

# Derech Ha-Rif



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

For the Torah portion SHMINI | Volume 70 | 27 adar



## First Shabbat Meal

**"And it was on the eighth day, Moshe called to Aharon and his sons and to the elders of Yisrael (Vayikra 9:1)."**

**A person must walk after Hashem with perfection and not allow thoughts of humility or justification to impact on their adherence to His word.**

In this week's portion, we read of how Moshe called to Aharon on the eighth day. The Midrash (Vayikra Rabba 11:6) states that Moshe built the Mishkan over the course of seven days, completing it on the eighth day, before giving everything to Aharon. Moshe was meant to be the Kohen Gadol, but he lost this privilege and gave it to Aharon. Let us understand why Moshe did not receive this role, which, ultimately, is the most elevated role that was available.

This can be answered based on a frightening point which every person must internalize. Moshe was working as a shepherd in the house of Yitro. One sheep ran away and Moshe chased after it. He suddenly saw a vision of Hashem at the burning bush; miraculously the bush was not consumed by the fire. For seven consecutive days, Moshe stood there and Hashem pleaded with him to go and redeem the Jewish people and Moshe said that he was unable. Hashem asked Moshe why this was, he answered that his older brother is the king and the leader of the Jewish people in Egypt. Moshe questioned how he could suddenly come and take this role, stating that he did not want to. Hashem tried to convince Moshe for seven days to go and redeem them, but Moshe did not want to emotionally hurt Aharon.

Hashem said to Moshe "He [Aharon] will see you and rejoice in his heart (Shemot 4:14)," informing him that Aharon would rejoice over Moshe's appointment. However, Moshe remained unwilling nonetheless. For not listening to Hashem and going [immediately] to redeem Bnei Yisrael, as well as acting with too much righteousness and giving too many explanations, Moshe was punished that he would not be the Kohen Gadol. On account of acting with too much righteousness and worrying for his brother, that he be the Kohen, Moshe lost the Kehuna.

There is a key concept which is learnt from this. Whatever Hashem commands a person to do, they must do with perfection. It is forbidden for a person to try to be wiser than following that which Hashem commanded him.

Many times, a person thinks, "I will be perfect, I will be a Tzaddik," or "I will be humble and try this" but they cause damage to themselves.

Moshe began to be humble and modest, but Hashem told him that He did not want this, He planned that Moshe would lead the people. Moshe claimed that Aharon was better than him, but by doing so he caused himself to lose the Kehuna and instead, it went to his brother.



בס"ד

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## Soul Of the Rif

For everything which happens to a person, one needs to look at it in the right way and in a wise manner. People sometimes look at things and are seized detrimentally and live a damaging life. By doing so, they destroy their lives as well as life within their environment. They make unpleasant lives for themselves and think bad thoughts.

The soul of a person and a person's mind are a magnet. One who thinks about bad things experiences bad things, one who thinks only about things which are not good undergoes only things which are not good. On the other hand, one who thinks with Simcha (joy), and thinks about Emuna (faith), one who places all his trust in Hashem and one who places his burden on Him, knows that every tough situation that one finds oneself in, is just a door to something greater which is coming their way.





## 2nd Shabbat Meal

**"And Aharon raised his hands to the people and he blessed them, and he descended from performing the Sin offering, the Burnt offering and the Peace offering (Vayikra 9:22)."**

**The people that surround a person give them strength to ascend in spirituality and in physical achievements.**

There is a key concept in life which one must be aware of. As much as a person attains spiritual achievements and ascends upwards, this is not something which comes from the person alone; it is a result of the power of the entire Jewish nation which helps one to ascend and reach great heights. Alone, a person is unable to get very far. A person needs Am Yisrael and the Tzaddikim of the generation in order to ascend and reach the loftiest heights.

The Sefarim comment on the Gemara (Brachot 7a) which tells of Rabbi Yishma'el ben Elisha, who entered to burn Ketoret (incense) before Hashem and saw a Malach (angel). He merited to see an Malach of G-d, and Hashem then told him, "Yishma'el My son, bless Me." Rabbi Yishma'el blessed as follows: "May it be Your will that Your mercy overpowers Your anger, and Your mercy rules over Your Middot [of strict justice]." Our holy Rabbis explain that the power of Rabbi Yishmael, the Kohen Gadol, at that moment to see this holy sight was in merit of the Tanna'im (the Rabbis of the Mishna), the holy people who lived in his generation. Alone, he would not have merited this revelation. Great things require the merit of the collective, the power of the Tzaddikim. Without their strength, it is difficult for a person to reach the greatest height and the holiest places.

Based on this, it is possible to explain the following verse within this week's portion: "And Aharon raised his hands to the people and he blessed them, and he descended from performing the Sin offering, the Burnt offering and the Peace offering." It is necessary to read closely into these words, what do they mean?

It is possible to explain that Aharon, despite his immense greatness and elevated stature, reached such a plain when he raised his hands to the people, as if he was thanking them and admitting to them that all of the high levels which he merited to reach, such as offering Korbanot (offerings) and reaching great heights of holiness were all a result of the merit of the people, which supported him. The love and support of the people who wanted good for him and prayed were part and parcel of his achievement. This was what helped and allowed him to offer the

Korbanot and have a fire descend from heaven which consumed them. Therefore, Aharon raised his hands and blessed the people. After this, he came down from performing the service of the Sin offering, the Burnt offering and the Peace offering. All of Am Yisrael is one, the power of the nation is one. It is impossible to reach great heights with the power of only one person; the strength of the masses is needed, Aharon also needed the power of the collective in order to achieve great and holy things.

The same point is clear from the Mishna (Yoma 6:2) and the prayers of Yom Kippur, in which it is stated, "And the Kohanim and the people were standing in the courtyard, when they heard the Ineffable Name emerge from the mouth of the Kohen Gadol, they would kneel, bow and fall on their faces." What is the meaning of the Kohanim and the people standing in the courtyard? On Yom Kippur, the Kohen Gadol would perform the holy Avoda (service) and achieve the highest spiritual heights in merit of the Kohanim, and the people standing in the courtyard would help the Kohen Gadol through their prayers and their longing for Hashem. Their action and desire would give the Kohen Gadol the strength to reach these levels.

Based on this, it is possible to explain and suggest a key concept. The Gemara (Yoma 71b) tells of one Kohen Gadol who left and was being accompanied by the people. When Shmaya and Avtalyon (two great scholars) went out, the people accompanying the Kohen Gadol left him and went after them. It is necessary to understand the depth behind this.

This event can be explained in light of the same concept as above. The prayer of the Kohen Gadol who entered the Holy of Holies and left, the cause which gave him the power to attain such achievements was Shmaya and Avtalyon, who had intention in their prayers and understood the roots of prayer. In that generation, the Kohanim Gedolim were not people of lofty levels; Shmaya and Avtalyon were greater and holier. Their focused prayers were accepted by Hashem, He took these and on account of these prayers, He raised the Kohen Gadol to high places.

There is a key concept learnt from here. However great a person may be, they need the people and the individuals around them. If they get strength from those around them, they can reach the greatest heights. Without people around them, one is limited in terms of how far they can get.

## Q & A with the Rif



### Question:

Dear Rabbi, what is the best way to prepare for the coming of the Mashiach (Messiah)?

### Answer:

To attach oneself to Hashem with tremendous closeness. As the Torah says, "And you who cling to Hashem, your G-d, are all alive today (Devarim 4:4)."







## 3rd Shabbat meal

Even Aharon the Kohen, after offering the Korbanot, went out to the people and raised his hands in order to thank them, for it was their strength which enabled him to reach the greatest heights.

Rabbi Yishma'el merited to see holy things and Hashem told him to bless Him. On this point, our Rabbis teach that he merited this because of the holy Tanna'im (check above) who lived in his generation and helped him to reach the level that he saw the things that he did.

The Kohen who offered the Korbanot in the time of Shmaya and Avtalyon and left the Mikdash was left by the crowd of people surrounding him; they went after Shmaya and Altalyon. The reason for this was because he performed the Avoda in the Beit Hamikdash, but the merit and the intention of these two men allowed him to reach the height that he did.

This is a critical concept, a person can reach high and lofty places because of the merits of others. These may be people who one is close to and/or the merits of the Tzaddikim of the generous. If a person has no one holy hoping that they rise and praying for him, there is a limit as to how far he can reach. Through prayer and the will of these around them, a person can reach the highest places. This matter is true about both spiritual and physical things. In spirituality, a person needs people who want him or her to rise high; lack of this will limit a person's progress. The same is true about physical things, one needs others to desire one's success. Once one has this, one can climb levels and reach holy places.

If those who are close to a person have aspirations, prayers and hopes for them, this gives a person strength and enables them to go far. However, if they have a grudging outlook, and they want a person to rise but only to a limited extent, their ascent will be limited. A person's surroundings give them power and cause a person to rise both spiritually and physically.

Therefore, a person must always be in a good, pure and holy social environment comprised of honest people, who see the truth and the purpose of everything, whether it be physical or spiritual. A person cannot achieve great things if those surrounding them want them to be limited; their outlook makes it hard for a person to achieve. A person must choose that their surroundings be holy and good, pure people with elevated souls, as this will cause one to be successful and have Divine Assistance.

**"Do not make your souls disgusting with any creeping thing which creeps, and do not contaminate yourselves through them so that you do not become contaminated through them (Vayikra 11:43)."**

**A person can ascend through fulfilling the Torah and the Mitzvos in the manner that Hashem permitted and forbade.**

The Gemara (Eiruvim 13b) tells of how Rabbi Meir had a Talmid (student) named Sumchos, and on everything which was Tamei (impure), this Talmid could give forty-eight reasons why it was Tamei, and for everything that was Tahor (pure), he could give forty-eight reasons why it was pure. The Talmud continues that there was a diligent student in Yavneh who came up with one hundred and fifty reasons to purify a Sheretz (a creeping form of animal), which is forbidden to eat. This student came up with one hundred and fifty reasonings based on Talmudic analysis to permit eating a Sheretz. It is necessary to understand the meaning of this. If a Sheretz is forbidden to eat, then one may not do so.

What would be the purpose of coming up with one hundred and fifty reasons why it should be pure based on logic, the Torah forbade it. What reason would there be to come up with these suggestions?

This can be explained based on the following Talmudic passage (Chullin 109b), which tells us that for everything which the Torah forbade, he permitted something equivalent. For example, Hashem forbade us from drinking blood, if one does so this is a sin. However, if one wishes to know what it tastes like, the liver of a kosher animal is permitted to eat and it has the taste of blood. The Talmud continues that Hashem forbade us to eat the Cheilev (certain forbidden fats) of cattle, but if one wants to know what it tastes like, they can eat the Cheilev of deer and the like. The Talmud teaches that there is a certain fish named Shibuta which has the taste of a pig. In summary, the Torah is telling us that whenever Hashem created something forbidden, there is something permitted with that same taste.

However, it is necessary to be aware of a key point, "And You sustain and give life to them all (Nechemia 9:6)." There is nothing in the world which does not have sparks of holiness. Hashem is the One who keeps all of creation alive. In everything, for example, within the sun, the wall, the lamp, there are sparks of sanctity which sustain it and give each thing life. A fruit which a person eats has sanctity, the liquid that a person drinks also has sanctity. Nothing exists without holiness.

When a person makes a Bracha (blessing) on their food or drink, they perform a Mitzva and Hashem refines the holy sparks within it. For example, when a person eats at their table on Shabbat and recites Birkat Hamazon, the chair which one sits on and recites words of Torah on is raised up. Likewise, the bed on which one sleeps in order to gather strength so that they can fulfill Mitzvot the next morning is elevated through this action. Everything in the world has holy spiritual sparks. When a person deals with them directly, they refine the sparks within any matter and raise them to a high and holy place.

Therefore, within the Torah and the Mitzvot, there is the positive part that a person connects all that he does to Torah and Kedusha, through doing so, they refine the holy sparks and raise them from the place in which they are found. On the other hand, within forbidden foods or activities which we are forbidden from doing, the moment a person holds himself back from doing them, he fulfills a Mitzva and becomes elevated, for he did not do something forbidden.

For example, it is forbidden to eat blood. If a person opts to eat liver instead of blood, he raises that liver which is permitted to eat, and also raises up the blood which he cannot eat. The pig is forbidden to eat, however, if a person eats Shibuta and knows that the taste of pork is very tasty, but nonetheless holds back from eating it, he raises the power of that substance to a high place.

Both types of substances in both directions have great purpose. If a person performs a Mitzva and ate something kosher, this has a great effect. On the other side, the restraint of a person who held back from eating something forbidden raises him to the highest and holiest place.

It is necessary to understand why that student came up with one hundred and fifty explanations to permit a Sheretz even though Hashem forbade it. The reason is that we raise ourselves up through that which is permitted for us to eat by making Brachot. For that which we do not eat because it is forbidden, we also elevate ourselves through our restraint in not eating it. Therefore, this student needed to study grindingly (pilpul) one hundred and fifty times in order to permit us to eat a Sheretz.

## Treasure charms from the Rif



The following Segulah (charm), brought in the name of the Noam Elimelech, is said to reduce a woman's pain during labor. The Segulah is to eat something for Melave Malka each Motzei Shabbat, and before eating, to declare, "this is for Melave Malka." If they do this, they can be assured of easy births.





## The fourth Post Shabbat meal

## Stories from the Rif

Rabbi Yoshiyahu Pinto, the patriarch of our holy family, was the author of a prominent commentary on the Sefer Ein Yaakov, which focuses on the stories within the Talmud. Rav Yoshiyahu was an in-law of the great Kabbalist Rabbi Chaim Vital, with Rav Chaim's son having married Rav Yoshiyahu's daughter; indeed, the two enjoyed a warm relationship. It is recorded that two dreadful plagues occurred during Rav Pinto's lifetime. During both plagues, Rav Chaim Vital sent Rav Yoshiyahu a message imploring him to pray for the plagues to cease. Rav Chaim explained that only he, Rav Yoshiyahu, with his immense Torah knowledge and piety would be able to stop the plagues. Rav Yoshiyahu acceded and successfully managed to stop the plagues.

It is recorded that Rav Yoshiyahu Pinto and some fellow Tzaddikim once camped out in a cave. They announced that they would remain in the cave until they succeeded in bringing the Moshiach. The Rabbis remained there for many days, until on a certain Friday, a gentile seized Rav Yoshiyahu's son, Yosef, and stabbed him in the heart, killing him instantly. The entire city was horrified and rushed to the cave to inform Rav Yoshiyahu of his son's tragic death. Upon hearing of his son's death, Rav Yoshiyahu announced that he had unwittingly overstepped the boundaries, by seeking to bring the redemption before its rightful time, and he had been punished accordingly, through his son's death. With that, he left the cave and went to live in the holy city of Tzfat. In Tzfat he became a cherished student of the extraordinary sage, Rabbi Yaakov Abulafia, and he was the last person to receive Semicha (ordination) from him.

Rav Yoshiyahu's greatness is illustrated by the fact that he is cited by so many great teachers. The Grand Rabbi of Satmar, Rav Yoel Teitelbaum, repeatedly cites foundational principles from Rav Yoshiyahu. Moreover, a prevalent Halacha regarding Mikvaot (ritual pools) within Sephardi Jewry is attributed to Rav Yoshiyahu, as below. The Ben Ish Hai related that although Rabbi Yosef Kairo stated in the Shulchan Aruch that a Mikvah cannot be hot, Rav Yoshiyahu testified that he heard Rav Yosef Kairo retract this ruling, and permit purification within a hot Mikvah. Accordingly, the Ben Ish Hai permitted the use of hot Mikvaot based off the testimony of Rav Yoshiyahu Pinto.

Rav Yoshiyahu Pinto was an angel of Hashem whose spiritual sensitivity was even able to detect the presence of Avoda Zara (idolatry) and have it destroyed as illustrated in the story below:

One time, Rav Yoshiyahu happened to be in the city of Damascus, which was home to a fabulously wealthy man. While in the city, Rav Yoshiyahu entered the man's home, and the man, perceiving the greatness of his esteemed guest, wished to give him a generous donation. Rav Yoshiyahu was touched by the man's generosity, but he couldn't help but feel uneasy; he was convinced that the man's home was shrouded in impurity. Rav Yoshiyahu thanked the man for his offer, but queried as to the source of the man's fabulous wealth? The man explained that he used to work with scrap metal and on one occasion had come across a piece of iron which had begun to give him signals as to what to do. He explained that he had followed the signs and subsequently become a wealthy man.

Rav Yoshiyahu was horrified, realizing that the man had been treating the piece of metal as Avoda Zara, and immediately requested that the man bring him the piece of metal. The man agreed, and upon seeing the piece, Rav Yoshiyahu perceived that it was in fact Avoda Zara; he realized that it was the source of impurity which he had felt in the man's home. He declared that he was going to destroy the Avoda Zara and with it, diminish the Yetzer Hara (Evil Inclination) towards Avoda Zara, present in the world. With that, he proceeded to burn the piece to ash.

The next day, the wealthy man's home burnt down, and he lost all his investments. Understanding that this had been a result of what had happened, Rav Yoshiyahu proclaimed that the man should be supported by the Jewish community of Damascus for the rest of his life and the community readily agreed.

The agreement was written up in the community's charter, and the entire community rejoiced that the drive towards Avoda Zara had been diminished through the activities of Rav Yoshiyahu.

Rav Yoshiyahu Pinto was one of the holy of holies, who succeeded in quelling two plagues during his lifetime, on account of his immense holiness, as attested to by Rav Chaim Vital. Rav Pinto serves as an example of purity and loftiness who we can aspire to learn from and become closer to Hashem.

There was a certain man who supported Rav Zushe, giving him Tzedakah regularly. One day, the man knocked on the door of Rav Zushe's house and was met by Rav Zushe's wife. He inquired as to where Rav Zushe was, to which his wife responded that Rav Zushe was out of town, visiting his Rabbi in the town of Mezeritch. Upon hearing that Rav Zushe had his own Rabbi, the man resolved to stop supporting Rav Zushe, and instead to support Rav Zushe's Rabbi. He rationalized that it would surely be more meritorious to support the Rabbi's Rabbi, rather than a mere disciple. Accordingly, the man began to visit the town of Mezeritch and support the Rabbi there and ceased supporting Rav Zushe.

The man changed his routine and began making regular trips to Mezeritch to help the great Rabbi in any way he could. However, to his dismay, his fortunes turned, and he began to lose his wealth. The man was perplexed and continued to support the great Rabbi, hoping that his situation would improve, but unfortunately it declined to the extent that he began to lose his entire fortune.

In desperation, the man returned to Rav Zushe in anguish and pleaded, "why have I lost all my wealth?!" Rav Zushe looked at the man and asked, "Where have you been? How come you stopped coming to me?" The man gingerly responded that he had begun going to Rav Zushe's Rabbi, rather than Rav Zushe himself. He explained that he had thought it more meritorious to honor Rav Zushe's Rabbi, seeing as even Rav Zushe iconized him.

Rabbi Zushe turned to the man and explained why he had been punished. He explained that he, Rav Zushe, was a simple man, whilst his Rabbi in Mezeritch was exceptionally holy. Accordingly, all the while the man had come to visit him (Rav Zushe), Hashem had viewed him relative to the simple Rav Zushe, and therefore seen the man to be virtuous. However, once he had started visiting the holy Rabbi, Hashem had begun to view him in light of the holy Rabbi he now associated with; therefore, He had been particular to punish the man for any shortcomings. Rav Zushe concluded that this was the reason that the man had lost everything.

The above story highlights the importance of being meticulous in matters of Tzedakah.

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