

Derech Harif

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

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First Shabbat Meal

“Moshe took half the blood and placed it in basins, and half the blood he threw upon the altar”

A person needs to sanctify himself and connect to his spiritual half in Heaven.

At the end of the Torah portion we find a wondrous matter- Moshe Rabenu seals a covenant between HKB”H and the Jewish people, as the holy Torah narrates: “Moshe took half the blood and placed it in basins, and half the blood he threw upon the altar. Then, he took the Book of the Covenant, read it in earshot of the people. Immediately, they declared, ‘Everything that G-d has spoken, we will do and we will obey!’ Moshe took the blood, sprinkled it upon the people, said ‘Behold this is the blood of the Covenant that G-d sealed with you concerning all these matters.’”

Rashi (ad loc.) comments on this verse: “Moshe took half the blood”- “Who divided (the blood)?- An angel came and divided it.” The verse, along with Rashi’s commentary requires further explanation, as the Torah explicitly states that Moshe divided the blood, yet Rashi specifies that it was an angel! Also, the action of dividing the blood into two parts and sprinkling it on the people and altar calls for further interpretation. What is the source of Rashi’s interpretation? The Midrash (Vayikra Rabbah 6,5) states that this angel resembled Moshe Rabenu in appearance, and some commentators go so far as to identify him as the angel Mata”t. What is the meaning behind these very particular interpretations?

Additionally, the identification of the angel as being none other than Mata”t poses a serious challenge. The Sages interpret the verse “And Chanoch went in the way of G-d, and he was gone,” to mean that he was transformed and elevated to become the Minister of the World, HKB”H’s Personal Secretary in Heaven. How can this hold true for the Minister of the World must have been present at the creation of the world, while the human Chanoch was only born 622 years after the creation. How could Chanoch possibly be the Minister of the World?

The Commentaries explain as follows- The verse “I was a youth, I have also aged” (Tehillim 37, 25) is referring to Chanoch. When he was in the world, he was

young, but when he was elevated to the Heavens, he can be described as “I have also aged.” Based on this teaching, we can explain that every person has two parts to his soul (a single soul apportioned to two parts), an element which resides in Heaven and one which resides on Earth. In the case of Chanoch, his half that was in Heaven was the angel Mata”t, and the half which was on Earth resided in Chanoch. When Chanoch ascended to Heaven in a storm, the angel Mata”t became complete.

Moshe Rabenu is described in a similar manner. The Torah describes Moshe Rabenu as having his upper half G-dly entity, a Man of G-d, an Angel of the Almighty, and his lower half of flesh and blood, that of a human. The Gemara (Sotah 13b) tells of a wicked kingdom that sought the burial place of Moshe Rabenu, despite the holy Torah (Devarim 34,6) stating that it was concealed from all of mankind. “And no one knows (the whereabouts of) his burial place”. When one would ascend the mountain, they would perceive the burial place below them. And when they would descend, they would perceive the burial place above them, at the top of the mountain. When they split and stood at both the top and bottom of the mountain, they perceived the burial both above and below them. The explanation of this event is that Moshe Rabenu was both a Man of G-d and an ordinary human- he was a combination of both elements. This is who Moshe Rabenu was; like an Angel of the Almighty, like the angel Mata”t.

Based on this, we may explain- The holy Torah says that Moshe Rabenu split the blood, and Rashi comments that an angel split the blood. Moshe Rabenu who was similar to the angel Mata”t split the blood, as the Midrash says that the angel had the appearance of Moshe. Moshe split the blood when he was like a Man of G-d who is half angel.

This is the great degree of a person- that a person can connect to his upper spiritual half above, to be a Man of G-d and a holy person, to ascend and reach the very highest levels. A person must never stop. A person should always aspire and say ‘when will my deeds reach the deeds of my forefathers?’, to reach the very highest levels. When a person cleaves to the Torah and cleaves to sanctity, he may reach lofty levels and achieve great spiritual attainments.



Soul Of the Rif

A person should know that life is full of worries and a person should know which worries should be taken care of, which worries should not be taken care of, which worries are things of the Almighty that He will solve them, how far a person’s efforts should be, and only this by the right of the Torah You can reach this limit. And beyond this limit that the Holy Torah says up to here, and in a miracle from you do not demand (Higaga 11) as soon as a person reaches a miracle from you, to a thing that is already beyond, that is a matter of the Almighty, any worry that he worries is a false worry, a worry that cannot solve any problem for him And she can’t do anything for him, and he only enters the world of despair and the world of despondency.



2nd Shabbat Meal

"If a person shall strike his slave's eye...If his slave's tooth"

The two ways that a person can overcome the evil inclination, and escape it to freedom.

The holy Torah tells us in this week's portion: "If a person shall strike his slave's eye, or his maidservant's eye and destroy it, he shall set him free for his eye. If his slave's tooth, or his maidservant's tooth he shall knock out, he shall set him free for his tooth." In these two verses the Torah tells us that if a person either strikes his slave's eye or strikes his slave's tooth- he shall set his slave free.

Based on this, perhaps we may infer the following. A person who would like to overcome his inclinations, would like to defeat them, to be set free from the evil inclination and to ascend to a very great level has two options to defeat the evil inclination. Either to subdue the desire of the eye or to subdue the desire of the tooth: the respective desires of inappropriate sight and inappropriate eating.

When a person controls his desire of inappropriate sight, and is careful about what he looks at, and looks only at holy things, and doesn't, Heaven forbid, degrade his eyes looking at impure things, and similarly, in regard to eating- when a person is careful about his eating, to eat only those things which the holy Torah permits us, and in the manner which the holy Torah permits them to us, and he subdues the desire of eating, then he is set free. He becomes someone who subdues the evil inclination and controls himself, rather than allowing the inclinations to control him.

This is the highly exalted level of a person who controls his desire of the eye and desire of the tooth. The covenant of sight and the covenant of the tongue are one- If a person guards both of these covenants which are one covenant, then he is set free and merits to ascend and become uplifted to very great and lofty levels.

"If a fire shall go forth and find thorns, and a stack of grain or a standing crop or a field is consumed, the one who kindled the fire shall surely pay."

A person who kindled the fire of conflict and ran away will ultimately pay for everything.

It is brought in the weekly Torah portion "If a fire shall go forth and find thorns, and a stack of grain or a standing crop or a field is consumed, the one who kindled the fire shall surely pay." Perhaps we may infer based on our Sages' words "If a fire shall go forth"- The fire has gone forth, but we do not know where from- This fire is the fire of conflict. Whenever conflict erupts- it is unclear who kindled the fire. Suddenly, there is a great argument, and people wonder- Who kindled the argument? Who kindled the fire? Those who generally kindle the flame, the fire, the conflict-often kindle it, and then run away. People have a nature to kindle a conflict and run away, so that they will not be caught having caused the conflict.

The holy Torah says: "If a fire shall go forth"- suddenly there is a fire- a conflict, and we do not know who started it. "And it shall find thorns, and a stack of grain... is consumed"- everything is burned- the conflict burns through and consumes everything. The holy Torah promises "The one who kindled the fire shall surely pay". The one who kindled the fire- even though we don't know who they are, and they are hidden- "shall surely pay"- will ultimately pay for all they caused. Thus, we see that suddenly troubles and difficult problems fall on people- destructions and great tragedies, and they do not understand the reason. It is because they once kindled a great conflict, and it was not known that it was them. HKB"H, the cause of all causes, arranges everything in such a manner that they will pay for the fire they have kindled.

Q & A with the Rif



Dear Rav,

What does Hashem expect from us these days? What should we do to please him?

Each person has their specific life-mission to accomplish. To accomplish this mission, one must be aware of the four symbolic elements which constitute a person's entity and being: fire, water, wind and earth.

A person whose dominating symbolic element is fire will have a tendency to anger and impatience. Such an individual must work on controlling their anger, controlling their fiery, impulsive behaviour. Doing so pleases Hashem.

The wind symbolic element in a person's makeup is characterised by a tendency to speak gossip. "He said this...he said that..." For a person with such tendencies, refraining from such behaviour gives Hashem much pleasure.

The water symbolic element is characterised by the pursuit of pleasure: theft, vanity, etc. Halting such behaviour gives Hashem much pleasure.

Lastly, those persons whose character is dominantly represented by the earth symbolic element have a tendency to depression and pessimism. "He did such and such to me...he said that...he insulted me..." here again, stopping such behaviour pleases Hashem.

It's important that each person identify their nature so they know how to correct and rectify it, and as such, they will engender true satisfaction and joy to Hashem.



3rd Shabbat meal

“These are the Laws which you shall present before them.”
Every trial and tribulation must be accepted with joy, as they have an origin in previous Reincarnations.

On the very first verse of the Parasha, the Zohar comments “These are the Laws...these are the systems of Reincarnation...” These words are particularly enigmatic; what is the connection between Torah Law and reincarnations?

To answer this question we must first forward that there are oftentimes instances where a person doesn't understand why a specific incident occurred to them. For example, they may be summoned to court for an proceeding in which they have no connection or guilt. Such situations, explains the Zohar, are the result of previous reincarnations. The individual may have done nothing wrong, but they must rectify an action from a previous reincarnation.

The following story describes the functioning of reincarnations. There was once a salesman who employed several horses to transport his merchandise from city to city. One particular horse, although significantly older than the rest of his stead, worked a lot harder than the rest, and that on a smaller portion of hay.

One day, the owner of the horse was clearing his desk of old contracts and IOU notes. He came across one note which he remembered the borrower had long passed away. He immediately tore the note in exclamation that he had forgiven that person even if they hadn't repaid him in full. At the very moment those words were uttered, the old horse found in the stable collapsed and died.

He was very surprised at what had transpired and rushed to his rabbi for an explanation.

“The person who owed you that sum written on that note was reincarnated into that hard working horse, so that he could pay his debt. The moment you forgave him for whatever was owed, his judgement was complete and his soul was able to depart the body of that horse.”

This teaches us a fundamental lesson: we must be very meticulous and careful in all our actions- especially those related to financial matters. A small amount of money that wasn't paid in full, can be the cause of a person's soul returning as a reincarnation to fulfil his obligation.

When a difficulty or trouble befalls a person with seemingly no explanation whatsoever, they must know that it is coming from a previous reincarnation. In such situations, one must rejoice in the knowledge that Hashem is giving them the opportunity to close old files from previous reincarnations. And conversely, one must be just and careful with all matters so as to avoid the need to reincarnate to rectify them.

“If you purchase a Jewish slave, he shall work for six years and on the seventh he shall be liberated.”

Measure for Measure: one who is negligent with other people's money or wares deserves that the Torah will be negligent with his money too.

The Torah portion begins with the laws of Jewish slaves. “If you purchase a Jewish slave, he shall work for six years and on the seventh he shall be liberated.” This system that is put in place by the Torah is astounding. A person who steals but has no means of returning the object or money is sold as a slave for up to six years. The buyer has the right to marry him off to a non-Jewish slave-woman of his (if he, the slave was currently or previously married at the time of sale) so as the offspring will be his to keep and employ. These offspring have no belonging to the Jewish slave as such that they remain in the buyer's possession once the six years come up, ad infinitum. These laws are quite mind-boggling. The laws established by the Torah are most sensitive and kind to the human condition, so how can it be that such a law concerning Jewish slaves exists? A person may have erred and stolen, but is it just to have him endure six years of humiliation and cruelty in serving as a slave, being obliged to marry a non-Jewish woman and also not having any rights to the children he may bear? The slave will go on with his following his liberation- and may even come to achieve success in life- but those children he bore with the gentile slave-woman will forever be removed from him. Where is the justice and kindness in the whole matter?

Alas, the lesson to be learned from this law is fundamental to human relationships. A person who thievs others reveals that they have no sentiment and caring for their fellow's feelings and possessions. They exhibited cruelty towards another Jew in their act of theft, so they received a punishment in precisely equal measure, i.e. being sold as a slave. The Torah reveals its position about such an individual: they ignored the feelings of others, neglected expressing sympathy towards others, so too the Torah punishes them by disconnecting any slave offspring from them forever. It's essentially humanistic to be careful with other people's sentiments, money and possessions. One who acts carelessly with other people's money or possessions will in turn endure discipline similar in nature through the laws of the Torah. One who blatantly ignores the effort a person must have experienced to obtain their money or possession will in turn be neglected by the Torah; his son born from the gentile slave-woman will be kept away from him forever.

A person must be very careful in their interpersonal interactions. It's fairly easy to become insensitive towards others through the course of life. However, one must be aware that it will cost them dearly; the Torah itself will thrust a situation of similar nature and measure upon them. One who disregards other people's feelings will in turn endure situations which will bring about identical feelings

Treasure charms from the Rif



The Me'am Loez cites Rabbi Chaim Vital zt"l who teaches that reading the entire Book of Tehillim (Psalms) on Rosh Hodesh Adar is a powerful Segula.

Whoever has the opportunity to do so - the Rabbi personally requests - should pray that the Gates of Heaven should open and for the success of the Rabbi and entire Shuva Israel community.



The following is a tale of the Sainly Ba'al Shem Tov, pioneer of Chassidut.

There was once a pair of simple tailors, who's extent of experience covered only simplistic garments; they were tailors of the lowest ranks. They would wander from town to town, in search of jobs, which were just enough to sustain themselves. They would earn a paltry rubble or two for their services, and thus were very poor.

One day, they arrived at the home of a respectable jew, and they knocked on his door to offer their services. When the door was opened and they were asked the meaning of their visit, they noticed a righteous looking man with a gloomy and deep expression sitting in the main room.

Touched by his pain, they asked about the cause of his despair and if they could help him in any way.

"I'm a tenant of a gentile Landlord. It hasn't been too long that he's come over to my home with a particular and almost impossible request to fulfil. He is planning the wedding of his daughter very soon and he requires fine garments for his entire family. He has so far been very displeased with all the tailors whos work he's examined, and has therefore decided to place the responsibility of finding suitable tailors upon me. He threatened to jail me for a long time if I came back empty handed."

"We are tailors," the two tailors exclaimed excitedly.

"But you're very simplistic tailors. There is not a chance that he will be pleased with your product. He's cancelled many tailors much better than yourself. There is almost no chance that he will even consider your offer." The tailors insisted that they had nothing to lose in at least making an offer.

And so they presented themselves to the gentile landlord, and listened to his specific requests for a sample garment. They sewed it together and the landlord was very pleased with their craftsmanship. He thus placed his order for the wedding garments, and the tailors began their work.

After a loaded month of work, they came with their completed products to the landlord. Once again, he expressed his delight at their fine work and paid them a sizable sum of six hundred rubles. As they were about to leave, the landlord's wife reminded her husband of the jewish family - a man, his wife and their five children - they had jailed for failure to pay their tenant dues.

"If you pay me three hundred rubles, I'll let them free," said the landlord.

With compassion in his heart, one of the tailors spoke up and suggested to his partner that they free the family and then divide the remaining three hundred rubles between themselves. The second tailor was less excited to partake in the deed and refused to give any part of his profit for the release of the jailed family. He took his portion and went on his way.

The other tailor, conversely, gave all his money for the release of the family, embraced them and went on his way.

They both returned home; the first bought a business with his money, which rapidly became very successful, while the second returned to offering his simple tailoring services, as he had always done. The former became only wealthier with time, while the latter slowly sank to the lowest levels of poverty.

One day, the wealthy former-tailor was approached by a pauper requesting money for his Shabbat meals. Upon receiving a coin, he joyfully showered the man with blessings of success. "I don't need your blessings," responded the tailor. "I have money. It is you that needs the blessing." And so he continued on his way.

That day, the man had an important business meeting and, almost miraculously, the meeting was extremely successful. He had a suspicion that it was in the merit of that pauper's blessing, and so before every business meeting then onward, he would find the pauper, give him charity and get a blessing for success.

The blessings had power, and the man began to climb the ranks of true wealth, doubling and tripling his former stature. One day, under the influence of heavy drinking, he revealed his source of wealth as being the blessings of that pauper. His friends and guests, hearing those good words, decided to test it out, and so they too began to visit the pauper for his blessings of success. In no time, his name began to gain fame and he was called by all as "the miracle-working tailor."

Tales of the tailor reached the ears of the Baal Shem Tov and he decided to investigate this man and determine the origin of his power- if he actually had any. He had the man brought before him and was surprised to find that he was utterly ignorant. After some goading and pressuring, the pauper revealed the source of his power of blessing as coming from the Mitzvah of Pidyon Shvuyim (release of prisoners). Touched by the sincerity of the pauper, the Sainly Ba'al Shem Tov took him under his tutelage, and in a short while he grew into a very respectable scholar and saint.

This story teaches us that when charity is performed with sincerity and especially self-sacrifice, as when the amount given is important to the giver, it only then has true merit.



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