

Derech Ha-rif

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

For the Torah portion of Ahrey-mot-kedoshim Volume 26 | 8 Iyar



First Shabbat Meal

"And Hashem spoke with Moshe, following the passing of Aharon's two sons, which occurred when they neared Hashem, and they passed."

Respect for our Chachamim must be of the highest order.

There are several reasons the Sages attributed the death of Aharon's two sons, Nadav and Avihu.

The Talmud in Sanhedrin 52a tells how they expressed their inner sentiment of taking over the leadership roles of Moshe and Aharon: "When will these two elders come to pass," they exclaimed, "so that we can lead the nation in their place."

In expressing themselves in such a manner, they overstepped the fundamental principle of honoring our Sages. We must honor and be in awe of our sages to the absolute; disrespecting them is a very grave sin.

The Talmud in Chagigah 22b relates how Rabbi Yehoshua degraded a teaching of Beth Shammai that he couldn't comprehend in saying, "I am ashamed of your words Beth Shammai." A disciple of Beth Shammai approached him and explained the entire teaching. Rabbi Yehoshua then realized his error, came before Shammai's grave and asked for his forgiveness. "How clear are your teachings: the obscure ones - all the more so the clearer ones." The Talmud relates how Rabbi Yehoshua's teeth were from then on always blackened from continuous fasting...

The lesson is obvious: if Rabbi Yehoshua, who was a great sage in his time,

Another... The holy Baal Shem Tov once witnessed someone desecrating Shabbat with a prohibited act and he felt very bad about it. What had he done to merit that he's eyes witness a Jew transgressing the Word of Hashem?

After much reflection, he recalled that he had witnessed a person denigrating a Talmid Chacham and he didn't rebuke that person as he should have. The Zohar teaches that Torah Sages are comparable to Shabbat: "Shabbat for Hashem, sanctified for Hashem - just as Shabbat is sanctified for Hashem, so is Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai (i.e. so too all Torah scholars) sanctified for Hashem

(Zohar, Nasso 144b)."

Thus, the Baal Shem Tov understood that Hashem caused him to witness the desecration of Shabbat to draw attention to the incident of his slight indifference to the honor of a Torah scholar.

In the Book of Yesha'a (58:13), the Prophet states: "And you shall declare Shabbat a day of pleasure, to sanctify Hashem's name, the Honorable." The Sages interpreted the latter part of this verse - "the one sanctified to Hashem"- to be referring to Torah scholars. Thus, the juxtaposition of these two is to teach us that one must honor and provide for all the needs of the Torah scholar in the same manner one does for Shabbat. Furthermore, lack of respect for Torah scholars will automatically ensue some form of - Heaven Forbid- desecration of Shabbat.

In the context of the sons of Aharon, Nadav and Avihu, it is understandable why their end came about; their lack of respect for Moshe and Aharon.



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Soul Of the Rif

A common mistake many parents make is treating their children as if they were their own personal assets. A child is not just another key hanging from a key-ring: some people having 3 keys and others having 5 keys hanging from their key-ring. Rather, a child is akin to a returnable deposit that Hashem entrusts the parents with so that they should educate and raise the child and then release their child, allowing them to find their own way in life.



2nd Shabbat Meal

"Hashem spoke to Moshe after the death of Aharon's two sons, when they drew near before Hashem, and they died."

Maintaining an appropriate distance from one's Rav enables a person to receive and accept the Rav's teachings.

The Torah appears to describe Aharon's sons' death to be due to their having drawn near to Hashem. But how can this possibly be, as, ostensibly, we should all strive to draw near and come close to Hashem?! Why did they die for doing a positive and commendable thing?

Perhaps we may explain this based on the following anecdote: The Gemara (Ketubot 103b) tells us that before Rabbi Yehuda Hanasi passed away he commanded his son to 'throw venom' at the students. We must understand what the expression 'throwing venom' means and for what purpose Rabbi Yehuda Hanasi commanded that it be done to the students.

This may be understood based on the following principle said in the name of Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Riminov: Chazal teach that the Moon has no light of its' own, and it merely receives and reflects light from the Sun. The Moon's ability to receive light from the Sun stems from its great distance from the Sun. If it were to be closer to the Sun, the light it can receive and reflect would diminish. A student's ability to receive and accept from his Rav works in a similar manner: In order to be able to receive and accept from his Rav, a student must distance himself somewhat and accord his Rav a level of awe and respect.

So too, in a person's service of Hashem, if a person is filled with awe of Hashem, they merit to cleave to Hashem. This is learned from the verse (Devarim 13, 5) that states "After Hashem your G-d you shall go, and Him you shall fear, and His commandments you shall guard, and His Voice you shall heed, and Him you shall serve". Through performing all the above one merits to the end of the verse which states "And to Him you shall cleave".

Based on this principle, Rabbi Yehuda Hanasi instructed his son to 'throw venom' at the students.- When a student feels too close to the Rav they begin to disparage their Rav. But when a student has the correct balance of a certain level of closeness and a certain level of distance, then they may receive and accept much learning from their Rav. Therefore, Rabbi Yehuda Hanasi instructed his son to 'throw venom' i.e. apply some measure of distance to the students so that they will be able to act as receptacles and receive Torah learning from him.

Just as we find with the Moon that its distance from the Sun enhances its ability to receive light from the Sun, it is a general rule that there are some matters that benefit from an appropriate level of distance. One of these matters is maintaining the appropriate distance from one's Rav so that one may receive from them.

This was the error of Aharon's sons- They had come close at a time and place where they should have kept a distance, and due to that inappropriate coming close, they had to die.

A person should take this lesson to heart and act wisely with their Rav, by identifying those points where they should come very close to their Rav and those where coming close may detrimentally affect their ability to act as a receptacle and receive from their Rav.



"And the men with the women, all those of a generous heart (Shemot 35:22)."

"You shall be holy, as I - Hashem your God - am Holy (Vayikra 19:2)."
The smallest of acts one can raise or lower an entire world.

The verse in Devarim 32:9 states: "Hashem's portion is his people Yaakov is His inheritance." (continue on page 3)

Q & A with the Rif



Question:

Dear Rav, my wife and I both draw strength and follow the Rav's teachings. I work and set aside fixed times to study Torah. My wife would very much like me to become a full-time Torah scholar, but I feel that I'm not truly 'there'. How may a person discover what their aim should be in terms of their Torah-life?

Answer:

A person must always develop themselves gradually.- A person cannot one day just take the leap and do things his soul isn't naturally designed to do.

Of course, sometimes a person is able to take this leap, and the thing stopping them is the Yetzer Hara planting fear of change in their heart.

Through having many meaningful conversations with your wife, you may be able to together reach a point of truth. Indeed we would advise the righteous husband and wife to hold many meaningful conversations with each other and reach a mutually agreeable plan to action, and thus together you will both reach true points. May Hashem help and rest blessing in your endeavors and take you on the correct path to the correct aim.





3rd Shabbat meal

The commentators learn from this verse that the Jewish people strengthen Hashem's presence in the upper worlds. "Give strength to Hashem (Tehillim 68:35)." The positive acts of the Jewish people strengthen Hashem's presence not only in our physical realm, but also the purely spiritual realms.

Similarly, the commentators explain the verse of Hashem commanding us to be holy as follows. "You shall be holy, because I am Holy (says Hashem):" My Holiness is very much removed from your (the people's) holiness, but it nonetheless draws from your holiness. Meaning, sanctifying our actions augments Hashem's Holiness even in the upper, purely spiritual spheres. We must be acutely aware that every action we do has a direct consequence on Hashem's (perceived) sanctity up above. The literal translation of the portion of the verse "...Yaakov is His inheritance," is "Yaakov, the 'rope' of His inheritance." The actions of Yaakov, the Jewish people, affect the spiritual worlds as if there were a rope connecting to them. Every action in this world has a ripple effect on the upper spheres. The Sages relate a parable explaining this phenomenon. There was once a king who had a splendid chandelier of gold and precious stones hanging in his main hall. The chandelier was held up by a thick rope which went through the ceiling to the roof where it was attached securely. One day a simpleton passed by the palace and noticed the rope on the roof. Just what he needed, he thought to himself, to attach whatever he wanted. He climbed onto the roof and sawed off the rope from its anchor. Doing below, the chandelier came crashing down onto the floor. Within no time, the simpleton found himself jailed and scorned at for the immeasurable damage he had caused. "But what have I done? I needed a piece of rope for myself?" There are many actions which seem insignificant, but their significance in the upper spheres is immense. Every Jew is intimately connected to Hashem as if by a rope and every action either elevates or, Heaven Forbid, causes the opposite to Hashem's splendor and Sanctity. "You shall be holy, because I, Hashem Am Holy," means that your holiness as individuals in this world affects My (perceived) holiness in the spiritual spheres. These words are so applicable during the summer months when physical enticement is abundant. Safeguarding once sanctity meticulously elevates Hashem's grandeur in the world. Extra caution is needed because one action inevitably to the next as the Sages teach "a Mitzva brings about another Mitzva."

"You shall be holy, as I - Hashem your God - am Holy (Vayikra 19:2)."
Denigrating Mitzvot diminishes a person's life-force.

Rashi teaches that this Torah portion was read during the Hakhel ceremony because it contains so many important Mitzvot. All Torah portions and teachings were recited specifically to the men, but these teachings included men, women and children in their audience. The verse in Kohelet (12:13) states: "The end of all matters, once everything has been heard, is to fear Hashem and keep His commandments, for this is the entire man." The Sages teach that man is made up of a physical and spiritual components which reflect one another. As our physical bodies are composed of 248 with our bodies positively affects the spiritual limb corresponding

to the physical limb we employed, and conversely, transgressing a negative commandment negatively affects the corresponding spiritual limb. Sins which carry the punishment of Karet, effect the 'soul' of one's spiritual makeup. "To fear Hashem" refers to fulfilling the 365 negative commandments, while "safeguarding His Mitzvot" refers to the positive commandments of the Torah. Together, they comprise the entire person: "For this is Man complete." There are numerous categories of Commandments, some which are specific to a time, others which are present every day, continuously, and yet others which are specific to a group within the Jewish nation, i.e. Cohanim or Levites. Oftentimes, Mitzvot which are occasional, for example those of Pessah or another specific event, are held in high esteem and performed with much joy and dedication, while those which apply every day- Torah study, Tefillin and Mezuzah, for example- are performed with less appropriate enthusiasm.

However, the priorities are incorrect, because what is most essential is most abundant. Case in point, air, which is involved to our bodies most critical continuous activity, and water, which is the basis of the living world and sustains all living matter, are available essentially everywhere on earth. Everything else, whether grains, fruits or any other creation is isn't necessarily abundant about the entire face of the world are less important to man's survival. Air, which is most essential to all life is most abundant on earth. Then, water, which is of second in importance compared to air, is slightly less abundant. Fruits or other things which are not critical to life's continuation are only found in very specific places. The nature of Mitzvot is similar in that the Mitzvot that are most critical to our existence are present at all times, and those of relatively lesser direct impact are present less often, upon occasion. The parasha of Kedoshim, importantly is a central parasha, with many critical teachings and many others which are directly dependant upon them. One particularly significant Mitzva present in this parasha is that of not withholding hatred in one's heart onto another Jew for no reason- baseless hatred.

The Vilna Gaon z"l in his work Hama'or Hagadol asks: how does Hashem call hatred towards another Jew baseless, it must have surely emerged from an inappropriate or harmful act which was committed towards that person. How is it baseless then? To which the Gaon z"l answers: one who truly believes in Hashem knows concretely that Hashem brings about every situation in its finest and minutest details- including that person who caused harm or insult onto them. How then can they bear hatred towards that person?

That hatred is therefore baseless. We find this attitude by King David when he was shamelessly bashed and cursed by Shimi'i ben Gera. David's general Avishai ben Tzeruya requested permission to behead Shimi'i, but David refused, exclaiming that " Hashem told him to curse David; who daresay why has that happened?" Even if he was unconceivably shamed by Shimi'i, he understood that no one could bring about any harm to him if not for Hashem's command.

Treasure charms from the Rif



A great Segula for the 8th of Iyar for one's prayers to be accepted and one's requests answered:

The 8th of Iyar is a particularly auspicious and sanctified day. Everyone should endeavor to recite the 'Akedat Yitzchak (Binding of Yitzchak)' seven times and the 'Pitum Haketoret (Incense Offering)' three times before the Mincha prayer and then make their requests of Hashem. Whatever is requested then, Hashem will bring abundantly from Above and all prayers will be answered. So please righteous ones, be meticulous to recite before Mincha the 'Akedat Yitzchak' seven times and the 'Pitum Haketoret' three times, and with Hashem's help we will merit to salvation, success and great help from Above.



Rabbi Meir Baal Hanes.

The usual way that we bury the deceased is in a supine lying position, however Rabbi Meir Baal Hanes is buried in a standing position, with his hands raised to Heaven, praying for the arrival of the Mashiach.

It is told that there were greatly pious people who would, at the sound of any unusual noise, hasten and prepare themselves believing it to potentially be the coming of the Mashiach. It is told that there were pious people who would sleep with their clothes and shoes on, so that they could quickly run to greet the Mashiach, should he come in the middle of the night.

There is a well-known Gemara that tells the following story of Rabbi Meir Baal Hanes. Rabbi Meir was teaching Torah in the study hall, and a certain woman sat to listen to his teaching until a late hour. When she arrived home, her husband was very angry and refused to allow her to enter the house. He said he would only forgive her if she would go back and spit in Rabbi Meir's face.

Rabbi Meir heard of this incident, and wishing to bring peace in this family's home, he approached this woman and told her that he was fearful of Ayin Hara (harmful negative energy of the Evil Eye), and therefore requested her to spit at him to remove the Ayin Hara. An alternative version is that Rabbi Meir told her that he had some disease of the eye which he needed someone to spit at in order for it to heal. The woman went ahead and spat in Rabbi Meir's face (or eye) and returned to her husband, informing him that she had done as he had requested and spat in Rabbi Meir's face.

The saintly Rabbi Meir Baal Hanes was prepared to suffer the denigration of being spat at in the face in order to bring peace in a Jewish home. For if there is peace in a home on Shabbat, blessing rests the entire week and a person's entire life is transformed for the better. This is learned from the verse "(He) Who makes your borders peaceful, and sates you with the cream of wheat."- Where there is "peace", the "cream of wheat" follows, as Chazal teach- 'Hashem did not find for the Jewish people a receptacle to receive blessing except peace'.

Therefore, the Satan concentrates his efforts to disrupt the peace in the home on Shabbat, beginning on the Shabbat evening, by kindling the 'fire' of strife, and allegorically kindling the fire of Gehinnom to bring a person down to new lows.

The Mystical writings teach that when one performs a Mitzvah or cleaves to a Mitzvah, a Tzadik's soul spiritually occupies his body, but when he becomes angry, the Tzadik's soul immediately leaves. On the holy Shabbat one should be particularly careful of the Yetzer Hara and the anger he attempts to incite. For there is no greater bringer of destruction and ruin than strife and anger- Strife and anger ruin everything that is good. The Yetzer Hara, the Satan 'dances', raising strife, anger and all manner of ensuing evils.

It is further told of Rabbi Meir Baal Hanes, that here was once a family who would have great arguments every week on Shabbat. Rabbi Meir, wishing to quash this strife, arrived uninvited at this family's home one Shabbat evening.

The couple were embarrassed to argue in Rabbi Meir's presence, and so set aside their argument that Shabbat. The next Shabbat, Rabbi Meir again arrived unexpectedly at their home and thus prevented them from arguing a second week. Rabbi Meir arrived on the third Shabbat as well, preventing any strife. Following the third consecutive Shabbat with no argument in the home, the couple reconciled and strife exited their home for good. One should be cognizant that by quashing argument and not allowing it to enter the home, one leaves a space in their home that is filled with blessing.

Our sages allegorically interpret the following verse from Tehillim (34, 15) "Refrain from evil and do good. Seek peace, Verodfehu (and pursue it)" as follows: If you would like to "Refrain from evil", then distance yourself from the evil angel who arrives on Shabbat evening to cause strife, and by that you are "do(ing) good"- for a good angel accompanies the evil angel and blesses the home to always have peace, to which the evil angel must answer 'Amen' and thereby the evil angel becomes a good angel. Following this, "Seek peace, Verodfehu". 'Verodfehu' may also be interpreted as 'it pursues him'. -That is to say that when one follows the above advice and refrains from the evil of strife and transforms the evil angel into a good angel, then good and peace pursues a person throughout the week and they achieve salvation and success and only good and blessing.

Therefore, one should be very careful on the Shabbat evening and day to cleave to the Torah, the Mitzvot, good deeds, Love of Hashem, Mitzvot "between man and his fellow friend", and refrain at all costs from argument which can bring terrible destruction.

