

# Derech Ha-Rif

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

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## First Shabbat Meal

**And He (Hashem) made me a father for Pharaoh, a master over his household, and the ruler of his country (Bereishit 45:8)."**  
**Success and advancement that come from Hashem, arrive gradually, not in one shot.**

When the brothers revealed to Yaakov that his beloved son, Yosef was alive and well and had become the ruler of Egypt, at first, Yaakov was hesitant to believe them. His anxiety came not only from the shock of finding his son alive, but also on account of his concern for Yosef's spiritual state. Yaakov feared that perhaps the corrupt and immoral values of Egypt had affected Yosef. Had Yosef been affected spiritually, and how had he risen to the position of viceroy, through force and deceit or through just means? For Tzaddikim, having children that are off the path of the Torah is very tough to endure, almost to the point that they would prefer their child's life to have ceased when they are still righteous rather than to die as sinners.

Yosef realized that his father would be more concerned for his spiritual, moral and ethical standing than his physical one, and attempted to transmit this message. He tells his brothers to communicate to their father that "Hashem initially made me Pharaoh's personal assistant, then head of his household and finally ruler of Egypt." Yosef specified the stages that he experienced before coming to the position of ruler over Egypt. After interpreting Pharaoh's dreams successfully, Yosef found favor in Pharaoh's eyes and was slowly given greater and greater responsibility before coming to the position of ruler over the entire country. Yosef was communicating that he attained his level gradually and this was the sign that it had come from Hashem. If his success had come or been influenced by the Yetzer Hara, then his success would have arrived in one jump, and that would be of concern. Also, if success had arrived in one jump so would failure.

Only after hearing the detailed story of Yosef's gradual rise to power, Yaakov was relieved and trusted that his son's success was a direct implication of Hashem and not, Heaven Forbid, affected by the Yetzer Hara and evil forces.

In fact, if we reflect on Yosef's dreams, we can see that they too exhibited his gradual rise to power in the following manner. The dream related: "Behold, we were gathering bundles in the field. Then, my bundle rose up and stood erect. Your bundles (the brothers) then surrounded my bundle and then bowed to it (Bereishit 37:7)." Yosef's dream contained a gradual element which reinforced its validity as a prophetic dream from Hashem.

The notion that things that come from Hashem come in steps is evidenced in the rising and setting of the sun; both occur gradually. Nature, which Hashem put in place, reveals to us Hashem's mode of interaction with the world.

Importantly, just as a success which arrives in one jump is often the working of the Yetzer Hara, so too a sudden loss or failure or drop in status is simply the working of the Yetzer Hara. Hashem makes things arrive gradually, even the low points, so that a person will have time to adapt and contend with the situation. Therefore, if, for example, a person experiences a loss that is sudden, they should not fear, because Hashem will raise them back to their prior status.

One must look out for situations that arrive gradually and be wary of those that come in an overly easy manner. Similarly, one should distance oneself from those who have attained wealth or status in one leap, because their failure and downfall is imminent and when it arrives it will be just as rapid. Things that arrive gradually are from Hashem and arrive with blessing and lasting success.



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## Soul Of the Rif

*We have come to this world to repair it within the kingdom of Hashem, and each person has their part within this broader task. When you conduct yourself and act in line with your unique capabilities and talents, then you will bring the world to a place of completeness. He brought your soul down to the world for you to complete your unique purpose, and therefore, you should not become too engrossed in looking at other people's lives and their tasks, because that task is not your task. In the same way that people's faces are not the same as each other with no two people appearing entirely alike, so too everyone has their own mission. Indeed, even identical twins who appear alike are not the same, no two people's minds are the same. Each person's Tikkun (repair) is different, each person has their own individuality. For this reason, it is best to avoid arguing with your friend's opinion, because it is not the same as your own, and likewise do not argue with others because you are not their Tikkun, each person is their own Tikkun. There is no reason to imitate another person because they are not your Tikkun, your Tikkun is your own.*





## 2nd Shabbat Meal

**And he said to them: "Do not argue on the journey (Bereishit 45:24)."**  
Below are three Pieces of Life Advice which Yosef gave to his Brothers.

When Yosef sent his brothers to the Land of Canaan to bring his father Yaakov, he told them: "Do not argue on the way." Rashi explains that this means to say that they should not discuss a matter of Halacha (Jewish Law), or alternatively he warned them not to take big steps as they traveled. Our Rabbis teach that Yosef gave them several pieces of life advice.

The first form of advice that he gave them was that they should not argue on their return journey; Life is a journey, and a person must not become angry in their life path. A wealthy person should not get angry on their path; likewise a poor person should not get angry on their journey. This means that a person should not say things along the lines of, "My life is difficult, why is life tough like this, and why do I have these troubles?" A person needs to take hold of their life journey which Hashem gave them without becoming angry. One must take it calmly and with an understanding that this is their Tikkun in life.

The Gemara (Yoma 38a) teaches: Ben Azzai said: 'In your name they shall call you, and in your place they shall seat you, and from that which is yours they shall give you.' The meaning of this teaching is as follows: 'In your name they shall call you' - a person is given their name and does not need to complain that he was named such. 'In your place they shall seat you,' means to say that a person who is seated in a chair does not need to be offended and ask why they sit in one place while another person sits somewhere else, as this is their rightful place. 'And from that which is yours they shall give you' means that no one can take anything from you. Therefore, Yosef told them not to argue on the way, but to accept what Hashem gave them in life.

The second point he advised them was not to take big steps. Yosef advised the Jewish people in general terms that when we ascend to greatness, we should not forget those who helped us when we were down. There are those who rise to greatness and then forget that there were those who were superbly dedicated to them, who helped them and supported them by picking them up in their times of difficulty. Not taking large steps means not trampling on those people who helped you in your difficult days, for when you ascend upwards on a ladder,

when the day comes that they descend, they will wait for you further down on the ladder.

The third piece of advice he gave them was about not busying themselves with a matter of Halacha. Our holy Rabbis teach that Yerushalayim was destroyed because its townspeople judged one another based on Torah law alone, in that they said everything based on legal definitions (Bava Metzia 30a). One example of what this means is that a person who lowers their foot over the pedestrian crossing will go to prison. When the law was followed excessively, Yerushalayim was destroyed. For people in whom they had an interest, they held them to be above the law, but for those for whom they did not, everything was done by law. The moment that things are run only according to strict law, this causes great destruction. A person needs to act beyond the letter of the law, and not be excessively strict. These are the three major points of advice which are good for a person to follow.

## Q & A with the Rif



### Question:

**Dear Rabbi, in my workplace there is a woman who describes herself as an atheist. We often have conversations in which she laughs at me for mentioning Hashem. She says that if I explain to her what Hashem is and why she must believe in Him, then she will undergo the path of Teshuva. Please can the Rabbi advise me on how I can bring her closer to Judaism?**

### Answer:

**It is sufficient to encourage her to look at the beautiful world in which we live. If one sees this, it is impossible not to recognize Hashem's presence.**







## 3rd Shabbat meal

**"And he appeared to him, and he fell on his neck and wept on his neck again (Bereishit 46:29)."**

**When reciting the Shema, a person must channel all of their earthly expressions of love to Hashem and withhold all of their desires.**

In this week's portion, we find something incredibly wondrous. After twenty-two years of weeping and pain, during which time Yaakov was sure that "a wild animal devoured him (Bereishit 37:33)," Yaakov prepares to meet his beloved son Yosef who left his father's house aged seventeen. Yosef also prepares to meet his father, whose likeness appeared to him in a window and saved him from sinning with the wife of Potifar. The meeting was not straightforward for either of them, and this conversation served as a blueprint for the Jewish people for generations.

Yaakov and Yosef meet and embrace. Yosef weeps against the neck of his father, Yaakov, and our Rabbis say that Yaakov cried over the difficulties which the Jewish people would face in the future. They also teach that Yaakov was reciting the Shema. The question must be asked, why was Yaakov saying Shema at this particular time?

It is necessary to consider a tremendous concept. There are many secrets and explanations about what a person is supposed to have in mind when reciting Shema. Yaakov and the twelve tribes established "Shema Yisrael - Listen, O Yisrael, Hashem is our G-d, Hashem is the One and Only" before his passing. Moshe mentions this concept again at a later stage in time. The word 'Echad' refers to the uniting of the Jewish people with Hashem. The 'Alef' refers to Yaakov who showed the presence of Hashem, with Yaakov being the 'Aluf' (chief) - which is etymologically connected to 'aleph,' of the world. The letters 'Chet' and 'Dalet' have a Gematria (numerical value) of twelve, matching the twelve tribes; they are the unity and the Oneness of Hashem.

When Yosef vanished, Yaakov did not want to be comforted, because he was sure that the Unity of Hashem and His Throne were damaged because of this reality of Yosef having gone, and Yaakov held himself to be guilty of causing this. When he met Yosef, he said "Now there is Unity of the Name of Hashem and the Throne of Glory." The 'Alef' refers to Yaakov who represents Hashem, and the letters 'Chet' and 'Dalet' represent the twelve tribes, therefore Yaakov recited the Shema at that moment when they came together. However, we must ask, why did Yaakov recite the Shema at that precise moment and not just before or just after?

The Chassidic sages teach that every form of joy and love which a person feels for something physical must be elevated for spiritual things. If a person suddenly feels afraid upon being stopped by the government or by a police officer, or because one almost had an accident or because something dangerous happened to their children, or if they are instructed to undergo medical tests and feel fear, at that moment, they should direct these feelings toward being afraid of Hashem. By doing this, a person raises their physical fear and puts it in a spiritual place. Additionally, the same is true for the love that a person has for something or someone. If they love eating something or seeing something which excites them, at the moment when they feel physical love, they should spiritually connect themselves to Hashem, connecting the beauty to the Midda of Tiferet (splendor) which is the beauty of G-d, and thereby lift themselves to a higher spiritual place.

This is a tremendous concept. Every physical thing which a person sees in life should be connected to something spiritual, thereby raising the physical thing to an incredibly high spiritual plane. Upon meeting Yosef, our father Yaakov, who was an exceptionally holy person, recognized that his embrace with Yosef represented the reuniting of Hashem's presence. He understood that he corresponded to the Chief ('Aluf' connected to the letter 'aleph') of the World, and he was finally being reunited with the twelve tribes (being represented by the letters 'Chet' and 'Dalet' which have the numerical value of twelve). At the moment when he had the greatest love and yearning for his son who he had not seen for twenty-two years, Yaakov channeled this love and connected it to Hashem. Through the recital of Shema, he raised these feelings to form a tremendous connection with Hashem. Therefore, when a person sees something which causes them great joy or satisfaction, or something which causes them to feel great fear, they should connect it to Hashem, and raise it to a high place. This ability is a great strength and tremendous potential within a person.

There is a second aspect of Krias Shema. Our Rabbis teach (Brachot 5a) that if a person sees that the Yetzer Hara (Evil Inclination) is overpowering them, they should be reminded of the day of death. The last thing that a Jew does in their lifetime is to recite the Shema, as our father Yaakov established before his death. Rav Chaim Vital (Shaarei Kedusha 1, Sha'ar 2) comments on the verse "Let the waters which are under the heavens be gathered into one area (Bereishit 1:9)." He explains that the concept of water represents desire, in that everything which develops and grows in the world comes from water, which is thus the source of desire. When creating the world, Hashem said "Let the waters be gathered into one area;" this "one" refers to "Listen Yisrael, Hashem is our G-d, Hashem is One." This realization will stop the water, the Yetzer Hara will not be able to develop and grow further as it will be overcome by the power of the recital of Shema. Therefore, a person who is struggling with the Yetzer Hara should be reminded of the day of death.

Our holy Rabbis teach that when reciting Shema, a person must imagine that if they were being tortured or made to suffer terribly, as Rabbi Akiva was, that they would be willing to give up their life for the sake of Kiddush Hashem (sanctifying G-d's Name). Alternatively, they should imagine a large fiery oven, which they would be willing to jump into for Hashem. These intentions cause the waters, which represent the root of desire to be gathered and restricted to one place. Therefore, when reciting Shema, a person should intend to direct all the love which they feel towards Hashem, and they should restrain all of their desires with the strength of the recital of Shema.



## Treasure charms from the Rif



*We, the holy community of 'Shuva Yisrael,' have re-accepted upon ourselves the ancient practice of wearing white clothes on Shabbat. My great teacher, Rabbi Meir Abuhatzzeira, the 'Baba Meir,' would say that if one wears white clothes on Shabbat, then even if one's children live in a secular neighborhood, lacking in Yirat Shamayim (Fear of Heaven), one can be assured that their children will remain devoted to Hashem. Indeed, aside from this adage of our holy teacher, we know that all those who wear white clothes on Shabbat, can be assured that their sins will be forgiven. Considering the above, we, the holy congregation of 'Shuva Yisrael,' have taken upon ourselves to adorn ourselves in white on Shabbat until the Mashiach comes. Specifically, whether in Eretz Yisrael or outside of Israel, we are particular to wear at least four pieces of clean white clothing to greet and enrich the holy Shabbat.*





It is imperative to internalize the following foundational idea.

If one instructs someone to perform an activity, if the instructor is deficient, then the activity of the emissary will similarly be flawed. In contrast, if the instructor is of pure intent, then the person instructed will be empowered to fulfill the mission with untainted purity.

In this light, if one views oneself as being a messenger of Hashem, charged with refining the world through fulfilling his unique task in the world, then one can be assured that they will be imbued with Divine assistance to be successful in all their endeavors. However, one who goes about their life and solely serves his own interests, rather than serving as a representative of Hashem, then their activities will be lacking in wholesomeness, and unsuccessful. Therefore, before one embarks on any activity, one should resolve to oneself that they are doing this for the sake of Hashem's glory, in one's capacity as Hashem's emissary. If one internalizes this mentality, and follows it, then their pure service of Hashem will surely lead to their handiwork being successful and blessed by Hashem.

There is a famous story in which a certain great Rosh Yeshiva (Head of a Talmudic Academy), promised one of his students that he would attend that student's son's wedding. The student was overjoyed that his cherished Rabbi would attend his son's wedding. The day of the wedding arrived, and due to unforeseeable events, the Rosh Yeshiva was unable to make the wedding. The Rosh Yeshiva was devastated not to make good on his promise and instead sent one of the other prominent Yeshiva Rabbis to attend in his place.

The other Rabbi arrived at the wedding, and stayed until the very end of the wedding, far longer than anyone expected. The guests, though touched by the Rabbi's extended presence, were somewhat surprised that he had stayed so long; they therefore asked him why he had graced them with his presence for so long?

The Rabbi responded by explaining he had been inspired to stay on account of the Talmudic dictum that one's emissary is like the person himself. He explained that in his capacity as the Rosh Yeshiva's representative, in a certain sense, all the while he was at the wedding, he was like the Rosh Yeshiva. Therefore, he had chosen to remain at the wedding for longer, in order to maximize the inspiration that came with being the Rosh Yeshiva's messenger.

This story highlights the importance of living with a clear understanding that we are emissaries of Hashem. If we live by this mantra, then we will be privy to Hashem's Divine flow being injected into our endeavors, such that we will be successful without a doubt. However, if we live our lives in a manner which is totally guided by our transitory desires, then we will no longer be emissaries of Hashem, and will therefore not be privy to His Divine assistance. In fact, this is the reason why the spies (who scouted out the Land of Israel) were unsuccessful; it was because they were emissaries of the Jewish people, who themselves were flawed, rather than being emissaries of Hashem.

Everyone has their own unique perspective on the world. There is a parable offered by the famed Dubner Maggid, Rabbi Yaakov ben Wolf Kranz, which contains tremendous pearls of wisdom for us to draw on. The parable is as follows:

There was once a family of seven children. The family members were extremely close with one another, and it was by all accounts a happy family. One day, the family's home caught fire, and the entire house was burnt to ashes. Miraculously, the entire family was able to escape the fire and survived. They lost their home, their clothes and all their worldly possessions, yet by Hashem's kindness, they were alive.

The family were grateful to be alive, but they couldn't help but cry, being completely overcome by their loss. The townspeople observed the family crying and approached the youngest child and queried why he was crying. The young boy responded that he was crying for his dear teddy bear and his treasured games which had all gone up in smoke. The townspeople then asked the second youngest child why he was crying. He responded that he was mourning his comfortable bed which had supported him for so many nights; he was devastated that he no longer had a bed to sleep on. The townspeople then approached the next oldest child and asked him, "Why are you crying?" The child responded that they were mourning the unity of the family. Until now they had done everything together, be it eating together, sleeping together; they had been totally united in every facet of life. Now however, they had nowhere to sleep, and as such each child would have to be shepherded off to stay with different relatives, and as such the family would no longer be united.

Once they had finished quizzing the seven children, the townspeople asked the parents why they were crying. The parents explained that they simply didn't know what to do. They were terrified that the family would disintegrate and were concerned as to how they would sustain their children. The parents questioned how they would be able to restart everything which they had built. Moreover, aside from the physical challenges, the parents were besides themselves worrying about their children's spiritual welfare.

The Dubner Maggid explained that each of the family members had experienced the burning through their own individual lenses. The youngest child cried for his teddy bear which had burnt, whilst the second had cried for his comfortable bed, and so on for each person. So too, explained the Maggid, every single person lives within their own perspective, guided by his individual ambitions and visions, and these individual perspectives engender individual experiential realities.

In this vein, it is imperative for us to be cognizant of what we cry over, of what we yearn for, and what we direct our attention towards. Once we fully grasp what our thoughts are, we will have a completely new world perspective, and be able to appreciate the things we experience through a new fresh lens.

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