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Under the auspices of Moreinu v'Rabbeinu, the Admor Rabbi **David Chananya Pinto** shlita
Son of the tzaddik Rabbi **Moshe Ahron Pinto** zt"l, and grandson of the holy tzaddik and miracle-worker Rabbi **Chaim Pinto** zyt"l

maskil Le'David

Why is the Evening Prayer Voluntary?

"Yaakov departed from Be'er-sheva and went toward Charan" (Bereishit 28:10).

Yitzchak Avinu's approach in *avodat Hashem* was different than Yaakov Avinu's. Yitzchak's approach was mainly internal spiritual service; he even considered his exterior physical body to be something internal and spiritual. He was a perfect "burnt-offering" – just as a burnt-offering is offered in its entirety to Hashem, so too Yitzchak Avinu was entirely holy for Hashem Yitbarach. Yitzchak served Hashem from the depths of his soul, a service that stemmed from the attribute of *gevurah*, strength. He was as strong as a lion in performing the Will of his Creator.

This is a lofty level of attainment that most mortals cannot fathom. Chazal tell us that his body transformed into something as spiritual as an angel which has no residue of materialism at all. The holy *sefarim* write that Yitzchak did not even enjoy regular physical pleasures of mortals, such as pleasure when eating and drinking, for his body became pure and clean from any form of materialism. He became like an angel, a *saraf*.

Yaakov Avinu's approach was to focus also on the external in his holy service, besides his inner work. He summoned strength and courage in his battle against the deceitful Lavan. Yaakov's strength derived mainly from the power of the holy Torah, which he occupied himself with throughout his life without cessation. He was considered "a wholesome man, abiding in tents" as if he killed himself in the tent of Torah. That is why Yaakov left home, as the verse says, "Yaakov departed." He left his family and exiled himself to a place of Torah, to the *beit midrash* of Shem and Ever, and there he immersed himself in Torah for fourteen years, engaging in Torah study with self-sacrifice and super-human strength.

While Yitzchak and Yaakov had different approaches in *avodat Hashem*, "All the rivers flow into the sea" (*Kohelet* 1:7). Both of them had, each in his own way, the common goal of sanctifying Hashem's Name and performing His Will wholeheartedly. Both of them garnered their spiritual strength and absorbed their holiness from their holy ancestor, Avraham Avinu.

When Yaakov arrived in Charan the sun set and the verse says (*Bereishit* 28:11), "He encountered the place and spent the night there." The Gemara tells us (*Berachot* 26b), "There is a *breitah*, Yaakov established the evening prayer as it says, 'He encountered (ויפגע) the place.' 'פגיעה' – encountering – always denotes prayer."

I found this difficult to understand. If Yaakov established the evening prayer, why does a different Gemara say (*Berachot* 27b) that the evening prayer is voluntary? This is also the halachic ruling (see *Orach Chaim, siman* 237). Seemingly, just as Avraham established *Shacharit* and Yitzchak established *Mincha*, and according to all opinions these are obligatory prayers, should the *Arvit* prayer that Yaakov established not have the same ruling? Why is this prayer inferior and considered only voluntary?

With *siyata d'Shmaya* I would like to explain the idea as follows. Yaakov Avinu was the pillar of Torah upon which the world stands. The verse testifies about him, (*Bereishit* 25:27), "But Yaakov was a wholesome man, abiding in tents." The word "תם" (wholesome) can be rewritten to spell "מת" (dead), for Yaakov Avinu killed himself in the tent of Torah. He engaged in Torah study without weariness both day and night, when awake and when sleeping, as it says (*Bereishit* 28:16), "Yaakov awoke from his sleep (מסנתו)." Rabbi Yochanan says, "Don't read it '*mishnato*' (from his sleep) but '*mimishnato*' (from his learning)."

When Yaakov Avinu went to rest he still engaged in the holy Torah and did not cease for even one moment. The verse says (*Bereishit* 37:1), "וישב יעקב" (Yaakov settled), implying that he settled himself in Yeshiva (*וישב בישיבה*) all his life. The Torah was his entire essence, and all his preoccupations were given over to it. That is why it says about him (*Bereishit* 33:18), "Yaakov arrived intact" and Chazal explain (*Shabbat* 33a), "Intact in his Torah." Although he shepherded Lavan's sheep for many years and he suffered through many tribulations, nevertheless his Torah was not blemished and he did not forget anything from his learning. His Torah was preserved within him because he was connected to it and clung to it with his entire soul.

As we know, a Jew who makes Torah his profession and engages in it without cessation is exempt from prayer. Due to this, Yaakov Avinu did not have to establish the evening prayer during the fourteen years that he studied Torah in the *beit midrash* of Shem and Ever, since the holy Torah was his entire life.

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9 Kislev 5786

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Yayetzzei



Hilula

9 Kislev

Rabbi Natan Salem,
of the Chachmei Yeshivat
Porat Yosef

10 Kislev

Rabbi Isser Zalman
Meltzer, Rosh Yeshiva
of Eitz Chaim

11 Kislev

Rabbi Dayan Moshe
Harrari, a Gadol from
Aram Tzova

12 Kislev

Rabbi Shlomo Luria,
the Maharshal

13 Kislev

Rabbi David Shalosh

14 Kislev

Rabbi Mattiyah Garji,
author of *Oneg Shabbat*

15 Kislev

Rabbi Yehuda HaNassi





PARSHAH PEARLS

Inspiring Reflections

When Tzaddikim Receive Prophecy in a Dream

“He encountered the place and spent the night there because the sun had set” (*Bereishit* 28:11).

The Midrash says that the words “because the sun had set” teach us that Hashem made the sun set before its time, in order to speak with Yaakov privately.

The Midrash explains this using the *mashal* of a king’s beloved friend who comes to visit him on occasion. Whenever he arrives the king says, “Turn off the lights, extinguish the lamps, for I wish to speak with my beloved friend privately.” So too, Hashem made the sun set before its time so as to speak to Yaakov privately.

Rabbi Shmuel Florantine of Saloniki, in his *sefer Minchat Shmuel*, points out the following difficulty. On the verse, “And G-d came to Avimelech in a dream by night,” the Midrash says that Hashem specially reveals Himself to the nations by night, as it says, “G-d came to Balaam at night.” We also find with Lavan that Hashem came to him in a dream by night. But to the Jewish prophets Hashem reveals Himself by day, as it says, “Hashem appeared to him in the plains of Mamrei while he was sitting at the entrance of the tent in the heat of the day.” And there are other examples. So why does the above Midrash say that Hashem made the sun set so as to speak to Yaakov privately (at night)?

He answers according to the Moharash Yaffe, who says that prophecy by day comes only to a prophet who is accustomed to Hashem speaking to him, while to a prophet who is not yet accustomed to prophecy, Hashem only reveals Himself at night. This explanation fits with the precise wording of the Midrash, “It can be compared to the king’s beloved friend who comes to visit him *on occasion*.”

Let us Agree in Advance

“Then Lavan said to Yaakov, Just because you are my relative, should you serve me for nothing?” (*Bereishit* 29:15).

The Gemara (*Chulin* 127a) quotes the *Amora* Rav Gidal, who offered some advice for life in the name of Rav: “If someone from the town of Neresh kisses you, count your teeth to check that he didn’t steal one of them. If someone from the town of Nahar Pekod accompanies you, it is because he covets your clothes and wishes to steal them from you. If someone from Pompadita accompanies you, change your place of lodging because he plans to rob you.”

The Chatam Sofer uses this Gemara to explain the verse, “He recounted to Lavan all these events.” Yaakov told Lavan that he “stole” the blessings from Eisav and that is why Elifaz stole everything from him. When Lavan heard that Yaakov also knows how to steal, he said these words, “Just because you are my relative”; we are really brothers.

The Chatam Sofer adds that Lavan was saying, “Just because you are my relative,” in wonder, implying, “You are a thief just like me and you served me for nothing! You will surely still steal from me at some opportunity.” The Gemara says that a thief has hidden intentions as to how to cheat and steal. If so, “Tell me:

What are your wages” — let us come to an agreement in advance regarding the amount I will pay you, but don’t steal from me.”



FROM THE TREASURY

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

Eisav Understood the Torah’s Value

Yaakov Avinu rose to a level so lofty that he merited being the pillar of the holy Torah which upholds the world, and his image was engraved in the Throne of Glory.

Let us separate between the holy and the profane, between the pure and the impure, and focus on Eisav the *rasha*, brother of Yaakov Avinu, who was the exact opposite. He was despised by Hashem and by mankind too. Hashem hated him as it says (*Malachi* 1:2-3), “Yet I loved Yaakov. But I hated Eisav”. There was not one sin that he did not transgress, whether through immorality or theft. He also denied Hashem’s existence¹ and did not believe in the resurrection of the dead.

We should not mistakenly think that Eisav did not recognize the greatness and importance of Torah. He certainly understood the great value of the Living Torah of G-d, but it was hard for him to abstain and distance himself from the temptations of This World, for he lacked the willpower to avoid them. We can bring a proof for the fact that Eisav was aware of the greatness of Torah from the following *Chazal* (*Rashi Bereishit* 29:11): Eisav ordered his son Elifaz to ambush Yaakov and kill him. Elifaz pursued and found Yaakov, but, having been raised by Yitzchak and having studied Torah with Yaakov, he could not bring himself to kill. He asked Yaakov, “What about my father’s command?” Yaakov told him that by taking away all his wealth and thus impoverishing him it would be considered as if he complied with Eisav’s order, for the Sages say that a poor person is tantamount to a dead man.

It seems very strange that Eisav the *rasha* should agree that his son Elifaz study Torah with Yaakov. Did he not hate the Torah and those who study it?

But from here we see the contrary: Eisav knew and recognized the great value and importance of Torah. He wanted his son to follow in its ways and merit absorbing the holiness of Yaakov so that he too should become a *talmid chacham* like him. However, Eisav himself did not want to cleave to the Torah, he wished to continue his wicked ways and corrupt himself with the temptations of This World. He preferred to live a life of abandonment and debauchery; when he saw the truth in front of his eyes, he did not agree to repent on any account. And so he persisted with his rebelliousness and insubordination, adding impurity to his already impure state.



WALKING IN THEIR WAYS

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

Few in Place of Many

Mr. David Sitbon of Paris has a son, Yochanan, who during his childhood became ill with leukemia. He lay in critical condition, hovering between life and death.

During that time, a dinner was arranged in order to raise funds for the poor for their upcoming Pesach needs. Approximately four hundred people were invited. Unfortunately, since a football game was scheduled for the same night, only forty people showed up at the dinner. At first, the organizers, myself included, felt terribly despondent. But we immediately reinforced our faith in Hashem. Given how hard we had worked to make this event, Hashem would surely grant it success.

Suddenly, Mr. Sitbon entered with another twenty people. The hall now contained sixty people who merited hearing *divrei Torah*. Occasionally, we would cast a glance at Mr. Sitbon's downcast face and be filled with pity, thinking of his son lying deathly ill in the hospital.

Suddenly, I stood up and declared, "We are obligated to help those in need, on whose behalf we have gathered here today. Everyone should donate according to his means. With Hashem's help, this mitzvah will be a merit for the child, Yochanan Sitbon, and Hashem will heal him completely! This mitzvah will certainly cause a commotion on High, for a mere sixty people are willingly undertaking the task originally expected of four hundred. Hashem will surely affect miracles and in one year's time, we will meet once again in this venue, together with the child, hale and hearty!"

Everyone was deeply moved by my words. From only sixty people, we managed to raise double what we had anticipated from four hundred!

I could not attend the dinner the following year, on account of my son's birth, Rabbi Michael Yosef Alexander. But the dinner was graced by the presence of the completely healthy Yochanan Sitbon.

Today, he is Baruch Hashem happily married and the father of five children, may they increase in number. May Hashem continue to grant him the merit of Torah and good deeds.

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Since he engaged in it with all his strength and it was more important to him than anything else, he did not wish to cease its study even to pray.

But now that he arrived in a place and the sun set, he felt tiredness and wished to rest a bit after fourteen years of not sleeping. But then he thought to himself that if he ceases from the toil of Torah for a moment to rest, the time has come to also engage himself in prayer. Additionally, the circumstances had changed: he was now going, at the command of his father Yitzchak, to find his marriage partner. Therefore, particularly at this time when Yaakov went to rest and stopped learning for some time, he established the evening prayer.

Now we can understand why the evening prayer is voluntary. Yaakov Avinu's main essence and occupation was the holy Torah alone, and for this reason he did not engage in prayer; he was exempt. Only on that particular night when the sun set for him and he rested somewhat from the Torah (without being at fault for this) did Yaakov open his mouth in prayer. But this was only temporary – the holy Torah was Yaakov's main occupation, not prayer.



WORDS OF THE SAGES

A lesson from a 'Beetle'

When Yaakov Avinu married Leah it says, "And it was, in the morning, that behold it was Leah!" (*Bereishit* 29:25). Rashi explains the words "in the morning": At night Yaakov did not realize it was Leah because he had given Rachel signs and Leah performed those signs. This was because when Rachel saw that Leah was being given to Yaakov in her place, she said, 'Now my sister will be shamed,' so she revealed those signs to Leah.

All the commentaries point out Rachel's singular attribute of forgoing for the sake of her sister Leah. And this was not just a one-off act, but actually a long-term concession. Throughout her married life with Yaakov, Rachel acted benevolently to Leah, giving her the feeling that she performed an act of kindness by marrying Yaakov before her. And even when Leah taunted her, Rachel kept quiet and didn't say anything.

Rabbi Shalom Shwadron *zt"l* explains why Rachel's trial was so valuable, so much so that at the time of the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash and the exile it was her memory and merit that ascended before Hashem to redeem His children from exile. We can ask, why were Rachel's trials greater than those of the Avot, which were huge and difficult trials? Why were they not sufficient to take Am Yisrael out of exile?

The reason is because the trials of the Avot were limited in time; they took place for a certain period and then ended. Rachel's challenge, on the other hand, was continuous, it lasted throughout her life, yet she constantly prevailed in silence and did not say anything! This is a form of strength that is unequalled! This fortitude afforded her the eternal merit of being the one in whose merit Hashem will wish to redeem His children.

The Admor, Rabbi Ahron of Belz *zt"l*, once had to travel to a brit milah. His attendant showed up with a small car called a "Beetle" to take him to the brit.

The Admor asked in surprise, "How does one get into such a small car?" And the reply was, "One has to bend down a bit."

The Admor bent down, somehow crawled inside and the car set out on its way.

The Admor related, "I learnt a great lesson from this: If you wish to get ahead, you must bend."

This was Shlomo Hamelech's intention in saying (*Mishlei* 25:15), "A soft tongue breaks strong anger." With a soft tongue, with bending and forgoing, one can achieve the best results.

a NOVEL LOOK AT THE PARSHA



Bitachon brought him Wealth

In the historical meeting between the deceitful Lavan and Yaakov Avinu, Yaakov declares, “G-d saw my wretchedness and the toil of my hands, so He admonished you last night.” Rabbeinu Bachaye explains, “He admonished you last night’ – that you should not kill me. If so, the merit of the toil of his hands saved him from being killed and the merit of his fear of G-d saved his money.”

The Maharal rules in his *sefer Derech Chaim* (based on the Mishna at the end of the first chapter in *Avot*) that Hashem Yitbarach provides everyone with an appropriate portion, and no one can take what has been allocated for another, only what Hashem has decided for each person.

The Gate of Bitachon

Rabbi Gamliel Hakohen Rabinowitz *shlit”a* relates the following story that he personally heard from the hero of the tale, who was a *ba’al teshuva* who married an American converted Jewess. Her non-Jewish father was an American tycoon and his legendary wealth was valued at tens of billions.

Due to his exceptional wealth, he enjoyed life to its fullest and indulged in all of the futile pleasures of This World. Word had it that his rich wife spent over a thousand dollars on her smallest purchase ...

Their dear daughter, whose soul was seemingly hewn from a high and lofty place, greatly despised and detested these futile pleasures. The chase after animalistic enjoyment did not leave her with anything of substance or significance in life, and so she searched for the true purpose of life that would afford her genuine meaning. At the end of a long journey, with Hashem’s kindness, her soul found the holy Jewish religion and she converted according to law, while discarding all the exceptional wealth and worldly pleasures of her parent’s home. Her parents were extremely insulted and disowned her completely. They no longer wished to consider her as their daughter.

Now she was free to devote herself entirely to striving spiritually in Torah, prayer and mitzvah observance with the appropriate holiness, as was her sincere wish.

She eventually married a dear young

man, the *ba’al teshuva* mentioned at the beginning of the story. Of course, she did not receive any assistance from her wealthy parents, not even one cent. And so she began her new life with her *chatan* with absolutely nothing. Through the generosity of our fellow Jews, they established their home in a small, simple apartment, and rejoiced in their spiritual lot of Torah and mitzvah observance with joy and embellishment.

After several years of marriage, when they had already been blessed with several small children, supporting their growing family became a great challenge. Whatever they tried was met with disappointment and bitter losses.

But our dear *ba’al teshuva* did not despair, G-d forbid. Rather, he fortified himself with observing Torah and mitzvot with joy. On the advice of one of his friends, he began studying the *sefer Chovat Halevavot* and became attached to it with all the fibers of his soul. Since he was struggling financially, his friend suggested that he study the section in *Chovat Halevavot* called *Sha’ar Habitachon*, which details at great length the laws of *bitachon* (faith) and *hishtadlut* (appropriate effort) concerning livelihood. Indeed, during this trying time this *sefer* was their constant companion, and he encouraged himself and his wife not to lose hope in the Rock of the World, G-d forbid, who sustains, provides, and nourishes every single creature, from the horns of a *re’em* to the eggs of lice.

In this way, the couple endured poverty over a long period of time, but with an overriding feeling of happiness and tranquility. They lived modestly and simply, constantly fortifying their great trust in Hashem’s kindness. Their way of life and exceptional determination made a great impression in Heaven. After withstanding this difficult test with fortitude and strength, without ever becoming angry or complaining about their difficult situation, Heaven decreed that the time had come to redeem them from trouble to relief!

One evening the husband had an idea. “I have some experience in real-estate; maybe I should try my luck in this profession?” From thought to deed, he turned to several of his friends who were business owners, and inquired whether they had any good

business deals to offer him. Indeed, one of his friends was happy to suggest a “deal” that had been “stuck” for several years, with no interested buyer. The building in question was an enormous, prestigious building in one of the expensive areas in the large business center in Manhattan, valued at 40 million dollars. His friend said, “Show us your professionalism by finding a suitable, honest buyer for this prominent deal, and you will be rewarded well!”

With not much choice he decided to try his luck with this huge deal. He began with a small advert in one of the local newspapers, offering several details about the building in question: its location, price, and immediate entry after payment.

Perusing the Notice Due to Boredom

One wealthy American non-Jew sat sprawled out on an easy chair, relaxing in his favorite lounge after a day full of recreational sports. While sipping a drink he noticed a section of the daily newspaper lying on the ground, and out of curiosity and boredom, picked it up and began leafing through it. Suddenly, his eyes caught hold of a small, side advert, concerning a big, prestigious building that was being offered for sale. The offer appealed to him! It seemed like a most lucrative deal, and right then and there he called the number listed in the advert.

The fresh real estate agent was amazed at the quick response to his small advert. After exchanging several details, it turned out that the man in question was a serious buyer prepared to hand over the entire sum immediately!

A few days passed and the deal of a lifetime was set in motion. Our acquaintance earned a huge fortune in one fell swoop! He received a broker’s fee of one and a half percent from each side, which together amounted to one million, two hundred thousand dollars!

This considerable sum was only his beginning in this industry. From then on, his reputation grew sevenfold and today he is one of the biggest real estate dealers in New York. In the shortest time, with Hashem’s blessing, they became very wealthy, as it says (*Tehillim* 84:6), “Praiseworthy is the man whose strength is in You.”