy homeowner and is unable to look at him and ask for further charity, we hide in depths and call to Hashem to save us.

We stand on the eve of Rosh Hashanah, and what merits do we have?! How much has Hashem given to us, and what have we returned to Him? There are twenty-four hours in a day, how many of them have we dedicated to Hashem and how many have we taken for ourselves? How much have we used for our personal needs and how much have we given to charity? How can we come to Hashem? He then explained that the thief, hidden in the pit, tells the wealthy benefactor, "Please help me in any case;" so too we stand before Hashem and say the same. Despite all that we have done, we ask Him to forgive us.



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## Soul Of the Rif

One should not be afraid of things that are past, because they are past, they are not present. Maybe it can make a person a red light to be careful, but not to be afraid. Regarding future things, a person should have faith in God - what are you afraid of? The future is in God's hands, whatever you do or don't do, you don't know what will happen, just pray to God that it will be good. All the depth of the fears and anxieties found within man originate from a mistake: either a mistake from behind (it belongs to the back and not to the front) or a lack of faith in the front, that you believe in God and everything will be fine. The more we cling to God with faith and confidence and know how to look at things wisely: what is a thought that comes from forbidden foods, what is a thought that comes from a forbidden sight, what is a thought that comes from unhealthy things that cause a person to have bad thoughts. And what is this from a thought that just sat and thought, a new thing, in holiness and purity, in a correct way that has no fear and no anxiety and only good.



## 2nd Shabbat Meal

Every action will be brought by G-d in judgement.

One needs to know that the very nature of the days of Elul, and the Yamim Noraim (High Holidays) encompasses a sense of Teshuva (repentance) and Kapara (atonement). In this vein, these days contain a unique holiness which one can latch onto to cleave to Hashem. With the above in mind, if one disregards this opportunity, and instead fails to do Teshuva, he will be subjected to a more pronounced Middat HaDin (judgement) than he would otherwise throughout the rest of the year. This time of year is one in which one ought to be engaged in thoughts of Teshuva, to delicately contemplate and evaluate his actions, in a bid to ascertain how and why he came to do them. However, one who lives like a "a horse dashing forth in the fray (Yirmiya 8:6)" - simply cruising through life and doing what he wants without a care in the world, will lose his world and all that he has.

Man needs to know that eventually, be it immediately, or in many years to come, he will be held accountable for everything; nothing is unaccounted for. Indeed, anyone who believes that he can do anything, with no concern for the consequences, is mistaken, for "God will call every creature to account for everything unknown, be it good or bad (Kohelet 12:14);" everything which one does in Olam HaZeh (this world) will be brought to judgement.

On Rosh Hashanah, Hashem judges everyone on account of their actions. It is therefore possible that seeing as nothing is hidden from G-d's eyes, one may have escaped punishment for a certain deed for forty years, and only now, suddenly receives the punishment. To say, if heavy decrees suddenly befall a person, it may well be that they are on account of sins committed years beforehand. With this in mind, we should bear in mind that each year could be a year of judgement, in which Hashem pays particular attention to one's actions and even exacts justice on account of sins from previous years; this should therefore motivate us to be particularly careful in contemplating our conduct during this auspicious time.

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ט תשרי  
24 09 2018

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## Q & A with the Rif



### Question:

Rabbi, we have been trying to fulfill the law of reciting one hundred Brachot [blessings] every day, and if a young child makes a blessing, I answer "Amen" after them. Does this count as if I have made a blessing?

### Answer:

It depends on the age of the child, if they are already of a greater age, then this carries more weight. It is known that the Shulchan Aruch writes that on Shabbat, it is possible to get to this total [of one hundred] through Brachot made by other people if one answers "Amen".

If the child is not so young, then they count like an adult, and it is possible to answer "Amen" and consider it as a Bracha, and this is a significant matter based on the Bracha of an underage child. However, it is always preferable for a person to complete the one hundred Brachot in their complete form.





## 3rd Shabbat meal

In order to arrive at Rosh Hashanah in a prepared state, a person needs to work from one stage to the next during the month of Elul.

It is necessary to be aware of an important concept. People often view Elul as the end of the year, but this is not so. The holy books write that Elul is in fact the start of the year. Based on how a person conducts themselves during this month, their fate during the whole year will be decided. If a person enters into Rosh Hashanah with sanctity, purity, elevation of their soul and strong fear of Heaven, and if their Rosh Hashanah is strong, then the entire year will be good. However, if the opposite is the case, and a person enters Rosh Hashanah with a distracted mind, then the year will be one of distraction without peace of mind, as is needed. Therefore, a person needs to prepare themselves from the first moment of Elul and not enter Rosh Hashanah, thinking only in the last moment of what needs doing and how it is to be done.

A person cannot become a Tzaddik over the course of one day. The holy Torah says "And the daughter of a Kohen who begins to act promiscuously, she profanes her father and is to be burnt in fire (Vayikra 21:9)." The question is asked, why is this connected to her father, surely she is already married and no longer under the jurisdiction of her father who is a Kohen? However, our holy Rabbis teach that if such a woman became besmirched once married to her husband, this did not start today, she already began to become corrupted while she was a young child in her father's house. Her undoing already began then. Just as a person does not become a Tzaddik in one day, so too they do not become a Rasha (wicked person) in one day. If one sees a wicked person, there is a clear sign that their wickedness already began a long time before. Likewise, the Tzaddik's righteousness started a long time before, with steady work, day after day.

A person needs to exert effort and toil in order to reach a high level. The same is true in regard to evil; if someone is evil, this is the result of a process which started some time before which gradually continued until the person reached their current state. Neither a Tzaddik nor a Rasha are formed in one day, Hashem made it such that everything moves gradually. A person's love or hate of another person develops gradually, anything which comes suddenly is not really true. Things ripen steadily until they become proper and established. If a person buys chicken and wants to cook it, this cannot be done instantly, it needs to be placed in a pot and cooked slowly until it is ready. If someone throws it into a flaming hot fire, it will become burnt and will not cook.

Everything in the world needs progression, when something grows gradually, it is true and real. We find this to be the case when Yosef revealed himself to his brothers. He said to them "And He placed me as a father to Pharaoh, and a master to all of his household, and a leader throughout all the land of Egypt (Breishit 45:8)." He sent them to pass on this same message to his father. He knew that if they were to tell Yaakov that he had become a great man in a single instant, Yaakov would be afraid of this. Therefore, he said to them that his ascent had been gradual: First of all, a father [figure] to Pharaoh, then a master over his house and ultimately, a leader over the entire land of Egypt.

A person who comes and tells of how he became rich over the course of one day, must know that this is not true, he is misleading people, because this is not really true. To be truly rich, one needs to pass through gradual stages. If a person turns wealthy over the course of a single day, things are likely to fall with nothing remaining, all that will be is great ruin. If a person steadily ascends, this is from Hashem. Good and bad come in levels, things do not simply come at once.

When the Jews were enslaved in Egypt, this was not something which happened suddenly on a one-off basis. It began a little after Yaakov's passing. After the last of the tribes had died, they steadily began to become enslaved. So too, during the redemption from Egypt, once the ten plagues began, the Egyptians stopped enslaving the Jews, but they remained in Egypt. Slowly, things changed and they then left Egypt. Just as the sun rises and sets with progression rather than in an instant, the same is true of everything in life. Whenever there is an instant effect, this is not something true.

Therefore, a person cannot enter Rosh Hashanah at one moment and declare that we are Tzaddikim and strengthen ourselves [in serving Hashem], this is not a good approach. The advisable way is that on every day during the month of Elul, we need to strengthen ourselves and draw near to Hashem, rather than crying to Hashem only on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Though of a different level altogether, if a person received a letter that they are to have a court case, they would immediately go and hire a lawyer, and start to arrange and organize themselves. They would not arrive on the day of the case, asking the judge to forgive them and find answers of what to say and what not to say. Therefore, a person needs to subjugate oneself each day in Elul in preparation for Rosh Hashanah, and not begin seeing what needs doing only on Rosh Hashanah.



## Treasure charms from the Rif



A charm to be blessed with children:

The Torah, the holiest of holy things, includes the verse "And Hashem remembered Sarah as He said [and she was then blessed with a child] (Bereishit 21:1)".

R' Yoel taught that for a woman who has not been granted children, if her husband is called up to the Torah on Rosh Hashanah, for the verse "And Hashem remembered Sarah," this is a merit to be blessed with children that year. There are words which have power.



The Talmud (Bava Batra 10a) and Vayikra Rabba 34:12 record an identical story with a slight discrepancy; the Talmud records it as having involved Rabban Yochanan Ben Zakai, whilst the Midrash in Vayikra says it was Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai. For the purposes of the story below, we will relate it to Rabban Yochanan ben Zakai.

On the eve of Rosh HaShanah, Rabban Yochana ben Zakai had a dream involving his nephews (his sister's sons) who were exceptionally wealthy. He dreamt that the king had imposed an enormous tax on his nephews, demanding an extortionate sum. Upon awakening, Rabban Yochanan approached his nephews, and without informing them of the dream, and entreated them to donate to Tzedaka. They agreed to donate a certain sum, and he encouraged them to give more, they agreed to his proposal. The scenario repeated itself, with the nephews raising their pledges each time, until they hit a certain amount, beyond which they were unwilling to donate.

Some time passed, and the king sent emissaries to throw his nephews into jail. Their mother, Rabban Yochanan's sister, came running to her brother in a distraught state. She pleaded that he pray for her sons and do whatever he could to obtain their release. Rabban Yochanan speedily agreed and went to the jail to see what he could do. Once there, he was able to speak to his nephews and informed them that if they paid a bribe of seventeen gold coins to the prince, then he would secure their release. The brothers stared at their uncle in disbelief, and without trying to offend him, explained that seventeen gold coins was nothing! They said that they would be willing to pay hundreds of gold coins in the circumstances, and feared that offering such a measly sum would only likely incriminate them further, serving to offend the prince.

Rabban Yochanan looked at his nephews knowingly and explained. He told them about the dream he had had and said that per his dream, he had calculated that the king would seek a sum of seven hundred gold coins from the brothers. He explained that he had requested money from them under the pretext of charity for the poor and orphans, and that in total they had donated six hundred and eighty-three gold coins. Therefore, he explained, that in line with the adage that "whoever accepts upon himself the yoke of Torah; the yoke of the government is removed from him (Pirkei Avot/Ethics of the Fathers 3:5)," the coins they had already paid (the six hundred and eighty-three) had been deducted from their dues, and the seventeen gold coins alone would suffice.

This story illustrates that whatever one does for the sake of Torah (e.g., giving Tzedaka) will release one from an alternative burden. However, if, G-d forbid, one fails to do things for the sake of Torah, then Hashem will ensure that that energy which ought to have been exerted for Torah, will instead be drawn from one in the form of unpleasant and trying tasks.

It is for this reason that when one does good deeds, Hashem will save him from troubling things. May this inspire us to exert ourselves with all our strength, safe in the knowledge that Hashem records all our efforts with love.

And Teshuva, and Tefilla, and Tzedaka remove the evil decree

Take a look at the passage, U'netaneh Tokef ("Let us express the mighty holiness of this day"), written by Rabbi Amnon of Mainz. Rabbi Amnon, a renowned Tzadik, was one day summoned by the king. The king demanded that Rabbi Amnon forsake his Judaism and instead adopt Christianity; the king then informed Rabbi Amnon that the

alternative was death. Rabbi Amnon became pale and for a short while could find no words to respond. Eventually he was able to steady himself and requested three days to think about it (thinking to himself that perhaps he would find a way to appease the king).

After three days, the king's men fetched Rabbi Amnon, and upon Rabbi Amnon's refusal to forsake his beloved religion, the men proceeded to torture him by dismembering his body. By the end of the torture, Rabbi Amnon was barely alive. The following day was Rosh Hashanah, and despite his pain, Rabbi Amnon requested to be brought to the synagogue. During the prayers, Rabbi Amnon suddenly quietened the congregation, and with his final strength he began reciting the U'netaneh Tokef prayer, which the congregation repeated after him. A few minutes later, having left this prayer as a parting gift to the world, he died of his wounds.

This is a poem which we say, trembling, overcome with a sense of trepidation and fear. The prayer itself mirrors the heart-rendering death of Rabbi Amnon, outlining the self-sacrifice he underwent in his unyielding devotion to Hashem; it reminds us of the unbelievable Tzadikim who sacrificed their lives on account of their faith in Hashem. The prayer is recited on Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur and reminds us that it is this very dedication which defines us as Jews, in our unflinching devotion to Hashem.

When one passes on, the joy which accompanies him, is the knowledge that he is leaving behind individuals to continue his legacy and elevate his soul.

"The years of Sara's life" (Breishit 23:1): "All the while Sara was alive, she suffered from a tremendous pain, in that she perceived that her son Yitzchak was not destined to have children. Indeed, our holy sages teach that Yitzchak naturally suffered from infertility, seeing as he was from the Sitra d'nukvah (had certain female traits). This knowledge plagued Sara; she has waited for so many years for a child, and finally, in her old age she has merited a son, yet she realised that ultimately he would never produce progeny and her legacy would cease.

Things however changed during Akeidat Yitzchak (the Binding of Isaac), during which the Sitra d'duchra (male traits) entered Yitzchak, replacing the Sitra d'nukvah; thus, Yitzchak was then able to have children.

This transformation was incredibly joyful for Sara. It meant that her son would have a continuation, and by extension, she would too. She understood that her descendants would teach Torah, and indeed encourage others to learn Torah and perform Mitzvot, nourishing her soul in heaven, and this would secure her continued legacy. Indeed, this is the idea expressed by the verse: "The years of Sara's life (ibid)." The verse informs us, that through one having a legacy of descendants and students who continue in one's holy ways, one is considered alive and crucially able to grow, not just while physically alive, but also after death. The acts of those descendants imbue one's soul with continued strength to be spiritually elevated in heaven.

Therefore, one must know a fundamental idea. When one does Mitzvot, he creates an angel who escorts him, and similarly, if one does Mitzvot for the soul of someone deceased, then he gifts strength and vitality to the deceased to be continually elevated in the Heavens.

