

Derech Harif

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

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First Shabbat Meal

"And so shall you command the Children of Israel: and they shall take to you pure olive oil, crushed for lighting..."

one must give thanks and express gratitude to the grantor so as not to remain indebted.

the torah portion begins with the commandment to produce pure olive , from crushed olives, for the continuous lighting of the Menorah. "And so shall you command the Children of Israel: and they shall take to you pure olive oil, crushed for lighting..."

The Midrash comments on this passage: "It's not that I (says Hashem) need their lighting, but rather that they should provide illumination for Me as I have done for them." The Midrash explains the objective behind the kindling of the Menorah Hashem illuminates the world for the Jews, so in return, we kindle the lights of the Menorah. This Midrash is astounding: does Hashem need our kindling of the Menorah? Does He have any necessity for the illumination it provides? The entire creation is His.

In truth, the Midrash is teaching us a fundamental lesson in gratitude and indebteding. Oftentimes, a person will lightly offend a colleague and when they later realize their offense and approach said colleague with regret and a request for pardon, the colleague responds that they were not offended at all. They insist that nothing occurred and there was no offense at all. This behavior is bewildering: why do they not want to accept the apology- not even to give the person the opportunity to express their regret?

The reason behind the refusal to accept the apology is rooted in the fact that the person who was offended wants the offender to remain forever indebted for their offense. The issue is left open so that the offender will always have to apologize to them.

This same behavior we see when someone does a favor to a friend. The recipient wishes to express their gratitude to the benefactor, but, somewhat surprisingly, the benefactor insists that "it was nothing," and there's no need to give thanks. In these situations as well the benefactor doesn't wish to receive gratitude for their action because they want that the recipient be forever indebted for that action. In both scenarios, positive and negative, there's a desire to make the other person forever indebted to them.

It is this very point which Hashem wishes to teach us in this Parasha of Tetzaveh. Hashem requests of us to illuminate for him a small light, the menorah, in return for the immense good of illuminating our world. Hashem teaches us a fundamental lesson, which is to return the good that we receive. When a person's character traits aren't rectified and worked on, they can lead them to great harm.



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Soul Of the Rif

A person must take control of their lives, to care for themselves and their family, especially to fill their leisure time with positive and constructive activities. A person who has too much leisure time on their hands and simply searches for activities to fill their time is placing themselves for failure. Vain activities are a telltale sign of having too much free time at hand. A person must be focused on their life's priorities, and fill their leisure time with the study of Torah and good deeds.

The moment a person allows unnecessary things to enter their life, they are bringing about their very own destruction. One thing leads to the next, one argument to the next and only negative things come about.



2nd Shabbat Meal

"They shall take for you: clear olive oil, crushed, for illumination"

A person must crush himself like an olive is crushed so that oil may come out of him.

In the Gemara (Menachot 53b) Rabbi Yochanan says "Why were the Jewish people allegorically compared to an olive? To teach you that just as an olive only releases its oil through crushing, so to the Jewish people only return to the good way through afflictions." A Jew is allegorically compared to an olive. An olive when eaten in its raw state is bitter. But if it is pounded, it releases oil, which is a fine and valuable substance with many uses.

The Jewish people are allegorically compared to an olive. A Jew at first glance may appear "bitter" and unpleasant. However, if you know how to correctly take action with this Jew, then from that bitter olive, oil will come forth.

In the verse "Vanity of vanities- said Kohelet- Vanity of vanities! All is vain!" King Shlomo tells of the vanities of human life. The Midrash (Kohelet Rabba 1, 2) teaches that the seven vanities [havalim] that King Shlomo mentions correspond to the seven different stages of human life.

The Midrash says "A one-year-old is like a king who is on a canopied litter and everyone is embracing and kissing him." -In the Kabbalistic writings we find that the root of a person's haughtiness stems from their first year as a baby when they are loved and honoured and bestowed with many pleasant things.

It is from their first year as a baby that the desire to chase after honour and haughtiness enter a person's heart.

"A two- or three-year-old is like a pig that extends its hands into the sewers." -The Midrash is referring to a toddler's tendency to extend his hand into anything dirty.

"A ten-year-old jumps like a lamb. A twenty-year-old whinnies like a horse, beautifies himself and seeks a wife. When he marries a wife, he is like a donkey." -That is to say that after a person reaches the age of twenty and becomes like a horse and gets married, he become like a donkey. The burden of sustaining a wife and family is on his back, and his life becomes like that of a donkey.

"When he begets children, he is as audacious as a dog to bring [home] bread and food." -A person after begetting children becomes audacious to chase after and fight for livelihood.

"When he grows old, he is like a monkey." -The final stage is when a person has grown old and becomes like a monkey. Just as a monkey constantly changes their facial expression, so too an elderly person goes to this son and behaves with him in a certain way, to this grandchild and behaves in another way. He changes his facial expression each time to fit the given situation.

We may apply the same principle to the allegory of the olive. If a person doesn't pound the olive so that it shall bring forth oil. If a person doesn't straighten out his life and allows his life to go on like the way of the world, then in the beginning when he is a baby he will be like a king, then a pig, then a lamb etc.as is the way of the world. But someone who straightens himself out and works on himself, leads his life on a straight and good path. His life becomes a different life. A person must strive with all his power to work on himself greatly, that his inclination will not control him, rather that he will control his inclination. That he will be master over his inclination, and not his inclination master over him.

Q & A with the Rif



Dear Rav, I often vent my anger at home, and it is disturbing for my wife and children. Each time I try to repent and pray, but I keep stumbling and relapsing into anger. This matter is very distressing for me. Does the Rav have advice?

Answer:

You "vent anger at home, and it is disturbing for [your] wife and children". In fact, first and foremost, you are distressing yourself, for when a person becomes angry, the Kabbalistic writings teach that although in Heaven they have decided to deliver you something you require, perhaps money- at the moment you become angry- you have "killed" it, and lost the delivery you were due from Heaven.

Whenever you perform a mitzva, a holy soul becomes part of you. This holy soul of the mitzva should take you to great spiritual heights. Yet, every time you become angry, all those holy souls that became part of you when you spiritually strengthened and elevated yourself through the performance of mitzvot, all those souls leave you.

"One who becomes angry, all manners of Gehinom have power over them" (Nedarim 22), "is like an idol worshiper" (Shabbat 105). Therefore, you should know, righteous Jew, that you have a very great soul. The Satan comes to you with the ploy of anger to destroy you- Will you let him defeat you? Know that in this matter you are waging a bitter war. First be concerned for yourself, save your own life. Only then should you worry that you distress your wife, which is indeed a great matter, and that you distress your children, which is a great matter. These are not trivial matters.



3rd Shabbat meal

"Its opening at the top shall be turned inward; it shall have a border around it - made of woven material. It shall be like the opening of a coat of armor; it shall not be torn."

The Holy Name of Hashem that divides and weakens the Forces of Evil.

In Torat Moshe, the Chatam Sofer zt"l cites a Torah secret in the name of Rav Shimshon of Astropoli zt"l that teaches how to destroy very powerful Forces of Evil. There are two primary forces of Evil, one named S"M and the second is his wife, Lilith. When their forces combine they cause the most devastating destruction possible. Preventing their union and protecting from their harm comes through a Holy name of Hashem, "Kfi" (letters, Khaf,Pe,Yod). This name of Hashem is alluded to in the above verse in the first letters of the words "Lephiv" till the end of the verse. The first letters of "Lephiv saviv ma'asei oreg" (L S M A) form the word "samael", the first force of evil, while the first letters of "Tachra Yihye Lephiv Lo Yikarea," (Tav, Yod, Lamed, Lamed, Yod) spell out Lilith, the second force of evil. There's a word, however, that finds itself between the two clauses that form the acronyms above: the word "Kephi." Its placement in the verse alludes to its power to separate the two forces that are also hinted in the verse.

The significance of these two forces is such that there is little that can escape the destruction they cause when they join forces. The destruction of the holy Temples occurred as a consequence of their joining together. So too, all great destruction that befalls an individual comes from these forces. It is nearly impossible to be spared from harm when these two forces join and come upon someone or something. The only protection comes through this name of Hashem, "Kephi."

What is the meaning and significance of the name "Kephi"? The Talmud in Bava Batra (85a) teaches that one who teaches Torah to the son of an ignoramus, even if a harsh decree is decreed upon that individual, Hashem will annul it for that person. The Talmud cites a text to support its remark: "And if you extract value from something that is cheap (i.e. teaching the son...Torah), it shall be as I say (Kephi-in Hebrew)." The verse alludes to the name of Hashem that can say "something of value," i.e. man, from something cheap, i.e. those forces of evil. Similarly, there's a verse in the context of the exodus from Egypt (Shemot 4:21) which says that "The nation believed and they heard that Hashem redeemed the Jewish nation..." and first letters of the words in the verse, "Ki Phakad Hashem (that Hashem redeemed)" form the name of Hashem "Kephi." Through their belief in Hashem and his manifestation through His name, "Kephi" released them stronghold of the forces that were keeping them in Egypt, and then they were freed from its shackles.

The verse in the Neviim also hints to the special name. "Ki Phada Hashem et Yaakov...(Yirmiya 31:10);" the first letters of the first three words form "Kephi."

Therefore, when one feels that there's a powerful Yetser Hara, evil Inclination pressing on their life, they should recite the above-mentioned verses. This will destroy the forces of Evil and bring us out from darkness to great light, as the verse says (Devarim 33:28), "And Israel dwelled in safety, and Yaakov's abode is untroubled."

And you, bring near to yourself your brother Aaron, and his sons with him, from among the children of Israel to serve Me..."

The Torah removes jealousy from amongst people.

When Moshe was commanded to bring his brother Aharon forward to take on the Kehuna, priesthood, he felt some pain. Moshe was appointed to his role as king of the nation directly by Hashem, but Aharon was appointed to his role through Moshe Rabbenu. When Moshe was commanded so, he had an uncomfortable sentiment, which he shared with Hashem: "This will create jealousy, anointing Aharon. As he will feel lesser than me, who was appointed directly by You."

Hashem responded to Moshe: "I had the Torah and I gave it to you. (Shabbat 88a)." When Moshe went up to heaven to deliver the Torah, the angels refused to allow him to descend with the Torah (because of its lofty nature). Moshe responded to the angels: "Isn't it written in the Torah 'do not murder, do not commit adult, do not steal(kidnap)?' Do any of these apply to you?" This anecdote teaches us that the Torah has the power to abolish jealousy between people.

Moshe feared that his brother, Aharon might be jealous of him when noticing that he was anointed to his post differently than Moshe. But, Hashem pointed out, that is what the Torah is for; it is the tool to combat our evil inclination, our imperfect character traits.

The Talmud remarks that there are three creatures that are uniquely bold, and Israel is the bold one amongst the nations. However, Hashem gave us the Torah to combat this brazenness. The Torah, thus, is the antidote to stand up to one's evil Inclination. Without it, there is no chance to fight the evil Inclination.



Treasure charms from the Rif

When donating the half-Shekel coin before Purim, one should mention that it is "for the elevation of Moshe Rabbenu's soul." So too when one gives the charity on Purim, matanot laevyonim, one should recite that it is for the elevation of Moshe Rabbenu's soul. The reason for this practice stems from the fact that it was Moshe who prayed for the Jewish people in heaven when Haman's decree was written out. Mordechai prayed for the decree to be annulled but in the merit of Moshe up above. It's a great Segula to say "Baruch Mordechai (blessed is Mordechai)" one hundred and twenty times and "Berucha Esther bat Avichail" twenty- four times during the Purim meal. In its merit, we should all merit redemption and much success.



Rav Moshe Feinstein

There was once a person living in the Russian city where Rav Moshe Feinstein was the rav. This person would act as an informant on the Jews to the Russian Intelligence. He would go to the Russian Intelligence and inform them that this Jew did so and so, and he would get monetarily rewarded for doing so.

The whole city suffered from this person. Some people are born from Satans. It sometimes occurs that many Satans congregate in a certain place and together are incarnated as one human form. This person was such an incarnation of all the Satans in the world. He would endlessly do evil to his Jewish brethren. He would do evil to any Jew he had information on.

When he passed away, he left behind a letter. In that letter he requested that since he did so much evil to his Jewish brethren, he be buried not in the cemetery with the Jews, but outside the Jewish cemetery beyond the boundary. Since his entire life he informed on the Jews, he wished to repent, and be buried outside the cemetery, as we do to a person who has taken their own life.

The burial society came before Rav Moshe Feinstein, recounted the contents of the letter and asked him how to proceed. Rav Moshe responded- "A person cannot decide for himself how to posthumously punish himself, he is dead, it is a matter for the Heavenly Court to decide. He cannot decide for himself; he can write as he wishes, but he cannot decide where he will be buried."

The deceased informant's family protested that the deceased's wishes be honoured. The burial society responded to the family that that there is nothing more that can be done. The Rav has issued his ruling. The deceased will not be buried beyond the boundary, but within the confines of the boundary, in the Jewish cemetery like everyone else. He was ultimately buried in the Jewish cemetery as Rav Moshe Feinstein instructed.

A few days later, the Russian Intelligence people arrived at the Jewish cemetery and took the burial society members for questioning. They inquired whether this deceased person was buried beyond the boundary because he was an informer. When the burial society members asked the Russian Intelligence what would lead them to think so, the Russian Intelligence told them that the informant had written them a letter prior to his death, informing them that the Jewish people were planning to bury him beyond the boundary, because he was an informant.

Even if there is someone who is clearly evil, we must act towards them according to the way the Halacha requires. We should reserve personal judgement and apply only the judgement of the Halacha. This would be the best thing we can do for him.



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