

Derech Ha-rif

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

For the Torah portion of Emor | Volume 29 | 29 iyar



First Shabbat Meal

"They established their genealogy according to their families, according to their fathers' household."

In the merit of their forefathers and dedicated Torah study, the Jewish people merited to attain genuine love and fear of Hashem.

The Midrash Yalkut Shimoni reveals that when Hashem transmitted the Torah to His people, the nations of the world became extremely jealous of this expression of favoritism and uniqueness. Hashem immediately crushed these envious remarks by bringing forth the genealogical book of the Jewish people. "Bring forth to Hashem the families of the nations (Tehillim 96:7)." The Jewish people merited the great gift that is the Torah because they had clear and great ancestors.

This Midrash needs further explanation, as there are other nations of the world who have ancestral merit, namely, Yishmael was Avraham's son and Esav was Yitzhak's son. What is unique about the Jewish nation's genealogy?

To answer this particularity we refer to the verses at the end of Bechukotai (Vayikra 26:42) which proclaim that "Hashem will recall the merit of Yaakov, Yitzhak and Avraham." Why does the verse reverse the proper order of the forefathers? The answer is that this order was chosen to emphasize Yaakov, the choicest and central forefather from whom the nation emanated. This automatically excludes Esav and Yishmael from the equation which is the covenant and merit of the forefathers; only descendants of Yaakov, who descended from Yitzhak, who descended from Avraham merit Hashem's dedication.

When Hashem told Avraham that his name will be used in the amidah prayers to conclude the first blessing, He was hinting that only those that carry his name- Avraham's pure descendants- will be considered to carry his great merit. The descendants of Avraham begin with him and conclude with Yaakov; Yaakov is the gatekeeper through which the descendants of Avraham must pass through. There is another important point at the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai. Before presenting the Torah to the Jewish nation, He presented it to each and every nation, but each expressed a negative desire to undertake the Torah because of inherent character flaws and vain desires which contrast starkly with

with the teachings of the Torah. What claim did the nations then have that Hashem showed favoritism to His people?

In truth, the verse in Shemot 19:4 metaphorically describes Hashem's immense love for His people. "I carried you on the wings of eagles and brought you to me (at the Exodus) (Shemot 19:4)." The Arizal in Pri Etz Haim (21:1) explains that these wings are referring to the love of Hashem and awe from before Him. On the eve of the Exodus, Hashem ignited the most incredible feelings of love and awe for Himself in the hearts of every single Jew. Hashem did this because it is the absolute basis of studying Torah- which the Jewish people were en-route to accept in 50 days from the exodus. The study of Torah which lacks within it genuine awe and love towards Hashem doesn't ascend, doesn't develop. These intense and immense sentiments Hashem endowed to the Jewish people on the night of the exodus, and it is this point which the nations of the world were jealous of. As a side point, this great and intense feeling of love and awe towards Hashem lasted only the very first night of the Exodus. Afterwards, until the moment of accepting the Torah at Mount Sinai, it was necessary for each Jew to personally invest their effort in improving their character traits to ultimately regain that great spiritual level they had once been granted. The obvious question is that if Hashem only granted these intense feelings for such a brief moment and it was necessary to attain them once again by personal effort, why did Hashem grant them in the first place? Rather, if Hashem wouldn't have granted them out of pure kindness, it would have been impossible to attain them on our own; these notions were so far removed from the people to be able to attain them. Thus, it is this additional favoritism that the nations of the world were envious of. Hashem responded to them by bringing the genealogical record of the Jewish People, which connects us with Avraham, Yitzhak and Yaakov. The significance of this is that without their great merit, we wouldn't have been able to grasp the immensity of Hashem granting us with feelings of awe and love for Him. Through the merit of our forefathers we were granted Hashem's gift and then we were able to slowly but surely attain those spiritual levels through personal investment



Soul Of the Rif

One should be cognizant that when one is performing good deeds and Mitzvot, yet is befallen by negative matters- as long as one's intentions in performing the good deeds and Mitzvot is pure, those negative matters shall eventually develop into highly positive beneficial matters.

No evil ever comes forth from Hashem. It sometimes happens that we experience matters that we do not fully understand in the short term, but in the long term, what the mind cannot envision, time makes a reality, and we then see that all the apparent travails and troubles that seemed bad, were truly great salvations and were wonderful and essential matters that, later in life, support us through difficult times.



2nd Shabbat Meal

"The Children of Israel shall encamp, each man by his banner according to the insignias of their fathers' household."

The order in which the Jewish people camped in the desert guarded them from Bilam's curse.

The mystical writings bring the following teaching of the Midrash Peliah: 'Do not read 'Otot (insignias)', but rather 'Otiot (letters)'. For this reason Bilam said "How can I curse?, The Almighty has not cursed":

This teaching is elucidated further in the work Asara Maamarot where it is explained that the letters of the names of the forefathers Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov were inscribed on the banners of the twelve tribes in the following manner: On the first banner, the first letter Aleph of Avraham, the first letter Yud of Yitzchak and the first letter Yud of Yaakov were inscribed. On the second banner, the second letter Bet of Avraham, the second letter Tzadi of Yitzchak, and the second letter Ayin of Yaakov were inscribed. On the third banner, the third letter Resh of Avraham, the third letter Chet of Yitzchak, and the third letter Kuf of Yaakov were inscribed. On the fourth banner, the fifth letter Mem of Avraham, the fourth letter Kuf of Yitzchak, and the fourth letter Bet of Yaakov were inscribed. The omitted fourth letter Heh of Avraham would float in the air and protect the Jewish people so that no evil should any power over them.

Now, The Zohar Hakadosh teaches that the Jewish people were encamped in a structure that resembled a final letter Mem (מ), i.e. in a square formation with four sides. The difficulty is raised- Why did Hashem instruct that the letter Heh of Avraham be omitted and float and protect the Jewish people? It would seemingly be more befitting that all the first four letters of Avraham would be inscribed on the banners, and the final letter Mem be omitted to float and protect the Jewish people. The final letter Mem would be better served to protect the Jewish people, given they camped in a final Mem formation as taught by the Zohar, and it would also be more intuitive that the final

letter be omitted rather than the fourth.

We may answer as follows- If the letter Mem were to be omitted, then, on the fourth banner there would be inscribed the letters Kuf, Bet and Heh (The Hebrew Kuf Bet Heh root means 'curse'). This was what Bilam was referring to when he said "Ma Ekov (How can I curse)?, Lo 'Kaboh' E-I (The Almighty has not 'cursed')"- Hashem instructed to omit the letter Heh so that the Kuf Bet Heh root shall not be inscribed on the fourth banner. Hashem did not leave Bilam any opening to curse the Jewish people- even the letters on the banners were amended to ensure they could not bear the interpretation of 'curse'.

More generally, we can learn from the set structure of the Jewish people's camping by their respective banners, that we must each recognize our place. Indeed, one of the forty eight ways in which the Torah may be acquired is by 'recogniz[ing] one's place' (Avot 6, 6)- One must recognize one's place, and, thereby, one may merit to attain and acquire the holy Torah.



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Q & A with the Rif



Question:

Dear Rav, I am, Baruch Hashem, working and receive a fixed salary. I would very much like to get married but I am concerned whether I will be able to, in the future, provide for my wife as well. What should I do?

Answer:

It is brought in the mystical writings that when one busies oneself with getting married, a special angel is sent to help them with their livelihood. There is therefore a great Segula, that when one has trouble with their livelihood, they should take upon themselves the Mitzvah of Hachnassat Chatan Vekallah (assisting those who require financial assistance to get married). For when one gets involved with marrying people off, one comes into proximity with this angel, who will help them with their financial affairs. It is a great Mitzvah and merit to support those in need of assistance to get married.

If one wishes to get married, they should do everything in their power to make it happen, as one must build a Jewish home, and not, G-d forbid, live in a sinful relationship. When a couple get married, Hashem rests all the blessings and salvations on them. If one has found a suitable partner who is willing to get married, they should set a date and get married, and not needlessly push off the wedding date.





3rd Shabbat meal

The festival of Shavuot

Meriting the receiving of the Torah requires great longing and devotion.

On Shavuot, we recite the Megillah of Rut. Many different rationales are provided for the recitation of the Megillah of Rut on Shavuot, and we would like to provide a potential additional explanation for its recitation on Shavuot. Perhaps the Megillah of Rut emphasizes to us the positive power of great longing. Merely sitting down to study Torah is not sufficient to attain the deeper levels and secrets of the Torah- Great love and longing for the Torah is required for this. Believing that one can study the Torah in a similar fashion to how one would study a subject such as accountancy or law would be a great error. One cannot truly attain the depths of the Torah without a desire and longing, and binding all of one's limbs to the Torah, as the verse (Tehillim 35, 10) says "All my limbs will say: 'Hashem, who is like You' ". Although one may feel enlightened and excited from hearing a Torah novelty, one only merits that the Torah becomes a part of them through great longing and desire for the Torah.

The Megillah of Rut teaches of Rut's great longing to be a part of the Jewish people. Rut was Naomi's daughter in law. After both of Naomi's sons Machlon and Kilyon had passed away, Naomi sent Rut off to return to her homeland, to her parents who were the king and queen, as it would be better for her there. At that time there was a great Halachic dispute amongst the Jewish sages, as the Torah (Devarim 23, 4) states "An Amoni (masculine form of Amonite) and Moavi (masculine form of Moabite) shall not enter into the congregation of Hashem; also the tenth generation shall not enter for them into the congregation of Hashem forever". This verse forbids the conversion and acceptance of an Amoni and Moavi into the Jewish nation, due to these nations not welcoming the Jewish people with bread and water after their exodus from Egypt.

The Gemara (Yevamot 76b) describes the dispute as to whether a female Amonite and Moabite were also included in the above prohibition, as the verse is only stated in the masculine form. The Gemara relates that Yeter the Yishmaelite took a sword, and announced that he had heard that the court of Shmuel Hanavi had ruled that only males were included in the prohibition and that anyone who would disagree with this ruling shall be killed with the sword. Most of the Jewish people were wary and did not accept this ruling, but Elimelech, Naomi's Husband and his children Machlon and Kilyon had accepted this ruling that a female Moabite was permitted to convert and be married to a Jew.

Naomi told Rut that she would advise Rut to return to her homeland as the Jews would not accept her conversion, as they had (mostly) not accepted the ruling of the court of Shmuel Hanavi, and it would therefore be better for her to leave the Jewish people to another nation where she would be able to marry. Rut was adamant and told Naomi that she preferred to remain unmarried, alone and childless, but cleave to Hashem and the holy Torah. We may learn from Rut's incomparable level of devotion- Rut was someone who truly desired something and was devoted and prepared to sacrifice all she had in order to attain her desired aim. For this

reason, we read the Megillah of Rut on Shavuot- to teach us, that if someone truly believes in something and fights for that matter, and is prepared to persevere in their fight even if they would incur great expense in the process, they will eventually have great salvation and success in that matter. Rut teaches us to be entirely devoted and follow her mother in law Naomi, to sacrifice everything and be willing to remain lonely our entire life, being prepared to lose everything for the sake of Emuna- This is a very strong and emphatic lesson.

We must apply this lesson on Shavuot to our approach in studying Torah- One should be utterly devoted to the Torah: even if one would need to sacrifice the entire world, and all of one's belongings for the sake of Emuna in Hashem and in the Torah, they should be prepared to sacrifice it all. Following this approach, Rut merited that David Hamelech came from her, and included in him were all the high and holy matters one may attain in this world. For this reason we read the Megillah of Rut on Shavuot, to teach the principle that through devotion, Emuna and dedication, great reward is eventually received.

Consuming dairy foods on Shavuot relates to the power of Moshe Rabenu.

The Rama (Or Hachaim 494, 3) writes that there is a custom to consume dairy foods on Shavuot. The reasons for consuming dairy foods on Shavuot are well known, but we would like to provide a further explanation for the basis of the consumption of dairy foods on Shavuot.

We have considered the following explanation. Moshe Rabenu was born on the 7th of Adar. Now, Moshe Rabenu's birth day ought to have been on the 6th or 7th of Sivan three months later, as Hashem had made a miracle that he was born three months prematurely so that the Egyptians would not know that Moshe's mother, Yocheved, had already given birth, and would believe that she was still expecting him, and so not inspect her home.

Around the 6th or 7th of Sivan, Moshe's original due date, Moshe's mother could no longer keep him hidden, and so placed him in the Ye'or, where Bitya the daughter of Par'o found him. When Bitya summoned Egyptian wetnurses to nurse Moshe, Moshe, who was pure, refused to suckle from any of the Egyptian wetnurses although there would have been special Halachic dispensations in the circumstances, until Miriam advised Bitya to summon a Jewish wetnurse, from whom Moshe acquiesced to suckle.

Moshe Rabenu merited to all that he merited, and that his pure mouth spoke with Hashem mouth-to-mouth due to his refusal to suckle from a gentile wetnurse, until he was provided with pure milk. It is this refusal that occurred on this auspicious time on the 6th or 7th of Sivan that we commemorate and connect to through the consumption of dairy foods on Shavuot.

Treasure charms from the Rif



Reciting the following verses and prayer, found in the holy work Razi'el Hamalach, is a tried and tested Segula to be performed on Shabbat and on Rosh Chodesh Sivan. They are prefaced with the following comment: "Anyone who would like to protect against themselves forgetting their learning should say these verses, and in the merit of the holy Torah for which we prepare ourselves in fear and trepidation during these days, may we merit to guard, action and fulfil the words of Your Torah with love and fear:"



אֶכְן רוּחַ הַיָּהוּה בְּאִנּוּשׁ וְנִשְׁמַת שְׂדֵי תְּבִינִים: לְאִדָּם מֵעַרְכִּי לֵב וּמִיְהוּהוּ מַעֲנֶה לְשׁוֹן: אֵל תִּשְׁלִיכֵנִי מִלְּפָנֶיךָ וְרוּחַ קִדְשְׁךָ אֵל תִּקַּח מִמֶּנִּי: יְהוּה בְּצַר פְּקֻדָּיךָ צָקוּן לַחֵשׁ מוֹסְרֶךָ לְמוֹ: לֵב טְהוֹר בְּרָא לִי אֱלֹהִים וְרוּחַ נְכוֹן חִדַּשׁ בְּקִרְבִּי: אֲדַנִּי יְהוּה נִתַּן לִי לְשׁוֹן לְמוֹדִים לְדַעַת לְעוֹת אֶת יַעַף דְּבַר יַעֲרֵךְ בְּבִקְרָה בְּבִקְרָה יַעֲרִי לִי אֶזְנוֹ לְשִׁמְעַ פְּלִמוּדִים: אֲדַנִּי יְהוּה פִּתַּח לִי אָזְנוֹ וְאֶכְלִי לֹא מְרִיתִי אַחוֹר לֹא נִסְוֵגְתִּי: רוּחַ יְהוּה דָּבַר בִּי וּמְלַתּוֹ עַל לְשׁוֹנִי יְהִי רִצּוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ י-ה-ו-ה אֱלֹהֵי אֲבֹרָהִם יִצְחָק וְיִשְׂרָאֵל שֶׁתִּפְתַּח לִבִּי בְּתוֹרָתְךָ, וְהָאֵר עֵינַי וְלִבִּי בְשֵׁם (וְיִהְיֶה רַבּוֹ) "פִּתְחָא" ל"י" "רַפָּא" ל"י" "תּוֹפָא" ל"י" שִׁפְתָּחוּ אֶת לְבָבִי בְּכוּחַ הַגְּדוּלָּה, שְׁלֵא אֲשַׁכַּח כָּל יְמֵי מַכַּל מֵהַ שְׁלִמְדַתִּי וּמֵהַ שְׁצִיּוּוֹתַי לְלִמּוּד. וְיִהְיֶה עֵמֶדִי שְׂאֵלְמֵד כָּל יְמֵי חַיֵּי וְלֹא אֲשַׁכַּח דְּבַר תּוֹרָה לְעוֹלָם, אֲמֵן נִצַּח סְלֵה. בְּרוּךְ י-ה-ו-ה לְעוֹלָם אֲמֵן וְאֲמֵן."

"But [in truth,] it is a spirit in man, and it is the soul from the Almighty that gives them understanding. To man belong the arrangements of [thoughts in] his heart, but from Hashem comes the tongue's reply. Cast me not away from Your Presence, and take not Your Holy Spirit from me. Hashem, in their trouble they turned to You; they poured out their silent prayer when You reproached them. Create a pure heart for me, O Almighty, and a steadfast spirit renew within me. My Lord, Elo-him, has granted me a tongue for teaching, to understand the need of the times in conveying matters to those who thirst [for knowledge]; He arouses [me] morning after morning; He arouses [my] ear for me to understand as disciples are taught. My Lord, Elo-him, has opened [my] ear for me, and I did not resist; I did not retreat to the rear. The Spirit of Hashem spoke through me, and His word is upon my tongue. May it be Your will Hashem, G-d of Avraham, Yitzchak and Yisrael, that You open my heart in Your Torah, and light up my eyes and heart in the name (contemplate the following words: פתחאל רפאל תופאל), that they may open my heart with Your great power, that all my days I shall not forget what I have studied, and what You have commanded me to study. And may it be with me that I shall study all the days of my life and never forget a Torah teaching, Amen, forever, in eternity. Blessed is Hashem forever, Amen and Amen."

Rabbi Meir of Parmishlan.

Rabbi Meir of Parmishlan had a certain benefactor who supported him significantly. One time, this benefactor came to spend the Shabbat with Rabbi Meir. When he approached Rabbi Meir on Friday afternoon, Rabbi Meir appeared to treat him with an unusual coldness. The benefactor thought to himself that perhaps Rabbi Meir was preoccupied, and therefore had not registered that his key benefactor had come to him. After the conclusion of the evening Shabbat prayer, he approached Rabbi Meir to wish him Shabbat Shalom, but was once again treated with a great coldness. At the Shabbat meal, although on previous visits Rabbi Meir would seat him next to him, this time Rabbi Meir seated him at the far end of the table. At the conclusion of the meal, the benefactor thought to himself: 'Perhaps the Rav is somewhat angered with me. Hopefully by tomorrow's morning prayer, he would have forgiven me.

I have done no bad to the Rav. On the contrary, I provide significant support to the Rav and his Yeshiva.'

The following morning, he came to wish Rabbi Meir Shabbat Shalom, but Rabbi Meir did not respond. He was accustomed that every time he would arrive he would be given an Aliya, but this time Rabbi Meir had instructed that he should not be given an Aliya. The benefactor was very offended and distressed by the treatment he had received, but resolved to see the Rav again on Motzei Shabbat to see if the Rav would still reject him. He said to himself that if the Rav would reject him once more, it would be a sign that this is no place for him and he would not return again. On Motzei Shabbat Rabbi Meir gave him an ice-cold rejection.

On Sunday morning, the benefactor approached Rabbi Meir of Parmishlan's son in law and exclaimed: "I was repeatedly hurt the entire Shabbat. I try to accept it all with love, but I have a grievance- I have been supporting the Rav, and donated to him half of my wealth- Why is the Rav treating me like this?!" The benefactor resolved to try and see one last time whether his treatment by Rabbi Meir would change, and following the Sunday morning prayer approached Rabbi Meir. Rabbi Meir ignored him. Following this, the benefactor decided that he would go and never return to Parmishlan where he was mistreated.

On his journey from Parmishlan, the wagon in which the benefactor was travelling struck an obstacle and turned over, killing him almost instantly. The deceased benefactor's grieving family came to Rabbi Meir of Parmishlan to inquire as to the meaning of the unusual sequence of events that had unfolded. Rabbi Meir told them that he had seen bad omens hanging over the benefactor, and had attempted to hurt him throughout the Shabbat, in the hope that if the benefactor would have accepted the hurt with love, it would have acted as an atonement of his sins. The benefactor's refusal to accept the hurt, and his grievance, prevented this atonement from occurring, and so he had to die, as was initially decreed upon him.

It is similarly told of the Divrei Chaim of Tszanz, that when he would treat someone with great amity, it was because he knew that this person was in dire straits and had no remedy from their predicament. But when he would treat someone harshly and reject them, it was a sign that all would be well with that person, so long as they accepted it. One should receive everything that comes from Hashem with love and great happiness, and be meticulous in all one's actions.

