

The Evening Prayer Established By Ya'akov Avinu

"He encountered the place and spent the night there because the sun had set; he took from the stones of the place which he arranged around his head, and lay down in that place." (Bereishit 28:11)

Rashi explains that the expression of 'encountering' is an expression of prayer, from which we derive that Ya'akov Avinu established the evening prayer (Arvit), as it says "because the sun had set", he prayed at the time of sunset.

Chazal add (Berachot 27b) that the morning and afternoon prayers are obligatory. With these prayers a person thanks His Creator for giving him life and sustaining him throughout the day. On the other hand, the evening prayer is not obligatory. For this reason, a person who forgot to recite the ya'aleh v'yavo prayer (recited on Rosh Chodesh) in the evening prayer does not need to repeat his prayer, but if he forgot in the morning or the afternoon, he must repeat the prayer. However, although it is not obligatory, we have accepted upon ourselves to be meticulous about reciting the evening prayer.

Ya'akov Avinu established the evening prayer with true self-sacrifice. As we know, when he lay down to sleep in that place it was the first time that he slept after fourteen years of diligently studying Torah in Yeshivat Shem v'Ever (Bereishit Rabba 68:11). Despite Ya'akov Avinu's enormous fatigue, he did not lie down to sleep before reciting and establishing the evening prayer, thanking Hashem for all the kindnesses that He performed for him until that moment.

The verse tells us, "he took from the stones of the place which he arranged around his head", on which Rashi explains "He arranged them as kind of trench around his head since he was afraid of wild beasts". The obvious question is, how did Ya'akov Avinu imagine that the stones that he puts under his head will have the power of saving him from wild beasts? What good is a pile of stones against a scavenger who wishes to devour? These words of Chazal inspired me to contemplate the significance of Ya'akov Avinu placing his trust in a number of stones to protect him against such a danger. If something would happen to him during his sleep, Heaven would find him guilty for not taking enough care with his life. We are told "A man is always held accountable", even while asleep, especially in a forest or desert where wild animals who are out to devour roam freely and pose a constant threat.

Indeed, placing stones around his head was not enough to protect Ya'akov from danger. It was performed as a symbolic act that serves as a lesson for future generations, for we are told that "The deeds of our forefathers are an indication for their descendants".

Many people live their entire lives devoid of any obvious fulfillment. They walk around with no identity or feeling of individuality and tend to fall into the black hole of depression. It appears that this outcome is a result of not relying on the Creator of the World; it stems from a lack of appreciation that Hashem is the One who sustains and supports us and guides our path down here in this world.

A person who ascribes all that occurs to him during his lifetime only to himself can easily fall into despondency since it seems to him that his lack of success and mazal are a result of his own lack of talent. This quickly leads to self-absorption

and depression since he is constantly consumed by feelings of guilt which do not allow him to function properly. These feelings rob him of all happiness and joy in life, which is an automatic prescription for melancholy.

On the other hand, one who places all his trust in Hashem, as it says, "In Your hand I entrust my spirit" (Tehillim 31:6), merits living a life of happiness and relief and even if something disturbing happens to him, he doesn't torment himself that it is his lack of mazal that brought it upon him. Instead, he believes with perfect faith that the One who causes all things to happen is the One who brought this about and even if right now he cannot perceive the good in the situation, it is absolutely clear to him that everything that Hashem does is for the best.

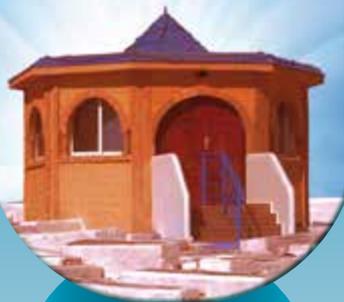
If a person hires a car for a few days and suddenly discovers some kind of mechanical fault, he will not sink into depression as a result of this since he knows that the car is under the custody of the rental company and they are responsible for any repairs. But if the car belongs to the person and as time goes on he discovers something that needs fixing, he is filled with concern since the responsibility lies on his shoulders and he is the one who will have to pay for the repairs.

Entrusting one's entire burden to Hashem Yitbarach allows a person to live a life of tranquility and peace since this kind of person constantly keeps in mind that whatever Hashem does is for the best and that everything is in Hashem's Hands. He believes with perfect faith that every single thing that occurs to him is orchestrated by the One who makes all things happen. On the other hand, people who ascribe all that happens to them to their own efforts will quickly be overwhelmed by feelings of sadness and devastation.

Our holy forefathers understood that each day is made up of three stages - morning, afternoon and evening. Each section of the day offers a person new opportunities and challenges which he must face with strength. In order for a person to have the strength to withstand the challenges, he must pray to Hashem three times a day, each prayer corresponding to a different part of the day. Prayer connects a person to his Creator and helps him to place his faith only in Hashem. Prayer sharpens a person's knowledge that there is Someone in Heaven who is watching over him and guiding his path.

This is the answer as to why Ya'akov Avinu placed stones around his head. It was a symbolic act. Ya'akov was asking Hashem to protect his head, which is where a person's thoughts lie, from evil and impure powers which increase at night. The wild animals that Chazal tell us he wished to protect himself from, refer to the powers of impurity that lie in wait for a person like wild beasts. Ya'akov Avinu was emphasizing his wish that Hashem should protect him from the forces of klippah and from the yetzer hara, not from the wild beasts, for stones indeed afford no protection against them.

Since the evening prayer is not obligatory, the yetzer hara takes the opportunity to intensify his efforts and as a result, a person faces difficult challenges at night. Only through prayer to Hashem can one overcome these challenges. This is why Ya'akov Avinu established the evening prayer, despite his extreme tiredness, since he realized that man requires renewed spiritual powers in order to stand up to these challenges with fortitude.



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Hilula

9 - Rabbi Natan Salem, of the Chachmei Yeshivat 'Porat Yosef'

10 - Rabbi Isser Zalman Meltzer, Rosh Yeshiva of 'Eitz Chaim'

11 - The Dayan, Rabbi Moshe Harrari, a Gadol from Aram Tzova

12 - Rabbi Shlomo Luria, the Maharshal, author of 'Yam Shel Shlomo'

13 - Rabbi David Shalosh

14 - Rabbi Matityah Garji

15 - Rabbi Yehuda HaNassi



Walking in their Ways

Tidbits of faith and trust penned by Moreinu v'Rabbeinu Hagoan Hatzaddik Rabbi David Chananya Pinto, shlita

Comforting Thoughts

On a visit to Canada, my hosts prepared a comfortable, spacious room for me on the first floor of their home. Since several married couples were also sharing this floor, I requested a room in the basement instead. When my host heard my unusual request, he was stunned. "Honored Rav," he implored, "how can I agree to such a request? It is not fitting for someone of your stature to sleep in the basement. Besides, it is dangerous to sleep there."

I countered that it was many times more dangerous to sleep on a floor where inappropriate thoughts were liable to assault me and I insisted on moving to the basement. To my host's credit, he did not refuse my request and did as I asked.

People often think that they can get a good night's sleep only if they sleep in an airy room with a good mattress and fresh linens. But this is not the case. Only living by the tenets of the Torah will afford a person a restful sleep.

Although the room in the basement was on a lower level of physical comfort, I lay down to rest and slept very well. I was calmed by the knowledge that I was doing the right thing. Baruch Hashem, I was spared the Yetzer Hara of having inappropriate thoughts during sleep.

Shortly before Mincha, I once again lay down to rest. And once again, despite the less than optimal conditions, I slept very well. Suddenly, as I was sleeping, I felt my kippah falling from my head. I was alarmed and immediately woke up, intending to pick up my kippah from the floor. But then I felt an invisible hand lift my kippah and place it on my head. I know that people will be skeptical on hearing this narrative. They might think I dreamed the whole thing. But I can vouch that this account, when I went to rest before Mincha, is one hundred percent true.

When I related it to my son, Rabbi Refael and my escort, R' Moshe Mirali, they asked if I wasn't afraid about this incident. I replied no. It was not an act of the kelippah. The hand that assisted me in my sleep wanted to protect me, not cause me to sin. Had it been an impure force, it would have wished to do the opposite of returning my kippah to my head.

I believe that the incident with the kippah was a clear indication from Hashem that He was pleased with my decision to change rooms, as I was more concerned with my spiritual repose than with any physical comfort.

The Haftarah

"And yet My people waver about returning to Me" (Hoshea 11)

Ashkenazim read the section **"Ya'akov fled to the field of Aram"** (Hoshea 12)

The connection to the Parsha: The Haftara mentions Ya'akov who seized Esav's heel, "In the womb he seized his brother's heel", and the Parsha talks about Ya'akov fleeing from his brother Esav.

Guard Your Tongue

Remaining Silent Cannot Be Regarded as Agreement

Just as it is forbidden to accept lashon hara even if it said in front of the person, so too the same law applies to rechilut. For example, if one says in front of the person, you said such and such about him, even if he keeps quiet when this rechilut is said in front of him, one is still forbidden to believe it and one must not take this as proof that it is true. Even if the person is generally outspoken yet, in this case, he remains quiet, this cannot be taken as a proof that he is speaking the truth.



Words of our Sages

Two Rules for Disassembling Ladders

"And behold! A ladder was set earthward and its top reached heavenward" (Bereishit 28:12)

A ladder serves as a tool to impart several important messages concerning appropriate conduct in life. The Gaon Rabbi Ben Zion Muzefi shlita brings a wonderful mashal to clarify these concepts:

There was once an unfortunate man who was not blessed with much wisdom. One day his landlord said to him: "Please go up to the roof and bring down several bags of sand."

"How will I get up to the roof?" he asked, "There are no stairs that lead up to the roof."

"You are correct," the landlord replied. "There are no stairs, but I have a ladder."

The simpleton took the ladder and went around to the side of the house. He placed the ladder against the wall and tried to climb up but did not succeed since the ladder kept falling.

"This wall must be crooked," the simpleton said and went around to the other side of the house. He placed the ladder against the wall, but once again did not manage to climb up as the ladder kept falling. He continued trying until a passerby called out, "If you wish to climb up the ladder, you need to pull it slightly away from the wall. In order for it to stand steady, you must lean it on a slant."

The conclusion: Dear friend, do you wish to climb far in life? Allow a bit of breathing space. Don't be adamant about every small issue. Know to forgo when necessary.

Here is another story about a second unfortunate simpleton:

His landlord turned to him with the following request: There are stairs that lead to the roof of my house but the roof is a dangerous place for my children. I am concerned that they will sneak up there without my knowledge, so please demolish the stairs!"

"No problem," answered the simpleton. What did he do? He began to ascend the stairs and as he climbed up each step, he broke the step beneath him. Standing on the second step, he broke the first step and this is how he continued until he reached the roof. He completed his mission but then found himself on the roof without any way of getting down!

"Help! Help!" he cried out.

The neighbors heard his shouts and asked what his problem was.

"I went up to the roof and now I am stuck here with no way of getting down!"

"Go down in the same way that you went up" they replied logically.

"I can't," he cried out hysterically. There used to be steps here and that is how I climbed up. But now that I broke them I can't get down."

"Listen to us," they replied. "When you demolish stairs, this is the way to do it: You start at the top and as you proceed downwards you break the step above you." The simpleton repeated this forty times until he absorbed the message: "When demolishing stairs, you start at the top and proceed downwards."

Time passed and he became the most sought-after worker for demolishing stairs. When cats began stealthily entering a large wine cellar and spoiling the wine, the owner thought to himself: If I get rid of the steps that lead down to the cellar, it will solve the problem of the cats entering. He hired this now-famous simpleton to demolish the stairs. Before beginning work, he repeated to himself, "When demolishing stairs, you start at the top and proceed downwards". He began descending the steps and demolished the top step. He continued making his way down and breaking the step above him until he found himself in the cellar with no way of climbing out.

"Help! Help!" he shouted. A passerby stopped and asked: "What happened? How did you get stuck down there?"

"I did exactly what I was told to do," he explained, repeating his refrain: "When demolishing stairs, you start at the top and proceed downwards".

"This is correct when you are on the roof, for a basement you must do the opposite!"

We too, sometimes mix up the roof with the basement. When a person sees that his income is decreasing, where does he cut down?

If he does not possess strong faith, he cuts down in his avodat Hashem. For example, he gives less charity and pays less tuition. However, he tries hard not to cut back in material matters. He is not prepared to lower his standard of living and does not want to give up the pleasures that have always been part of his life.

When his financial situation starts to improve, he starts allowing himself to be more carefree with his expenses. Where will we see the outcome? If he has not worked on himself, he will upgrade his clothing, food, furniture and car. Maybe after all that he will remember to increase the amount that he gives to charity and once again give with the same generosity that he used to before he started cutting back.

Treasures

Based on the teachings of
Moreinu v'Rabbeinu Hagaon
Hatzaddik Rabbi David Chananya
Pinto, shlita



Torah Elevates a Person

"I have sojourned with Lavan and have lingered until now" (Bereishit 32:5)

Chazal expound (ibid Rashi): "I have sojourned (גרת) with Lavan and I observed the six hundred and thirteen (תרי"ג) mitzvot. (The Hebrew word 'גרת' has the same letters as the word 'ג'תרי', each with a numerical value of 613).

The sefer 'Yismach Yisrael' of the Admor of Alexander zya"a, writes that if a person considers himself small, he automatically perceives Hashem's greatness. But if he considers himself as someone great, this thought causes him to consider Hashem as 'small', chalila.

It is possible that Ya'akov Avinu a"h was hinting at this idea with his words, "I have sojourned with Lavan yet I observed the entire Torah" (Sojourned implies staying as a stranger [from גר, alien]. Ya'akov implied, I have not become a great prince nor have I achieved status... I remained merely an alien). Since I observed the entire Torah, I have no desire to achieve status for I see that everything is futile and nothing has value in life besides the Holy Torah.

Rabbeinu Hakadosh, a great prince and extremely wealthy, was an example of this outlook. How else can one explain that Rabbi declared about himself before he passed away that he did not partake of any physical pleasures, even with his smallest finger (Ketubot 104a)? Since he was a distinguished personality he was certainly accorded much honor? The explanation is that since Rabbi was so strongly connected to Torah and Torah alone, nothing else in life gave him pleasure.

This is what Ya'akov was implying. After tasting the sweetness of Torah, I have no desire to be a prince or chief, since the Torah elevates a person to spiritual heights.

I heard from a certain Rav that at the hilula of the Maggid of Mezritch zya"a, his chassidim used to dance with the spoon that the Maggid used to use, repeating, "This is the spoon with which the Maggid of Mezritch zya"a used to eat".

What is the significance of this story? Chazal tell us that when passing a certain place, one of the Tana'im saw a stone and bent down and kissed it. In answer to his disciples' query, he replied that Rabbi Eliezer ben Hurkenos had sat on this stone and studied Torah, therefore the stone had become like Har Sinai.

When the chassidim danced with the tzaddik's spoon, they were inferring that if a stone despite its being inanimate still has holiness, all the more so is holiness present in a spoon that was a tool in physically strengthening the tzaddik zya"a enabling him to serve Hashem.

Pearls of the Parsha

A Rasha's Thought Process

"Lavan said, "It is better that I give her to you than that I give her to another man; remain with me" (Bereishit 29:19)

How can it be that Lavan told Ya'akov that he prefers to give his daughter to him as a wife than to any other man? Which rasha wants his daughter to marry a Torah observant Jew? So why did Lavan not prefer that his daughter marry Esav the rasha?

The Maharim Shik zt"l offers a wonderful answer: Lavan said this out of his extreme wickedness. This was his thought: Since my daughter is a tzaddek, even if she marries Esav she will transform him into a tzaddik. If so it is better that she should marry Ya'akov who is already a tzaddik and with that, I will gain that there will be one less tzaddik in the world!

The Power of a Word

"Rachel saw that she had not borne children to Ya'akov, so Rachel became envious of her sister; she said to Ya'akov, "Give me children – otherwise I am dead. Ya'akov's anger flared up at Rachel" (Bereishit 30:1-2)

Ya'akov's conduct seems perplexing. His childless wife pours out her heart to him and instead of comforting her and offering her words of encouragement, he replies harshly.

The holy Ohr Hachaim zya"a explains that Ya'akov was harsh with Rachel because she referred to death when speaking about herself and he was concerned that maybe this will bring her harm.

In the later Parsha of Vayigash, we find that Hashem said to Ya'akov, "I shall descend with you to Egypt, and I shall also surely bring you up (to be buried); and Yosef shall place his hand on your eyes (when you die Yosef will close your eyes)". The Ohr Hachaim asks, why did Hashem mention his death and the fact that he would be buried by Yosef?

He answers that since Ya'akov several times used expressions of death concerning Yosef, "he has surely been torn to pieces" and "For I will go down to the grave mourning for my son", therefore Hashem had to promise him that he does not need to be concerned about this fact (sometimes by mentioning something it becomes a curse) and it will not be considered "as something that happens as a result of a ruler saying something by accident".

"Their Mouths Speak Vanity"

"And Lavan said to Ya'akov, "Here is this mound, and here is the monument which I have cast between me and you" (Bereishit 31:51)

In the sefer 'Ta'ama D'Mikra', Maran Hagaon Harav Chaim Kanievsky shlita brings in the name of his father zt"l, that the verse wishes to point out the intensity of Lavan's lies. The verse writes that Ya'akov took a stone and raised it up as a monument and also told his children to gather stones and make a mound. Lavan immediately came over and said "Here is this mound...which I have cast". However, Lavan himself had not been involved in gathering and setting up the stones.

An Oath Out Of Fear

"And Ya'akov swore by the Dread of his father Yitzchak" (Bereishit 31:53)

Yitzchak Avinu a"h urged his son Ya'akov to be extremely careful about taking an oath and not to promise when it is not necessary.

Therefore, Rabbi Azarya Fijo zt"l explains in his sefer 'Bina Le'itim', when Ya'akov was forced to swear, he did it with fear of his father Yitzchak.

"And Ya'akov swore", but the oath was "by the Dread of his father Yitzchak", full of fear of his father's teachings.



A NOVEL LOOK AT THE PARSHA



Make the Most of Opportunities

"Ya'akov departed from Be'er Sheva". "A righteous person's departure from a place leaves a void. As long as he lives in the city, he constitutes its glory, splendor, and beauty; when he departs, its glory, splendor and beauty depart with him" (Rashi, Bereishit 28:10).

Considering this Rashi that was said about Ya'akov's departure from Be'er Sheva, highlights an important concept:

Ya'akov Avinu was neither the Rav nor the Maggid of Be'er Sheva. He did not give speeches, did not arouse the masses to consider their wayward ways, but rather closed himself off in his corner and diligently studied Torah in seclusion. The Torah describes him as "Ya'akov was a wholesome man, abiding in tents". Despite this fact, the Torah testifies that he was the glory, splendor and beauty of the city!

Harav Eliezer Turk shlita points out that this shows us that the degree of influence of a tzaddik on his surroundings is not measured according to the degree of his involvement in public matters, neither according to his prominence over other residents. Sometimes a tzaddik can be secluded in his home, but his influence reaches much further than the boundaries of his sanctuary and his inspiration has a far-reaching impact, to the extent that the Torah testifies about Ya'akov that he was the glory, splendor and beauty of the city!

This important foundation also answers the famous question of why Chazal do not mention that when Avraham Avinu and Yitzchak Avinu left their hometown, their departure left an impression?

Why indeed? Avraham and Yitzchak were extremely wealthy. They possessed much livestock and were accorded respect by the local population. They also involved themselves throughout their lives with spreading Torah, influencing the public and instilling emunah in the hearts of the people. This being the case, their departure certainly left a void. It was a natural outcome that Chazal do not have to make a point of stressing.

But concerning Ya'akov Avinu who was hidden away in the tent of Torah, we could make the mistake of thinking that his coming and going was not felt by the people and had no effect on the local population. So, the Torah points out that even his leaving made an impression, as we explained that the influence of a tzaddik on his surroundings is not measured according to his public involvement.

The Gaon Rabbi Zalman Rotbarg zt"l, Rosh Yeshiva of Beit Meir, writes in his sefer 'Imrei Da'at', that for about two weeks, he had the merit of staying in a room adjacent to his Rebbe, the Gaon Rabbi Shimon Shkop zt"l, Rosh Yeshiva of Grodno and author of 'Sha'arei Yosher'. He declares that those days spent in the company of his Rebbe remained etched in his heart and soul forever.

He describes several aspects that inspired him during that valuable time in which he was close to his great Rebbe. According to him, the same awe-inspiring personage of Rabbi Shimon giving over his deep and magnificent shiurim to his talmidim, the effusion of his soul in his pure prayers, the smiling countenance that he presented to his talmidim and all those who came to bask in his presence, was the same outstanding personality who was also particular to allow himself a small amount of rest to refresh his tired mind from his deep involvement in the intricacies of Torah, and through that he fulfilled

'ונשמרתם מאד לנפשתיכם', "You shall greatly take care of your souls".

He absorbed the exceptional routine with which his Rebbe scheduled his day, concerning both spiritual and physical matters, which according to his definition afforded him "profound lessons in character refinement." He was present to witness how just before going to sleep Rabbi Shimon's lips would utter and articulate chapters of Mishnayot, and he defined it in the following way: "Through this Rabbi Shimon took the necessity of repose and used it to deepen and penetrate the essence of Torah into reality."

Until his final days, Rabbi Zalman nostalgically recalled this great merit that befell him of intimately observing Rabbi Shimon's conduct. Every single aspect of a tzaddik and talmid chacham's lifestyle is Torah and spending time in his company is instructive and enlightening. "A path of life [waits] above for the intelligent one".

The Gaon Rabbi Moshe Shmuel Shapira zt"l, Rosh Yeshiva of Be'er Ya'akov, would often lament the fact that in his childhood he forwent the opportunity of beholding the radiant countenance of the Chafetz Chaim.

This occurred when the Chafetz Chaim visited Bialystok, to encourage and inspire the townspeople. Rabbi Moshe Shmuel was then a young boy of about seven or eight years old and his father, the Gaon Rabbi Aryeh Shapira zt"l, Av Beit Din of Bialystok, urged him to accompany him to get a glimpse of the Chafetz Chaim. However, his childish perception overrode any enthusiasm and he preferred to continue playing with his friends.

Many years later, Rabbi Moshe Shmuel was still troubled by this regrettable fact and his eyes would fill with tears when speaking about it. "I was presented with a special opportunity and I gave it up", he sighed with distress.