

Derech Ha-rif

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

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First Shabbat Meal

Behold! You are all standing today before Hashem, your God."

The Jewish Nation is one entity; one who elevates themselves influences others positively, and the converse is true if one slacks off. The first verse of the Torah portion details the groups of people that were present at that great assembly that Moshe gathered: men, women, children, wood-choppers, water drawers...Moshe points out that they "are all standing here today." The Sages remark (Zohar, Parashat Bo 32b) that whenever the Torah employs the word "today," it is in fact making reference to the very first day of existence (the sixth day of creation) which, from year to year, is the day we celebrate Rosh Hashana.

The Torah lists ten categories of people in the first couple of verses. The sages draw a connection between these ten categories listed here and the Ten Commandments. Going through the list of categories in the verse, the sixth category of people is 'children.'

Correspondingly, in the Ten Commandments, the Sixth Commandment is the prohibition of manslaughter. The connection between these too is very stark and is targeted to all parents; when a child is not educated carefully, with constant supervision and everything following the values presented by the Torah, such children can unfortunately stray off the proper path and even to the bottom of the abyss with murder on their hands.

The significance of the Ten Commandments and the ten categories of people that are listed in the verse, is that they are each, respectively, one entity. If one is lax in any of the Ten Commandments, they will have a deficiency in the other Commandments. Similarly, each Jew affects and is influenced by his or her fellow Jew. When one person elevates themselves spiritually, they elevate many along with them, and Heaven Forbid, the opposite is true as well.

Along the same line of interpretation, the Ten Days of Repentance (Aseret Yemei Teshuva) are also connected one with another, as one entity. Being strong at any moment of these days raises the spiritual influence of these days as a whole.

In preparation for the Great Day of Rosh Hashana, we must work united to uplift one another and the days and thus be worthy of Hashem's Divine Goodness and success in all matters.



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Soul Of the Rif

What purifies the soul and cleanses it so that it can ascend before the Throne of Glory at night in cleanliness? What ensures that the soul will not gather excessive dirt before Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur before returning itself to G-d? By cleansing one's soul on a daily basis, one ensures that one is clean. This is done by learning the holy Zohar, in that through one learning the holy Zohar, one purifies their soul. A person who is wise looks ahead, and knows that one who works hard on the eve of Shabbat will have food to eat on Shabbat (Avoda Zara 3a). This type of person is wise, and is already storing up strength for himself. Such a person has so to speak, many clothes laundered in advance of Shabbat, and thereby accumulates many merits for himself through having read the holy Zohar, and impacting a myriad of people. They garner merits for themselves by cleansing the world, as repairing the world in the Kingdom of G-d is exceptionally meritorious. Such a person has the power to be in the enclave of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai in heaven.



2nd Shabbat Meal

A person who sanctifies themselves on the last Shabbat of the year, can be assured this sanctification will leave an impression on Rosh Hashana too. The upcoming Shabbat is the last of the year. The essence of all the Shabbatot of the year are found within this Shabbat. When a person conducts themselves in the path of G-d, in a proper and fitting way during this Shabbat, this leads to great influence and can repair all of the Shabbatot of the past year.

It is known that Shabbat is the source of all blessings, and if Shabbat is handled in a proper way, then the essence of the entire week is refined and ascends to the highest level before Hashem. The entire essence of Rosh Hashana is nourished from this holy Shabbat, and if we are holy and pure on this Shabbat, with great elevation of our souls before Hashem, then we will be similarly impacted on Rosh Hashana, with great inspiration and strength; we will be able to climb to the highest heights on Rosh Hashana.

Rosh Hashana is the Day of Judgment on which the essence of a person's entire life passes before Hashem. Therefore, if a person knows how to conduct themselves with sanctity and purity on this Shabbat, all the Shabbatot of the year which have passed are repaired. Additionally, this Shabbat will be empowered to impact on the entire upcoming week, Rosh Hashana and the Aseret Yemei Teshuva (the Ten Days of Repentance). This Shabbat can impact tremendously on all of the forthcoming holy days.

Therefore, on this holy Shabbat, we should make an effort to foster a great sense of closeness to Hashem with luster and alacrity. Every instant which we maximize on this Shabbat has great unparalleled power. As our teacher, the Ben Ish Chai (Ben Ish Chai 302, Shemot), teaches, every hour of Torah study on Shabbat has the impact equivalent to a thousand hours of learning during the week.

The more a person attached themselves to Hashem on Shabbat, the more impact there will be to imbue the entire week with sanctity and purity. Our holy teachers say that a person who is particular on Shabbat subjugates the Evil Inclination for the rest of the entire week. Over the course of the whole week, the Evil Inclination is weaker because of the merit of Shabbat. Every holy matter which a person turns to during the week, and every holy act which a person performs, comes from the positive influence of Shabbat which impacts positively

and brings blessing.

Thank G-d, holy and righteous Jews in the community 'Shuva Yisrael' are particular about the reading of the book of Devarim on Shabbat, and they experience the resulting immeasurable salvation and strength. Every day, we hear of further cases of people who were personally saved and saw great light in many complicated predicaments. Great salvation has been seen in the merit of the book of Devarim. A particular cause of joy was the following case of salvation:

There was a woman who did not have any children for over fifteen years and was in great pain, and now, through natural means, in the merit of reading the book of Devarim, she has given birth. The power of the book of Devarim, spoken by Moshe our teacher, the faithful shepherd, has great influence, it carries rare and unmatched power.



Q & A with the Rif



Question:

When I was younger, I underwent an abortion, and today, thank G-d, I have four daughters. To atone for this sin, my husband and I did something as a tikkun (remedy) for this several years ago, but I still feel disquiet on account of this, and it causes me great distress. How can I know that I have definitely fixed this matter?

Answer:

With G-d's help, you should do a tikkun based on the Ben Ish Chai, including all of the tikkunim. The verse says "And my sin is constantly before me" (Tehillim 51:5). This means that one should constantly remember to do Teshuva (repentance) for one's sin. However, sometimes the work of the Evil Inclination is to stick to something, and by making a person think about their sin constantly, cause them to fall.

Many times, things are ideas of the Evil Inclination and not the Good Inclination. The Evil Inclination says "You erred by doing this and that, you sinned by doing such and such and you sinned rebelliously by doing this" and by doing so, the Evil Inclination brings a person down. But this is not so, a person repaired things, they performed Teshuva, and the meaning of "And my sin is always before me" means to remember it and undertake Teshuva, but not to become enveloped in the sin.





3rd Shabbat meal

Rosh Hashana

We blow the shofar to remind Hashem that we are halves, and are not yet complete.

One of the great and righteous men of the Jewish people was the Maggid of Mezeritch. Everything which he said is a key principle for us for all future generations. He comments on the following verse: "And when war comes to your land, against the enemy who oppressed you, you shall blow on trumpets and be remembered before Hashem your G-d and be saved from your enemies (Bamidbar 10:9)." The Maggid of Mezeritch said that the Hebrew word for trumpets, 'chatzotrot' is connected to the words 'chatzi tzurot' (half-forms). We must ask what the meaning of these half-forms is, what is their deeper meaning?

Perhaps we can suggest an important concept in answer to this question. It is known that the Torah and the Mitzvot parallel the two hundred and forty-eight limbs and three hundred and sixty-five sinews of the body. We have two hundred and forty-eight positive Mitzvot and three hundred and sixty-five negative Mitzvot, with each Mitzva corresponding to one body part; thus the Torah and human body mirror one another. When one performs a certain Mitzva, they empower the given limb which corresponds to that Mitzva. Likewise, every sin which a person transgresses impacts on a different limb within their body. A person's limb can appear to be whole and healthy but be internally dead since a person did not fulfill the Mitzva which is equivalent to that limb.

The deeper meaning of the chatzotrot, is that they serve as a vehicle through which we remind ourselves that we are merely half-forms (incomplete). When we blow the chatzotrot, we are in fact appearing before Him and declaring: "Master of the Universe. We come and blow on the shofar before You and declare that we are half-forms, we do not have complete bodies, we lack wholesomeness. We do not fulfill the Torah and the Mitzvot with completion, therefore we lack strength and are only half-bodies." A full body is only achieved when a person fulfills the Torah and Mitzvot in their entirety, only then can their limbs be entirely whole.

This is a tremendous concept in life which must be known. Hashem created man with something spiritual corresponding to each person. The more a person fulfills Mitzvot, the more they are alive, uplifted, and empowered with strength. So too, the opposite is also the case. The more a person fails to fulfill Mitzvot, the more they sag and feel dead inside. For this reason, the verse says, "And the angel of Hashem called to him from Heaven and said 'Avraham, Avraham' (Breishit 22:11)." He called his name twice, once on account of Avraham above and second time on account of the Avraham below. The same is found in regard to Moshe, where it says, "And G-d called to him from within the thornbush, and He said 'Moshe, Moshe' (Shemot 3:4)."

For everything above, there is a great significance and the moment a person does not observe a Mitzva, they lose the spiritual importance and truth which is found in each limb. Through this failure, a person loses the power of completion and becomes only half. This is the hardest and most dangerous aspect: A person comes before Hashem on Rosh Hashana in an incomplete form. A person needs to have great completion because this is the highest level that a person can have within their deeds. Such is seen within how the Torah speaks to a person about their name. Our holy Rabbis teach that when a person departs this world, an angel comes and asks their name, and on the day of their death, many people forget their names. Our holy teacher, the Ari, says that the angels seize a person like a Tallit (prayer shawl), shaken by four people, one at each corner. Likewise, four angels grab a person, one for each arm and one for each leg, and they

beat a person harshly in the grave until they remember their name. This is what is known as Chibbut Hakever - the beating of the grave, which is a harsh and frightening thing. Let us address the question of why a person would forget their name. What does this mean?

It is necessary to know that a person has two names. One is the name by which they are called and is known to everyone, and one needs to be particular that this be a name of righteous and devout people. There are many names which must be avoided and a person should not be referred to as. This is because it is damaging for a child to be called an incorrect name, such as is often done in Chutz La'aretz (outside of Israel), where children are given gentile names, or if a person shortens their name. A person's name has great significance, this is their spirit and it shows who a person is. The Talmud (Yoma 83b) tells of how Rabbi Meir would expound and derive from people's names, determining their essence. Within a person's name, there are also combinations for bad things and evil powers. If a person does not follow the path of G-d, they give power from their name to these evil combinations and to damaging things.

When a person walks in the ways of G-d, their name is greatly elevated and has holy combinations. Such a person remembers their name on the day of their death because they are connected to it. However, if a person ceases to go on such a path, at that moment their body becomes empty, and a half-form, like the word bechatzotrot, and on the day of their death, they will not remember their name, because they are not connected to their name and their refined form. For this reason, they undergo great suffering and the beating of the grave in order to remember their name.

If so, Hashem created a person whole, and this is how they enter the world. A person's task is to guard that which G-d gave them, this includes their name which has holy combinations. Likewise, their limbs correspond to each Mitzva. A person must ensure that they return the deposit which G-d gave them in complete form at the end of their days. When a person embarks on the journey of life and sins here and there, and does not go in the path of G-d, they begin to destroy their spiritual limbs. Every Mitzva matches a different limb, and through sin, a person turns into a partial, half-form rather than a complete one.

Externally, they may appear whole but their protection has been removed from them, their inside is empty. Therefore, a person feels a lack of self-confidence about things, since they have lost their internality. As the Talmud (Megilla 3a) teaches, even though a person does not see something, their mazel (fortune) does know. In effect, although a person may not know it themselves, their fortune knows that they have lost their internality and the strength of each limb, which corresponds to a Mitzva. A person loses their name through their sins. It may be the case that they remember their name but they have lost the essence of their name, because a name is not merely a name, but contains holy combinations.

A person needs their name to be completion and sanctified, that their limbs should be involved in Mitzvot in their entirety and with great dedication, for each limb, due to its correspondence to a Mitzva can be complete. For example, the eyes match honoring one's parents; if a person honors their parents properly, they protect their eyes. It is critical that a person be careful with every Mitzva, because it guards their body and keeps it whole, so that there will not be, G-d forbid, damage and half-form in their body. This is the meaning of bachatzotrot - chatzi tzurot - half-forms.

Therefore, on Rosh Hashana, when a person stands before Hashem, they should ask of Him that He remember that they are a half-form and are incomplete, that Hashem should have mercy on them, "with chatzotrot and the sound of the shofar (Tehillim 98:6)" - with half forms, that He should have mercy on us. The shofar arouses mercy, that Hashem should remember that our inside is good and that we love Him. We seek mercy and that He should forgive us for the half-forms, that we are not complete.

Treasure charms from the Rif



Everyday, one should strive to learn from the Torah of our great Rabbi, the Ben Ish Hai. It is virtuous to discuss his teachings, seeing as the root of his soul is exceedingly lofty, being amongst those unique souls which the majority of the Jewish people are intimately connected to. It is important to appreciate that the Ben Ish Hai's soul sits on the Heavenly Beit Din (court) and serves as an advocate for each generation. Fortunate are those whose souls are connected to such a distinguished Tzadik.

We have discussed his Torah for many years, and many of the Halachot (laws) which we practice are from him, and indeed during challenging times, we experienced revelations from him.



The great Rabbi Chaim Pinto

Rabbi Chaim Pinto would perform Tikkun Karet (remaining awake all night learning certain Torah passages, including some from the holy Zohar) every Thursday night. Indeed, performing Tikkun Karet has been a fixed tradition within the Pinto family for generations. One Thursday, while learning the holy Zohar, Rav Chaim fell asleep and the holy Zohar fell onto his feet. He awoke suddenly and summoned his attendant. He requested that the attendant fetch a stick and strike Rav Chaim on his feet until they bled. The attendant was aghast, and initially refused, unable to fathom the thought of striking his revered Rabbi. However, Rav Chaim prevailed, explaining that he was obliged to do as such, seeing as the holy Zohar had fallen on them.

The power of learning just a few pages from the holy Zohar each day, as well as learning passages from the Torah itself, such as Sefer Devarim and Sefer Tehillim, is exceptional. This learning has the ability to cleanse a person and transform them into a totally new being.

In addition to Torah learning, crying tears of Teshuva has a unique power. Indeed, one should seek to ensure that they rub those tears of Teshuva which they shed on their forehead, for they will cleanse the signs inscribed on one's forehead. In this vein, it is recounted, that Rav Chaim would store all the tears he would shed during Tikkun Chatzot (the Midnight Rite) and over the exile of the Shekhinah (Divine presence) in a designated cup. It is this level of dedication which epitomizes a lofty form of Teshuva. And it is this majestic Teshuva which lends one the ability to overcome the ten eternal challenges which man struggles with; this Teshuva strengthens the covenant between us and Hashem.

Below is a jarring story involving Rav Chaim
When Rav Chaim passed away, the Jewish people were struck by mourning; all were cognisant that their one of the holiest individuals of the generation, their leader, had left them.
In those days, upon a Tzadik passing away, the practice in Morocco was for people to bid to have the honor to lower his head and other organs into the grave. Whoever offered the highest sum would obtain the great honor.

When Rav Chaim passed away, there happened to have been an exceptionally wealthy gentleman, from the Atlas Mountains, who had been journeying to the Rabbi to seek a blessing; this same man had been carrying a bag containing a large amount of money. Upon hearing of Rav Chaim's death, he was devastated, having lost the opportunity to receive the blessing which he had so desired. Therefore, when he made his way to the funeral he was especially determined to acquire the honor of lowering the holy Tzadik's head into the grave. The bidding began, and the amount rose steadily until the wealthy man offered a sum which no one could match, and sure enough he had the honor. He then proceeded to lower the holy Tzadik's head into the grave.

Following the funeral, he came to pay the sum, however to his horror, he discovered that his bag containing the large sum of money had been stolen. The man was distraught, and was especially conscious that no-one in the vicinity knew him. He was therefore concerned that they would all consider him to be a fraud, who had lied, knowing full well that he lacked the means to pay for the great honor. With this in mind, the man, broken-hearted, fell on the floor, and began to weep bitter tears.

After a few minutes, he was distracted by a sound in the distance, and looking up, he saw a young man running from afar, bearing the stolen bag of money. When the man arrived, they asked him what had happened? He responded that he had stolen the bag and fled. However, upon returning home, Rav Chaim Pinto had appeared to him and had begun striking him, pursuing him, directing him towards the crying man to return the bag. The man then turned to the wealthy man and with trembling hands, returned his bag. We see from this incident, that although a Tzadik may appear to pass on, their power remains in the world beyond their physical death.

Indeed, people have witnessed a plethora of miracles and wonders, beyond the laws of nature, upon visiting Rav Chaim's holy grave. Many people have visited his grave, bearing a broken heart, drowning under a load of misery, and have experienced a great salvation. Rabbi Chaim Pinto's lasting impact is great - in Heaven, he serves as a tremendously significant advocate for us.



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