

# CONQUERING THE EVIL INCLINATION BY THE POWER OF PRAYER

## The Path To Follow Vayeitzei

# 161

December 2<sup>nd</sup> 06

11 Kislev 5767

Publication  
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### Guard Your Tongue!

#### Look at that Beautiful Orange!

Mr. Cohen was complaining to a fruit merchant about the exorbitance price of oranges in his grocery store. "Everything's expensive today," the merchant replied. "True," said Mr. Cohen, "but the grocery store across the street sells oranges for less!"

"How can you make such a comparison?" the merchant exclaimed. "Does he have what I have? He sells poor-quality merchandise!"

Naturally, the merchant's remarks constitute Lashon Harah. We are not permitted to extol the quality of our products by diminishing the quality of others. The fruit merchant had the right to extol his own oranges, such as by saying that they were of top quality. In fact he could have said, "It's true that things are a little more expensive in my store. But just look at the quality of my oranges! Look at how big and juicy they are!" However it is forbidden to criticize the merchandise of others.

It is written, "Jacob departed from Beersheba... and he encountered the place and spent the night there because the sun had set" (Genesis 28: 10-11). Rashi cites the Sages in saying that the expression vayifga ("and he encountered") designates prayer. From this we deduce that Jacob instituted Arvit (the evening prayer), and in fact the Gemara tells us that the holy Patriarchs instituted our three daily prayers: Abraham instituted Shacharit, Isaac instituted Mincha, and Jacob instituted Arvit (Berachot 26b).

I would like, however, to raise some questions regarding this subject. First of all, why did the holy Patriarchs institute these prayers for us? Is it not enough to study Hashem's Torah and perform the 613 mitzvot? Why must we also pray? Furthermore, is there really something specific in prayer that we do not find in the Torah?

In this regard I would like to explain a fundamental principle in serving Hashem. Torah study, prayer, and mitzvot observance constitute different paths to the Creator, intermediaries that draw us closer to Him and allow us to take upon ourselves the yoke of the kingdom of Heaven. True, the holy Torah is the foundation that establishes a connection between the Creator and ourselves. However in their holiness, the Patriarchs wanted to give Jews a special path to the Creator, an important intermediary filled with holiness. That intermediary is prayer, thanks to which Jews can come closer to their Creator and connect to Him.

Allow us to explain. When a Jew readies himself to pray, he pictures himself standing before the Creator. He focuses on just Whom he is praying to, and to Whom he is addressing his requests for goodness and blessing. Thus he begins to pray with a reverent fear before the King of kings. He opens his mouth and utters words of prayer much like someone counting his money – calmly and deliberately – regardless of whether he is reciting Birkot HaShachar, Pesukei D'Zimra, and above all Shema. In fact the Sages tell us, "If one distinctly pronounces the letters in reciting Shema, hell is cooled for him" (Berachot 15b). Thus a powerful and indestructible bond is created between a person and his Creator. However despite all the elation of a Jew in prayer, he may feel a sudden letdown and apathy afterwards. This occurs because the evil inclination comes after prayer and places itself before a person as it tries to control him once more. After a Jew prays, it immediately tries to break the bond between him and the Creator. Therefore it is not enough for a Jew to have aroused his heart only during prayer, since right afterwards the evil inclination attacks in order to make him fall into its trap.

On this subject the Sages have said, "If this repulsive wretch meets you" – if the evil inclination comes to you after prayer in order to disrupt your service of Hashem (since it is always lying in wait to ensnare you), what must you do? "Drag [it] to the house of study" (Sukkah 52b). In other words,

conquer the evil inclination by means of Torah study! There's more. The power of prayer is mentioned at the time the Torah was given to the Jewish people, as we read: "Israel encamped there, opposite the mountain" (Exodus 19:2). Here the Sages describe the people as "a single person, with a single heart" (Mechilta ibid.). This means that the Children of Israel achieved an extremely high degree of unity for the giving of the Torah. Yet how did they do this, since they had not actually received the Torah at that point? It is obvious that they achieved it through the power of prayer, a power that they possessed due to the Patriarchs, since they were the ones who instituted the daily prayers. The power of prayer is what purified the Children of Israel and led them to a level high enough to receive the Torah. Now it was not without reason that Jacob instituted Arvit. As we know, the Sages have said that Torah scholars should not go out alone at night, for the forces of evil are more powerful at that time (Berachot 43b). Yet Jacob, who was alone at night, instituted Arvit in order for people to conquer the forces of evil at night and reach the sources of holiness. I reflected upon the greatness of prayer, for there is almost no Jew who comes closer to Hashem simply because he studied the laws of Shabbat, purity, tithes, and so on.

A Jew who is far from Torah and mitzvot does not understand that he can come closer to Hashem in this way. On the contrary, he mocks everything he hears! Therefore how should we proceed with such an individual? We teach him to pray, to believe in the Creator of the world. We open his heart to a love of Hashem and a reverent fear of Him. It is only in this way, by the power of prayer and through the help of Heaven, that we can bring a person closer to the Creator.

On the other hand, to our regret and shame, we find many people who pray three times a day, yet they are still ignorant, scorning everything that is holy. How is this possible? It is clear that "prayer without concentration is a like a body without a soul." If there is no body in the soul, then there is no life within! Therefore if we fail to concentrate during prayer, it becomes lifeless. An absent-minded prayer does nothing for the person who utters it. It has no power to sustain and uplift the body, and it certainly cannot help a person progress in Torah.

There are two kinds of ignorant people. Some do not pray at all, not even understanding the nature of prayer. It is only when their hearts are aroused, and when they are taught, that they begin to pray a little. On the other hand, some people pray while being scornful of it all the same. Their reproach is far greater, for they understand what prayer is. They can come closer to the Creator and spiritually progress by the power of prayer, yet they choose not to. This is why every Jew must remind himself of the power and greatness of prayer, for it only by an attentive prayer that a person can progress in Torah, perfect his service of G-d, and completely defeat the power of the evil inclination. In fact, who understands the power of focused prayer more than we do? It has the power to open all the gates of Heaven!

# MUSSAR FROM THE PARSHA

## Nothing Other Than G-d

***It is written, "Behold, I am with you and will guard you" (Genesis 28:15).***

One of the disciples of Novardok, who at the time lived in Brisk, went to visit the Brisker Rav when he was in Israel. The Rav told him of the miracles he experienced from the time he fled the Nazi nightmare until his arrival in Israel. Among other things, he said that his father, the gaon Rabbi Chaim of Brisk Zatzal, had told him on several occasions that if someone is in trouble, he should cleave to the concept of Hashem's oneness (meaning that it should be absolutely clear in his mind that nothing exists other than Hashem and that nothing and nobody could affect him, for better or worse, without G-d having decided it), as explained in Nefesh HaChaim.

"That is what I did," said the Rav of Brisk. "In every trial I endured, I always remained constantly attached to Hashem's oneness, and in this way I was saved. Only once did my mind wander from this idea, at which point a German immediately stopped me and asked for my passport. I then got down from the wagon I was on and walked over to a tree, and there I stood concentrating on this concept. At that point the German disappeared, as if he had never existed! This occurred in the days before the war began. The situation was extremely tense at the time, and people felt that within a few days a terrible war would erupt, G-d help us. Nobody knew what the next day had in store."

Some young men from the Ponevezh yeshiva went to find the Mashgiach, Rabbi Yechezkel Levenstein Zatzal, to ask him what they should do at such a time.

Without commenting too much, the Mashgiach cited a statement written by the gaon Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin: "It is really an important matter and a tremendous segula to remove and completely nullify all of the laws and other desires that one is unable to control. They should not make any impression at all. Man should accept in his heart to say that Hashem is the true G-d, and there is nothing, no force in this world or any other world, except for Him. Everything is full of only the simple unity of Hashem. One who completely nullifies in his heart, not taking heed to any force or will in this world, and who subjugates and clings to the pureness of his concept, only to the one Master, blessed be He, then Hashem shall automatically grant him nullification of powers and wills of the world, that they will not have the ability to act upon him at all" (Nefesh HaChaim 3:12).

"Thus we have a wonderful segula," said the Mashgiach, "taken from the Beit Midrash of the gaon Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin, and which has the power to save us from every misfortune. In our minds we must infuse the simple realization that nothing exists outside of Him, and that Hashem is our G-d and Master. He is alone in all the worlds, and no power exists but Him. This understanding, which resides in the heart of every Jew, is enough to save anyone from every misfortune that may befall him."

These stories, and the wise advice of the sages, speak for themselves.

## A Pearl From the Rav

***It is written, "Jacob departed from Beersheba and he went to Haran" (Genesis 28:10).***

In his book Pahad David, Rabbi David Pinto Shlita writes: Why is it stated that Jacob departed from Beersheba, for we know from where he left, since he was in Beersheba? Furthermore, why is it stated that he went to Haran, since we know that he left from there? It should have simply been written, "Jacob went to Haran," without going into further detail. It seems to me that the Torah is alluding to the fact that to be protected from the schemes of the evil inclination, a person must not allow himself to be influenced by non-Jews or by the exile. Furthermore, in order to prevent G-d's wrath (charon af) from descending upon us in exile, we must all cling to the Torah – which is like a source of living water, which alone can protect a person – to the point of speaking of it "when you sit in your house and when you walk on the road, when you lie down and when you rise," meaning

always. This is the sense of, "Jacob departed from Beersheba." Jacob represents any given Jew, all of whom together are called the Children of Israel, from the name Israel, who is our father Jacob. A Jew must be surrounded by Torah when he goes into exile, and only by this merit will he be saved, for it is solely through the Torah that his heart can be nourished. The verse says by allusion, "Jacob departed meBe'er sheva [from Beersheba]," meaning that when a Jew departs for exile, we must be mem be'er, surrounded by the Torah that was given in mem (40) days, surrounded by a be'er (well) of living waters. In this way we will be saved from the influence of the exile, for we will nourish ourselves completely with the Torah and be content with bread dipped in salt and water in measure. We will then be saved from the charon af (divine wrath) of Hashem.

This is why it is written vayeilech ("and he went") to Haran, stressing the fact that halach (he walked), as a person must walk in the Torah, as it is written: "If you walk in My statues" (Leviticus 26:3). We must make an effort for the Torah, and because of that effort we will succeed in performing mitzvot and distancing Hashem's wrath both from ourselves and all the Jewish people.

## I Will Provide You With What You Need

***It is written, "Behold, I am with you...for I will not forsake you" (Genesis 28:15).***

The Midrash states, "He answered all his requests, save that for sustenance. ... Rabbi Assi said: He answered his request for sustenance also, since it says: 'For I will not forsake you' " (Bereshith Rabba 69:6). The Maggid of Dubno explains this midrash with a parable: A young man was about to go on a long journey, and his mother prepared everything he needed (clothing, food, etc.), while his father gave him a good sum of money for the trip.

While they were getting everything ready, they learned that the road was crawling with thieves. The young man's father then felt obligated to join him on his journey, so as to protect him from all possible harm.

While the two were traveling on the road, the young man realized that he didn't have a cent on him. Seeing an anxious look on the young man's face, his father said to him: "My dear son, am I not with you? I'm providing you with everything you need, so why worry about money?"

Our Sages said that when Hashem told Jacob, "Behold, I am with you... for I will not forsake you," it was as if He had answered his request for sustenance. This is a lesson for every generation, for we must realize that Hashem accompanies us in all our endeavors, and therefore we have no reason to worry whatsoever.

## Why Did He Run?

***It is written, "When Laban heard the news of Jacob, his sister's son, he ran toward him, embraced him, kissed him, and took him to his house. He told Laban all these things" (Genesis 29:13).***

Rashi states: " 'He ran toward him.' He thought that he was laden with money, for the servant of the household had arrived with ten laden camels. 'Embraced him.' When he did not see anything with [Jacob], he said, 'Perhaps he has brought golden coins and they are in his bosom.' 'Kissed him.' He said, 'Perhaps he has brought pearls and they are in his mouth.' "

The final words of the verse, "He told Laban et kol ha-devarim ha-eileh [all these things]," form the initials of the phrase: Al titma ki lo heveti davar. Berechush rav yatzati misham. Halach Eliphaz lakach hakol ("Do not be surprised that I did not bring anything. I left there with many possessions. Eliphaz came and took everything").

– Vayomer Avraham

## What To Glory In

***It is written, "Rachel was beautiful of form and beautiful of appearance" (Genesis 29:17). The same is also said of her son Joseph: "Joseph was handsome of form and handsome of appearance" (ibid. 39:6).***

Now Scripture tells us, "Charm is deceptive and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the L-RD shall be praised" (Proverbs 30:30). The Vilna Gaon objects to the view that the Matriarchs were praised for their charm and beauty, explaining

that the verse in Proverbs applies when charm and beauty are not accompanied by a fear of G-d. In that case they are like “a golden ring in the snout of a pig” (ibid. 11:22). However a G-d-fearing woman will be praised both for her charm and her beauty.

Similarly, the Vilna Gaon explained the verse: “Let the wise man not glory in his wisdom, nor let the mighty man glory in his might...for only with this may one glory: Contemplating and knowing Me” (Jeremiah 9:22-23). There is absolutely no reason to take stock in one’s wisdom, strength, or wealth when they are not accompanied “with this.” That is, one can take stock in one’s wisdom, strength and wealth when he uses them to know G-d. He can do so when he knows how to use his wealth, strength, and wisdom – when he directs them all for the glory of G-d.

### **Complete the Week**

***It is written, “Complete the week of this one...for the work that you will perform for me yet another seven years” (Genesis 29:27).***

What did Laban mean by, “Complete the week of this one”?

He meant that when the Sheva Berachot were finished, Jacob would also be given Rachel as a wife in exchange for another seven years of work. The Chatam Sofer explains that Laban informed Jacob that his marriage to Leah occurred one week before he completed his seven years of work. Now Jacob did not work during that week because the Sheva Berachot were taking place at that time. This meant that he still had one more week of work to do! Furthermore, Laban wanted seven more years of work from Jacob, which he had to complete before the week of the Sheva Berachot, so as not to miss a single day of work.

### **Knowing a Person by His Anger**

***It is written, “Jacob became angered, and he took up his grievance with Laban. Jacob spoke up and said to Laban, ‘What is my transgression? What is my sin, that you have hotly pursued me?’” (Genesis 31:36).***

The Sages have said, “By three things may a person’s character be determined: By his cup, by his purse, and by his anger” (Eruvin 65b).

The masters of Mussar said, “How do we know a person by his anger? We learn this from our father Jacob. Regarding Laban, even during times of happiness and love, even when speaking of song, timbrel and lyre, when all he yearned for was to kiss “my sons and my daughters,” even then he added in passing that he could have harmed Jacob. Such was the last verse in the song of his soul, as he poured out his love for his descendants.

As for Jacob, even when he was enraged, even when conflict erupted, we hear no threats, curses, or disparaging remarks from him. In fact all we hear is, “What is my transgression? What is my sin?” Such was Jacob’s nature, and it was in this way that he demonstrated anger.

### **Overview of the Parsha**

Our parsha describes the beginnings of Jacob’s life in a place far removed from his father’s home. The parsha describes Jacob’s life with Laban in Haran, a place for which he set out after having delayed a long time. In leaving Beersheba and going towards Haran, Jacob “encountered the place” (Genesis 28:11), and there he had a dream and uttered a vow. He went to the land of the children of the east, and when living with Laban he was given Leah and Rachel as wives, though in the wrong order. They and their maidservants gave birth to Jacob’s children while he took care of Laban’s flocks. In obeying Hashem’s command, Jacob fled with his family and journeyed to the land of his fathers. Laban, whose idols were stolen from his home, pursued Jacob and caught up to him. However in obeying Hashem’s command, Laban allowed him to continue on his way.

# **REASONS FOR THE MITZVOT**

## **The Gates of Wisdom**

***It is written, “Leah’s eyes were weak” (Genesis 29:17).***

People were saying that Leah was destined to marry Esau, and when she heard this she wept so much that her eyelashes dropped (Bava Batra 123a). Like Leah, there are some people for whom a great reward awaits. However before receiving it, they must prove themselves worthy. Leah was worthy of marrying Jacob, however for that to happen she had to weep and pray for him. The same occurred to the author of Sdei Chemed, the gaon Rabbi Chaim Chizkiyahu Medini, who said that he did not possess enough abilities in Torah during his early years. It was only after emerging from a difficult trial that he received great abilities. After his marriage, Rabbi Chizkiyahu asked to be accepted into a certain kollel in the town where he lived. The kollel was financed by a very wealthy individual, and only the best avrechim and most gifted scholars in the region could study there. When the kollel students heard that a young avrech, known to possess only an average mind, wanted to be accepted in their Beit Midrash, they voiced their opposition.

Once the Sdei Chemed met the wealthy sponsor of the kollel and they had a lengthy conversation, he realized that this wasn’t an ordinary avrech. He therefore accepted him into the kollel. Thus Rabbi Chizkiyahu began to study there, although certain individuals tried to get rid of him. Bidding their time, these evildoers acted when the kollel’s wealthy sponsor was out of town. At that point they convinced the non-Jewish cleaning lady working in the kollel to accept a hefty sum of money if she would accuse the new avrech of having tried to seduce her. Agreeing to their proposition, she began to spread the fictitious story around town, which needless to say made tremendous waves in the community. The evildoers then went to the home of their wealthy sponsor, but his wife said that she couldn’t do anything about it. She told them that they would have to wait until her husband returned. When he did return, they rushed to tell him about the “sin” that had occurred during his absence. However Hashem placed wisdom in the heart of the man, and he did not believe the story. Since he suspected the cleaning lady of having lied, he fired her.

The Sdei Chemed continued to study as if nothing had happened, and after a few months the former cleaning lady was in need of money. It fact her situation was so dire that she had nothing to eat. She secretly approached Rabbi Chizkiyahu Medini and asked him to forgive her for what she had done. She also asked him to speak on her behalf to the kollel’s sponsor, in return for which she would admit that she had received a bribe.

The Sdei Chemed thought about it, and he realized that revealing the truth would result in a desecration of Hashem’s Name. He therefore agreed to help the woman, but only on condition that she keep the truth to herself. Thus when Rabbi Chizkiyahu demonstrated such courage for Hashem’s sake, the gates of wisdom were opened to him.

# YOUR EYES SHALL BEHOLD YOUR TEACHER

## Rabbi Shlomo Luria Ashkenaz – The Maharshal

The Maharshal was born in Brisk (some say Posen) to the gaon Rabbi Yechiel of Worms, and he studied the Torah with his maternal grandfather, the gaon Rabbi Yitzchak Kluber of Posen. After returning to Brisk, the Maharshal married the daughter of the gaon Rabbi Kalonymus Haberkasten Zatzal, the Rosh Yeshiva of Ostrog. He devoted his entire life to Torah and the service of Hashem, and when his father-in-law went to live in Brisk, the Maharshal succeeded him in Ostrog. There he made many disciples, including such great figures of the generation as the Olelot Ephraim, the Mateh Moshe, the holy Shelah, and Rabbi Chaim, the brother of the Maharal of Prague. His disciples avidly drank from his words of Torah, and he published many commentaries under the title Yam Shel Shlomo. In 5613 the Maharshal was named as the Av Beit Din and Rav of Lublin, and there he expanded his famous yeshiva.

He became known as a firm man and a tremendous genius in the field of Torah study, and even more so in its practice. He fought with all his strength against those who tried to weaken the rules of modesty during his time. He also corresponded with the Rema, and although they had different views on a number of subjects, the Rema held him in great esteem and compared him to Moses in his time. On Kislev 12, 5634, the holy flame was extinguished as the Maharshal, Rabbi Shlomo Luria Ashkenazi, rejoined the celestial academy. Best known for his commentary on the Talmud (which appears at the end of every tractate), the Maharshal is buried in the old cemetery of Lublin. The memory of the tzaddik is truly a blessing.

# IN THE LIGHT OF THE HAFTORAH

## The Righteous Walk, the Wicked Stumble

*It is written, "For the ways of the L-RD are straight. The righteous walk in them and sinners will stumble over them" (Hosea 14:10).*

The wicked say that Hashem detests man. They believe that He has burdened people with the yoke of mitzvot in order to obstruct their lives and hinder their freedom. Such a view, however, is completely erroneous. To what can it be compared? It is like a generous person who practices great hospitality, inviting people to his home and serving them all kinds of delicious meals. When one of his guests overeats and becomes ill, he complains to his host and accuses him of trying to hurt people! The host replies, "Ask the other guests if my food made them sick! You're sick because of what you did. You're the one to blame. I only prepared meals for people to eat their fill, not to overeat and get sick!"

This is what the prophet says: "For the ways of the L-RD are straight," the best proof being that the righteous walk in them, living in joy and contentment. If some people feel that His ways are like an unbearable yoke, it is because "sinners will stumble over them," for they are sinners. The mitzvot represent a stumbling block for them in life, yet the blame is strictly theirs. As our Sages said, "If he is meritorious, it becomes for him an elixir of life; if not, a deadly poison" (Yoma 72b).

– Kochav MeYaakov

# A MATTER OF EDUCATION

## To Destroy the World on Account of Fools?

A philosopher asked Rabban Gamliel, "It is written in your Torah, 'For the L-RD your G-d is a consuming fire, a jealous G-d' [Deuteronomy 4:24]. Why, however, is He so jealous of its worshippers rather than of the idol itself?" He replied, "I will give you a parable: To what is the matter like? To a human king who had a son, and this son reared a dog to which he attached his father's name, so that whenever he took an oath he exclaimed, 'By the life of this dog, my father!' When the king hears of it, with whom is he angry – his son or the dog? Surely he is angry with his son!" [The philosopher] said to him, "You call the idol a dog, but there is some reality in it." [Rabban Gamliel asked.] "What is your proof?" He replied, "Once a fire broke out in our city, and the whole town was burnt with the exception of a certain idolatrous shrine!" He said to him, "I will give you a parable: To what is the matter like? To a human king against whom one of his provinces rebelled. If he goes to war against it, does he fight with the living or the dead? Surely he wages war with the living!"

[The philosopher] said to him, "You call the idol a dog and you call it a dead thing. In that case, let Him destroy it from the world!" He replied, "If what was worshipped was something not needed in the world, He would abolish it. Yet people worship the sun and moon, stars and planets, brooks and valleys. Should He destroy His universe on account of fools?" – Avodah Zarah 54b

# A TRUE STORY

## The Admission of the Accused

*It is written, "Your father has cheated me and has changed my wages ten monim [times]" (Genesis 31:7).*

Rashi states: "Monim, a term denoting the base number, which is ten. We learn that he [Laban] changed his stipulation a hundred times." It is said that Rabbi Moshe Alsheich Zatzal was once giving a lecture on Parsha Vayeitzei, one that was attended by the Arizal. The Alsheich began to comment on the aforementioned verse, explaining how Laban used all kinds of tricks to betray Jacob. The Arizal then burst into laughter, continuing to smile throughout the lecture. When it was over, people asked him why he was smiling.

The Arizal explained that Laban was condemned to be present during the Alsheich's lecture and to acknowledge his guilt. He stood near the door and listened attentively to the Alsheich's explanation, and with each ruse described, Laban nodded his head, as if in agreement. Hence the Arizal smiled, for all the ruses described by the Alsheich were true. The words coming from his mouth, as well as all the words of our Sages, were true.

# EISHET CHAYIL

## Before Everyone Else

We can learn how to act with children from the following story:

Two children printed a pamphlet containing words of Torah, and they called it Torah Aish. They wanted to show the pamphlet to the town's Rav, and so they went to his home.

The Rav had not yet returned from kollel, and so the Rebbetzin, Aliza Shoshana Zilberstein (may she rest in peace) suggested that the children wait for him, adding that the Rav would be happy to see their work. In the meantime, other people arrived at the Rav's home and formed a line that was getting longer as time went on.

The Rav had barely returned when one of the adults (who had arrived only after the children) went into the Rav's study to speak with him. Since they were children, nobody paid any attention to them, and perhaps no one thought that they also wanted to see the Rav.

All of a sudden, the Rebbetzin hurried to the Rav's study and said, "Excuse me, but these children were here before everyone else. It's not right that they should wait outside while others go in before them!"