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Vayetze | Evening Prayers Illuminate the Darkness



MESILOT

Pathways to the Soul

illuminating teachings and insights on the weekly Parsha
of **Rabbi Yoram Michael Abargel Zt"l**

From the weekly lessons of his son
Rabbi Yisrael Abargel Shlita

פרשת ויצא | אנגליה

...PATHWAYS TO THE SOUL...

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500 Frank W Burr Blvd Suite 47
Teaneck, NJ 07666



en@h-l.org.il



www.hameir-laarets.org.il/en



HaKatzir 666, Netivot, Israel



(954) 800-6526



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Parshat Vayetze

Saved from the Fire

Rabbi Mordechai Gerlitz recounted the following story:¹

In Transylvania, the illustrious Panet family of Dej stood at the forefront of those who kept Jewish life vibrant and spread the warm light of Chassidut. The patriarch, Rabbi Yechezkel Panet—author of *Mareh Yechezkel* and beloved disciple of Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Rimanov—served as chief rabbi of Siebenbürgen. After him came his son, Rabbi Menachem Mendel, his grandson Rabbi Moshe, and later generations, each guiding the Jews of Dej while their influence reached communities far beyond the city.

Rabbi Moshe regularly toured the region to strengthen Torah observance and Chassidic spirit. On one such visit, he spent several days in Bistritz, teaching, counseling,

and rekindling hearts. When his work there was done, he prepared to return home and instructed his faithful attendant, Reb Hirsch, to buy two evening train tickets to Dej.

A moment later, though, the rabbi called him back.

"Reb Hirsch, please hire a comfortable carriage for the journey."

The attendant was stunned. "A carriage? Rebbe, the train is fast and smooth, three hours, and only eighteen crowns. A carriage costs fifty, rattles all night, and takes twice as long!"

Rabbi Moshe listened but did not waver. "This time," he said quietly, "we travel by carriage."

Hirsch shrugged, found a driver, and the wagon rolled out after

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nightfall. The rabbi read by lantern light, pausing now and then to share a glowing Torah insight; the wheels groaned over rough roads, and the coachman hummed folk tunes, unhurried—dawn would see them in Dej, so why rush?

Well before sunrise, the carriage skirted the village of Retyag, some ten kilometers from home. Suddenly, the driver stiffened, sniffed, and, without warning, lashed the horses into a furious gallop. The rabbi and Hirsch lurched in their seats and slid open the front window.

“What happened?” they cried.

“Smoke!” the coachman shouted above the wind. “There’s a fire in Retyag. Years ago, I passed here when there happened to be such a blaze, and the villagers stopped every wagon for water. I’m fleeing before they delay the Rebbe.”

Rabbi Moshe’s eyes flashed. “Flee? On my account, you would refuse to help them? Turn back at once—‘*When a mitzvah comes to your hand, do not let it sour.*’ Lives may be in danger!”

The driver tried a meek protest, but a single glance from the rabbi sufficed. He wheeled the team around, and as the carriage climbed the hill, the eastern sky glowed blood-red, sparks shooting into the dark night. “Faster!” the rabbi urged. “Heaven may have assigned us a task.”

They arrived to find a large house engulfed in flames. Providentially, an open field ringed the building, so the rest of the village stood at a safe distance, but the house itself was doomed. Villagers circled helplessly, having evacuated the occupants and resigned themselves to watch it burn.

The tzaddik jumped from the wagon. “What can still be saved?” he asked.

“Nothing, Rebbe,” came the despairing answer. “Everyone is out—the fire is too strong.”

Rabbi Moshe scanned the structure. Amid shattered glass and roaring flame, two windows remained shuttered. He pointed. “Whose rooms are those?”

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A collective cry rose. "Oy! Reb Shmaya, the scholar, and his wife!" No one had seen them escape; perhaps, people whispered, they had slipped out earlier—no one was sure. Panic spread.

Reb Hirsch did not wait. He clambered onto the sill, forced the shutters open, and vanished into smoke. A heartbeat later, his voice rang out, raw with fear: "They're both here—unconscious!"

Flames were already licking the roof beams above. Two strong villagers hoisted themselves through the opening. Working by feel, they dragged out the frail couple, passed them to helping hands below, and leaped free just as a beam collapsed behind them. Outside, Rabbi Moshe directed efforts to revive the victims. Cold water, fresh air, gentle shaking—and slowly, color returned to their cheeks, weak breaths turned steady, and at last, their eyes opened. Minutes—no more—had separated them from a certain death.

Only when it was certain that no Jewish soul remained in

danger did the rabbi agree to leave. The horses, spent from their wild ride, plodded the last stretch. At sunrise, they reached Dej; without pausing at home, the rabbi went straight to the study hall for *Shacharit*. When the prayers ended, Hirsch could no longer contain himself. Folding the rabbi's *tallit* and *tefillin*, he burst out:

"Had the Rebbe taken the train, who would have rescued Reb Shmaya and his wife? They would have suffocated and burned, Heaven forbid!"

Word spread instantly. Within minutes, groups of worshippers buzzed like bees, speaking of the open miracle and *ruach hakodesh*. Rabbi Moshe, noticing the commotion, approached and listened. A shadow of displeasure crossed his face.

"Friends," he said firmly, "let me explain so your thoughts will not wander. When it was time to leave Bistritz, the notion of riding by carriage slipped into my mind. I argued against this idea with myself—it is slower, costlier, and

Parshat Vayetze - The Power of Pure Thought

less comfortable—why consider it? Yet the thought would not leave. An idea without reason does not rise in a mind trained to reason. I concluded that Heaven must be nudging me, and so I followed that impulse. Nothing more."

With that, he nodded to the still-amazed congregation and returned home, grateful that Providence had allowed him—through one illogical decision—to save two precious Jewish lives.

The Power of Pure Thought

In the book *Pe'ulat HaTzadik* (section 405) by Rabbi Eliezer Shlomo Shick of blessed memory, the following is recorded:

On one occasion, the holy Rabbi Nachman of Breslov זצ"ל was sitting together with his Chassidim, and he spoke with them about the great virtue of one who is worthy to pour out his conversation and prayer before G-d with sincerity and simplicity, just as a son speaks with his father.

He said: "It is very good when someone can pour out his heart before G-d, blessed be He, with mercy and supplication—like a child cajoling his father. For are

we not His children? As He Himself testified and wrote in His eternal Torah for all time: '*You are children to G-d your G-d*' (Deuteronomy 14:1).

"Therefore, it is very good for a person to articulate all his thoughts and pain before G-d like a son complaining to his father with gentle, compassionate words.

"And even if it seems to a person that, based on his deeds, he is not behaving like a son before G-d, nevertheless, he must know that his imaginary thoughts do not change the reality! We are His children, blessed be He, and we remain His children forever!²

...*~* **Wellsprings of Wisdom** *~*...

2. The righteous Rabbi Aryeh Levin זצ"ל was blessed him with an exceptionally great love for the Jewish people.

There was a certain man whom Rabbi Aryeh worked very hard to draw close to the path of Torah and mitzvot with love

Parshat Vayetze - The Power of Pure Thought

“When a Jew manages to remain steadfast, and each time finds the

strength to lift his eyes to Heaven and tell the Holy One, blessed be

~ Wellsprings of Wisdom ~

and affection. Initially, this man was very far from observing Torah and mitzvot. But from the time he met Rabbi Aryeh and was enchanted by the abundance of love that Rabbi Aryeh radiated to everyone, the man decided to repent completely and even began wearing a large kippah on his head.

However, after some time, the man's wife started to ridicule him for his new path; she told him that it made him look very old and ugly, and because of her words, his spirit fell and weakened, and he stopped wearing a kippah.

One day, this man was walking down a street in Jerusalem, and suddenly, he saw from afar that Rabbi Aryeh was also walking on that street, coming toward him. But since he had no kippah on his head, the man was embarrassed to meet Rabbi Aryeh like that. So he immediately darted across the road and fled into a side street.

However, just as the man had spotted Rabbi Aryeh from a distance, Rabbi Aryeh had spotted him. When Rabbi Aryeh saw that the man crossed to the other street, the rabbi crossed to that street as well — because he loved him so much and very much wanted to meet him. When the man saw that Rabbi Aryeh also crossed over, he could no longer bear to dodge and flee from Rabbi Aryeh again, and he started walking toward him.

When they came face to face, Rabbi Aryeh 'jumped' on the man and hugged him with love and affection, as was his holy custom, and said to him: 'What a great privilege has fallen in my lot to meet you! How much joy I have in my heart every time I see you.'

Rabbi Aryeh then added: 'I noticed that you were avoiding me and running away from me. I was worried that perhaps you are upset with me. If G-d forbid, I did not treat you with the proper respect, or perhaps I even hurt you unintentionally — right now, I ask from the depths of my heart that you forgive me!'

The man was shaken upon hearing Rabbi Aryeh's words. 'G-d forbid, Rabbi Aryeh! I adore you with all my heart, and you never wronged me — nor anyone else in the world! I'm not angry at all. It's just that I simply didn't have a kippah on my head, and I was embarrassed to be seen by you in such a state.'

Rabbi Aryeh replied to him with a bit of humor: 'As you can see, my dear friend, I am a very short man. Because of that, I can only see up to people's hearts — but I cannot see above their heads since most people are much taller than me. So, whenever I meet you, I only look at your heart — and I see that it is good and pure. As for your head, I don't look at it at all' (Imrei Noam, Metzora, Maamer II).

He, all the anguish of his heart — to plead and beg Him to help and bring him close with compassion...

“Then such a person merits that his thoughts become refined and purified. He merits to cleave completely to G-d, and all his thoughts and senses cling only to G-d. G-d's Name is constantly before his eyes — and such a person is worthy that G-d Himself speaks with him. Consequently, everything that enters his mind, he can know with certainty, is from G-d.

“For due to his great habit of speaking with G-d constantly, he merits to ascend from the world of speech to the world of thought. At that point, his mind becomes united with G-d. And whatever enters his mind are *announcements from Above* that are being revealed to him from Heaven.”

Rabbi Nachman, of blessed memory, continued and told the following story:

“My grandfather, the holy Rabbi Nachman Horodenker ZY”A, once traveled by ship. During the voyage, their food ran out, and they hadn't eaten for

several days until they reached a certain city. There were no Jews there — only Arabs.

“The passengers disembarked from the ship, famished, and went to search for food. Rabbi Nachman stayed aside and waited. Presently, an Arab approached him and invited him to eat.

“Rabbi Nachman washed his hands and recited the blessing of *Hamotzi* (on bread). But before he began to eat, the verse came to his mind: *'Do not eat the bread of one who has an evil eye'* (Proverbs 23:6). And our thoughts are not empty things at all” — (Rabbi Nachman said as he told this story) — “*so I did not know what to do, for I had already recited the Hamotzi blessing. Nevertheless, I thought that it would be best for me not to eat at all because of that thought...*

“Afterwards, another verse came to my mind: *'I have commanded the ravens to feed you'* (I Kings 17:4) — and then I ate and was revived.”

We now move on to the discussion of this week's Torah portion...

Seventeen Days of Walking

Last week, we learned the following:

In the year 2108, from Creation, Jacob, our forefather, was born. From the moment he was born, Jacob's heart was drawn to studying the holy Torah — drawn to merit and to cling to the essence and spirituality of the holy source from which the Torah descends.

Therefore, he began learning with absolute immersion, with extraordinary diligence,³ and with awe-inspiring focus... And thus, 63 years passed him by.

Then, when his father Isaac was 123 years old, Isaac called

his elder son, Esau, and asked him to prepare a sumptuous meal so that after Isaac ate, he would bless him.

The rest of the story is known: Jacob succeeded in receiving that blessing in Esau's place, and Esau decided to kill him.

Isaac and Rebecca called Jacob and commanded him to go to Haran and take a wife there. Jacob obeyed his parents' voice and set out on the journey, as it is written: *“Jacob left Beersheba and went toward Haran”* (Genesis 28:10).⁴

Jacob left the city of Beersheba, the city where his

~ Wellsprings of Wisdom ~

3. It was the habit of Rabbi Baruch Mordechai Ezrachi ל"צז to say: “There are those who are diligent in Torah study but not immersed, and there are those immersed but not diligent. The main thing is immersion — but it needs to be accompanied by diligence !”

4. Jacob, our forefather, lived for 63 years in an inner world that was pure and radiant. In this world, he found all

of his emotional and spiritual needs — a world full of light, delight, and vitality !

Yet now he understood that he was compelled to leave his inner world and begin to carry out his primary mission in the outside world, *“For Jacob was chosen by G-d, Israel as His treasure”* (Psalms 135:4) ! Jacob, our forefather, left his inner world and went to Haran — to occupy himself with material, physical matters.

Parshat Vayetze - Seventeen Days of Walking

father Isaac lived, and instead of heading directly to Haran, he went to the academy of Shem and Eber and hid himself there among the pages of holy study — with tremendous toil, extraordinary persistence, shedding all physicality and forgetting about all of his surroundings...

After fourteen years — when Jacob was 77 years old — he finally arose and left the study house and began to stride toward Haran.

Jacob, our forefather, departed from Beersheba,⁵ ascended from the Negev, crossed the Judean Desert, passed through Samaria, the Beit She'an Valley, and the Lower Galilee, ascended to the

Golan Heights, and reached all the way to Haran...

It took seventeen days of walking, and at the end of a long and exhausting journey, Jacob finally arrived at Haran. There, at the very threshold of Haran, a thought suddenly sprang to his mind: "Is it possible that I passed a place where my forefathers prayed, and I did not pray there?!"

As soon as the thought popped into his head, he did not consider the hardship of the road or the grueling trek of seventeen days' journey. He immediately turned around and set out to go back...

Then G-d performed a miracle for him: The road contracted before

...*~* **Wellsprings of Wisdom** *~*...

5. As it is written: "*And Jacob left Beersheba and went toward Haran*" (Genesis 28:10).

Rabbi Yitzchak Zev Soloveitchik ZY" A (the Brisker Rav) explained (*Reshimot Talmidim* from Maran HaGriz, Parshat Vayetze):

The Torah uses two verbs, "left" and "went," both describing the same act.

We can explain it like this: Isaac, his father, told him to go take a wife, while

Rebecca, his mother, commanded him to flee from his brother Esau.

Jacob fulfilled both directives — he observed the mitzvah of honoring his father and the mitzvah of honoring his mother.

Thus, the verse says: "Vayetze" ("he left") — hurriedly, as one flees, referring to escaping from Esau.

"Vayelech" ("he went") — traveling to take a wife, as his father had commanded.

Parshat Vayetze - A Broken Heart

him (so that the return journey was miraculously shortened), and in the blink of an eye, he arrived at Beit El.

But — we have gotten ahead of ourselves. Let us return to the beginning...

A Broken Heart

Our parasha begins with the verse: “*Jacob left Beersheba and went toward Haran*” (Genesis 28:10).⁶ We are accustomed to reading these words “Jacob left” and think to ourselves, “Well, it’s not a big deal; we, too, sometimes leave our hometown and travel to another country...”

However, when you delve a bit into these words “Jacob left,” you see that they contain mountains of pain and depths of sorrow...

The house of his father, Isaac, was, at that time, a spiritual beacon that illuminated the entire world. Anyone who wished to draw close to the Creator of the Universe needed only to come and hear Isaac’s prayer!

And Jacob did not waste his time; under the tutelage and guidance of his father, Jacob grew and ascended, climbing to exalted and lofty spiritual heights.

And now, he was required to leave it all — to abandon the halls of wisdom and knowledge — and go build his home in an impure and coarse environment! The very thought of it made him shudder.

Jacob set out on his way *toward Haran*. On his way, “*he encountered the place*” (Genesis 28:11). The Midrash says (Bereishit Rabbah 68:10): “‘And he encountered the place’ — He intended to pass by, but the whole world became like a wall before him!”

~ Wellsprings of Wisdom ~

6. Rashi raises a question on this verse: “It needed only to write ‘and he went to Haran.’ So why mention his leaving? Rather, it teaches that the departure of a righteous person from a place makes an

impression. For at the time a righteous person is in a city, he is its glory, he is its splendor, he is its beauty. When he leaves, its glory has gone, its splendor has gone, its beauty has gone...”

Parshat Vayetze - The Reward of Perseverance

His future seemed dark to him. Not a single ray of light pierced the impenetrable wall standing in front of him. Jacob's heart broke into pieces, crumbling into countless fragments... He lifted his eyes heavenward, and a bitter thought passed through his mind: *I am lost! I have lost this world and the next...*

An awful, terrible darkness enveloped him; his heart pounded with bitterness and pain.

We have no words to describe the depth of the brokenness that Jacob felt. But

we may attempt to imagine his feelings based on the words of the Sfat Emet of Gur, who described that moment and said that Jacob, our forefather, felt on that day all of the darkness that all of his descendants would, in the future, endure throughout all the generations until the very last day!⁷

And Jacob — seeing how dire his plight was — put forth his entire being and leaned solely upon his holy faith in G-d,⁸ *“And Your faith at nights”* (Psalms 92:3)!

The Reward of Perseverance

Jacob, our forefather, succeeded in withstanding the test. He found the strength to strengthen himself

and rise above the snare that the dark reality had cast at his feet. And by doing so, he merited greatly!

❧ Wellsprings of Wisdom ❧

7. The Sfat Emet explains (Parshat Vayetze 5635 [1874]):

"And all of this was a preparation for his descendants. For Jacob, our forefather traversed all of these places so that afterward, the Children of Israel would be able to follow in his footsteps, and there is no place — no hidden or dark place — for the Children of

Israel that Jacob did not pave the way through!"

8. In the words of the Midrash (Bereishit Rabbah 68:2):

He (Jacob) said: Will I lose my hope in my Creator?! Heaven forbid! I will not lose my hope in my Creator! Rather, “My help is from G-d, Maker of heaven and earth” (Psalms 121:2)!

Parshat Vayetze - The Reward of Perseverance

We will expand upon this a bit.

Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Kosov ZY”A (of saintly memory) wrote (in *Ahavat Shalom*, beginning of Parshat Vayetze):

Our parasha begins with the verse: “*Jacob left Beersheba and went toward Haran*” (Genesis 28:10). It is written in *Kanfei Yonah* (Vol. IV, §69) that the initial letters of this verse (ויצא יעקב מבאר שבע וילך חרנה) have the numerical value of 370, implying that Jacob at that moment merited the famed 370 spiritual lights.

To understand why, we must go back to the sixth day of Creation.

On the sixth day of Creation, the Holy One blessed be He created Adam and placed him in the Garden of Eden — a place where G-dliness shone palpably.

The holy Shelah (Rabbi Isaiah Horowitz) wrote (*Shnei Luchot HaBrit*, Parshat Vayikra, Torah Ohr §1) that at that time, all places, all souls, and all times were equal. Therefore, every

person, in every place and at every time, could find G-dliness.

But after Adam sinned by eating from the Tree of Knowledge, the lights and vessels were shattered, and everything fell into the realm of the unholy shells and external forces (the *kelipot*).

In the aftermath of that state, the reality of G-d's presence became hidden from human beings. From then on, one could regain that original illumination only by creating a reality of permanence (*kvi'ut*). Such a reality was created in perfection in the Holy Temple:

In our world, we have three dimensions, which are *world* (space), *year* (time), and *soul* (person). In all three of these dimensions, a fixed, permanent reality had to be established. And as stated, in the Holy Temple this was achieved:

Fixed Place — that is the Holy Temple, chosen above all other places.

Fixed Soul — that is the priest performing the service (and not every priest merits this; a blemished priest may not serve (see Leviticus 21:17)).

Parshat Vayetze - The Reward of Perseverance

Fixed Time — not all times are equal, as the verse says: “*He shall not come at all times into the Holy [Place]*” (Leviticus 16:2). That is, the morning Tamid offering is in the morning, and the afternoon Tamid in the late afternoon.

But before the sin, all things in the world were equal.⁹

Likewise, every person — according to how he rectifies these three dimensions — merits, to the extent of his service, for G-dliness to rest upon him.

It is especially during prayer that a person must (by way of establishing permanence) rectify these three dimensions. As our Sages said (Berachot 6b): “Whoever fixes a place for his prayer, the G-d of Abraham helps him.” The words “fixes a place” hint that one must fix **all three** of the aforementioned aspects —

For “*Whoever fixes* (haKove'a)” hints at the aspect of *soul*, i.e., the person, following the verse: “*He will seize the life from those who seize others*” (Proverbs 22:23) — the term *kov* (seize) relates to the soul (individual).

“*A place*” refers to the concept of *world* (space).

“*For his prayer*” refers to *time*, for each prayer has its allotted time.

Thus, when a person fixes (rectifies) these three aspects, then “*the G-d of Abraham helps him.*”

Now, when Jacob “*encountered the place,*” his heart had been shattered to bits. But even so, he mustered the strength to stand in prayer before G-d. In that prayer, he poured out before G-d all the feelings of his heart — he told Him, as one tells one's father,

—*~* Wellsprings of Wisdom *~*—

9. In truth, if we contemplate the ultimate essence of the matter, reason dictates that all aspects of creation should be equal. For relative to G-d — may His Name be blessed — there is no change or variation, on a similar note as the verse

states: “*I, G-d, have not changed*” (Malachi 3:6). But after the sin, everything descended downward in the mystery of the “shattering” (of the vessels), as is known (see *Etz Chaim*, Shaar 9, Chapter 6 — Second Edition).

Parshat Vayetze - The Reward of Perseverance

about the pain and anxiety, the loneliness and fears...

The words of prayer burst from his lips with force and heat, like red-hot pokers and flaming torches...

And Above, in the highest heavens, a light was ignited — new lights appeared ! These lights cascaded down into the depths of Jacob's soul and created within him a new space of permanence. His soul attained a new and higher level of *kvi'ut* (permanence).

In addition, he merited that this prayer of his took place on Mount Moriah (which at that moment 'traveled' and came to *Beit El*), for that is the fixed place for prayer for all generations.

Because of these two perfections of person and place, Jacob understood that this time was an auspicious time for prayer (for until then, only two prayers — morning and afternoon — had been established). Thus, he merited to establish permanence in time as well, establishing the evening prayers.

And since he succeeded in rectifying all three dimensions, he merited to unite in perfect unison with the Creator, in the secret of the 370 lights, and he instituted the evening *Arvit* prayer — which is related to the secret of the most lofty 310 divine lights...¹⁰

Let us pause here for a moment and broaden our discussion...

~ Wellsprings of Wisdom ~

10. Here are the sacred words of the Chiddushei HaRim of Ger ZY”A (*Likkutei HaRim*, Torah, p. 78):

"The prayer that Jacob instituted is called *Pegiah* ('encounter'), as it says '*vayifga baMakom.*' For he established that even when a person is in darkness and hiding of G-d's face, Heaven forbid — when he is unable to draw close to G-d or to pray to Him — nevertheless, by the very fact that the

person knows that he has nowhere else to turn but to G-d, he is compelled to pray to Him. And through this, he can come close, even though he has no idea how at all...

"Therefore, this prayer is called *Pegiah* — from the term *pogea*, meaning to push or press — because even when one has nothing with which to pray, he still presses and implores without any rationale whatsoever.

The Importance of a Fixed Place for Prayer

Our master Maran Rabbi Yosef Karo rules in the Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 90:19) as follows:

"One should establish a fixed place for his prayer and should not change it unless necessary. It is not enough that one designates a synagogue in which to pray; rather, even within the synagogue that he regularly attends, he must have a set place (for prayer)."

The Mishnah Berurah writes there (§59):

"'Establish a place' — for we find with Abraham our forefather that he set a place for his prayer, as it is written: *'Abraham arose*

early in the morning to the place where he had stood before G-d...' (Genesis 19:27)."

By way of further explanation: In the Gemara (Berachot 6b), it is taught in the name of Rabbi Chelbo, quoting Rav Huna: "*Whoever fixes a place for his prayer, the G-d of Abraham is at his aid.*"

Rashi explains: Abraham, our forefather in his lifetime, traveled very much. Every step he took in his life was fraught with trials and challenges — hatred from those around him, persecution, and wars. The pain of childlessness, the trial of poverty. His was a life full of

~ Wellsprings of Wisdom ~

This is what our Sages have said (Berachot 12b): "*Emet Veyatziv*" (True and Firm) *corresponds to the morning prayer, and "Emet Ve'emunah"* (True and Faithful) *corresponds to the evening prayer.*' For in the evening, the time of darkness, the main thing is faith — that a person clings to G-d and believes that the concealment is ultimately only for the good so that he will strengthen himself within the darkness.

Through doing so, there is greater **nachat ruach** (pleasure) to the Holy One, blessed be He, for G-d's intent is not truly to hide Himself from a person.

In fact, this prayer (the evening prayer) accomplishes even more — since the person is aware that he has nothing of his own and that everything is from G-d and for G-d, therefore his intent is not self-serving, and the *Sitra Achra* (evil inclination) cannot distract him!"

Parshat Vayetze - Setting the Clock

events and incidents, like waves of the sea growing stronger and violently crashing down.

Yet despite all that, G-d was always at his aid — helping him to stand firm, not to break and not to retreat! The Gemara reveals that Abraham merited all this because he had a fixed place for his prayer — and whenever he went to pray, he positioned himself in that same place.

Our Sages revealed to us that just as G-d helped Abraham in the merit of the *fixed place* he had for prayer, so too every Jewish man and woman who merit to establish a set place for their prayers¹¹ will merit that G-d will reveal within them special capacities to stand strong against all the troubles of the world!

However, establishing permanence is needed not only in place but also in time...

Setting the Clock

Abraham, our forefather, instituted the Morning Prayer (*Shacharit*); Isaac, our forefather, instituted the Afternoon Prayer (*Mincha*); and Jacob, our forefather, instituted the Evening Prayer (*Arvit*).

Those adept at interpreting hints said that the times of the prayers are hinted by the second letter of the names of their

founders: The second letter of “Avraham” is *Beit*, to indicate that the time of *Shacharit* is boker (morning);

The second letter of “Yitzchak” is *Tzadi*, and the *Mincha* prayer is in the *tzahorayim* (afternoon), and the second letter of “Yaakov” is *Ayin*, and the *Arvit* prayer is in the erev (evening).¹²

~ Wellsprings of Wisdom ~

11. To quote the Mishnah Berurah (ibid.):

“And even when praying in his house, one should establish a place so that the

members of the household will not disturb him.”

12. A traveling *maggid* (preacher) once spent Shabbat in a small town. On his

Parshat Vayetze - Setting the Clock

Since the prayers have fixed times, of course, one must pray them at their proper times. However, a person who has a fixed hour in the day in which he prays has an even greater advantage.

My father, Rabbi Yoram Michael Abergel ZY"A, used to say: "Happy is the person who has a fixed place *and* a fixed time for the three daily prayers — Shacharit, Mincha, and Arvit. 15 And this is the gateway to attaining Divine perception — to be steadfast one's entire life."

The root of every success in life is consistency. The root of all human failures and downfalls is

instability, the very opposite of consistency. A consistent person is a stable person — orderly, organized, deliberate, clear-minded, and precise. Such people can keep the same daily schedule for forty or fifty years without missing a day, an hour, or even a minute.

A distinguished rosh yeshivah once told me: "*Blessed be G-d, for thirty-two years, I have not been late even once to the morning prayer. In our yeshivah, the service begins at seven o'clock, and I arrive at six-fifty-four!*"

At that moment, I said to myself: *If only I could reach such a level of consistency.* His perfectionism struck me as almost

Wellsprings of Wisdom

way to the synagogue in the morning, he saw that many townspeople had already finished praying and were rushing home to make *kiddush*.

At *Mincha* time, he delivered his sermon and said: "It is well known that Abraham our forefather instituted the Morning Prayer, Isaac instituted the Afternoon Prayer, and Jacob instituted the Evening Prayer. There is a mnemonic to remember their times: The second letter of each of their

names — *Beit* (of Avraham) stands for **Boker** (morning), *Tzadi* (of Yitzchak) stands for **Tzahorayim** (afternoon), *Ayin* (of Yaakov) stands for **Erev** (evening).

But who instituted the *Vatikin* prayer (the early sunrise morning prayer service)? I tell you: it was *Lot!* (The second letter of *Lot* is *Vav*, hinting at *Vatikin*.) and the reason that he did so was that he wanted to get home early and make *kiddush* and eat Shabbat delicacies..." (*Chiyucha Shel Torah*, p. 16, by Rabbi Yehuda Greenspan).

Parshat Vayetze - Consistency in Every Avenue of Life

beyond reality — yet even in our generation, there are people who have earned it. Merely having such individuals among us is already a gift. Consistency is one of the strongest safeguards of holiness, and it is a powerful defense against the evil inclination.

We have heard of several righteous men who headed yeshivot and set fixed hours for prayer — a set time the whole year for *Shacharit*, a set time for *Minchah*, a set time for *Ma'ariv*: winter and summer, weekdays and

Sabbaths, times that never change. Even though halachic prayer times shift between summer and winter, they established one fixed clock time for the entire year because they knew a great secret: if the students are to be protected from the evil inclination, from spiritual pitfalls, sudden swings, and dangerous places, they must strive for this wondrous thing called consistency. A fixed place is the ABC of success, and one must be 'fixed' both in place and in time — a regular seat in the synagogue and a regular hour for prayer.

Consistency in Every Avenue of Life

We must recognize that consistency is the root of success; happy and fortunate is the person who has a set daily schedule and knows clearly what he must do each hour: the time to rise, to get organized, to pray, to eat a morning bite, to share the burden with his wife by getting the children ready. If he is a hired employee, he must know the starting time — what we call "punching the clock." From the moment he clocks in, he must understand that he is obligated to

the employer. Nothing external should interrupt during work hours; one must work honestly and faithfully, as Torah law requires. Just as the employer is obligated to pay the worker on time, so too the worker is obligated to his employer.

Sometimes, one meets a person who leaves work in the middle of the day to take care of personal errands. If you gently ask what happened, the answer is: "*The*

Parshat Vayetze - Consistency in Every Avenue of Life

boss is traveling. He doesn't see, so I popped out to handle some things..." Such a person should realize that the money he brings home during those hours is stolen money. It is no different from someone who breaks into a bank and empties a safe or who enters a business and takes what is not his; it is exactly the same — and perhaps worse, for trust was placed in him, and he breached that trust. My father, Rabbi Yoram, once said that food bought with such money could — G-d forbid — plant thoughts of heresy in a child's heart. It is frightening; it has the negative power to shake the very foundations of life.

How is this solved? By a person having an orderly life:

a set time for work, time for home, time to give attention to his wife, an attentive ear to his household, an attentive ear to his dear children — to listen to them, to feel them, to strengthen, gladden, empower, and love them.

Likewise, one must participate regularly in a Torah class and, of course, pray *Minchah* at its time and *Ma'ariv* at its time;¹³ this is a great virtue, a mighty power. Such a fixed time saves a person from all evils. G-d cherishes such people greatly and raises them up, for they are tranquil, deliberate, and composed...

Now, let us return to the *Ma'ariv* service.

...*~* **Wellsprings of Wisdom** *~*...

13. To add further insight:

In Parshat Noach, it says: “*And G-d said to Noah: Come you and all your household into the ark*” (Genesis 7:1).

In the teachings of the Baal Shem Tov (*Ba'al Shem Tov al HaTorah*, Parshat Noach §§15 — 16), it is explained at length that this verse teaches: When a Jewish man or woman stands to pray, they must put their soul into the letters of the prayer.

For the word *teva*-ark means “word.” And when a Jew stands to pray, he must enter into the words with all of his body, his heart, and his thoughts.

When a person is praying or learning Torah, the *malicious waters* seek to overpower him — distracting thoughts and ulterior motives. The only way to escape them is to place all of his thoughts into the letters and words of

Parshat Vayetze - Consistency in Every Avenue of Life

Torah and prayer. By doing so, he hides himself within those letters and words, far away from the malicious waters.

To clarify further: When the soul remains Above in its place, it is at peace — “*He leads me beside still waters*” (Psalms 23:2). But when the soul descends down into this world, it finds itself in a raging sea — chasing livelihood and sustenance... day after day, hour after hour.

The way to escape drowning in the terrible flood of worldly matters is through the wonderful advice: “Come into the ark” — cling to the words of prayer. Every word a person merits to utter from his mouth is an immense rectification in the upper worlds. Every word — every single word — of Torah study is a great privilege.

When a Jew stands in prayer and says, “Shema Yisrael, Hashem Elokeinu, Hashem Echad” (*Hear, O Israel, G-d is our G-d, G-d is One*), he must insert intention into the word. He must understand the meaning of each word. There must be a bond between his speech and his intent.

The Rebbe Rayatz of Lubavitch taught: A person's *dveikut* (attachment) to the words of prayer and the letters of the holy Torah is the greatest instrument for success and advancement in all of the most exalted levels. When a person accustoms himself to meditate pure and proper intentions — and his intention is connected with his action (meaning, his thought and speech are united) — when it comes time to *act*, an enormous impression is left and generates immense joy within him. His prayers make an impact in the upper worlds, and his Torah causes

great gratification Above. Such a person — an entire world can lean on his shoulders.

Dveikut is the key to unlocking all locks. Clinging to the letters of Torah and prayer — this is in the hands of every person. Every Jew, even the simplest, can attain *dveikut* and reach the highest levels. The only question is how serious a person is about it.

Don't think that for true *dveikut*, one must be a great mystic. One must simply be earnest. A person who doesn't get up early in the morning, who doesn't hurry to rise, cannot possibly focus properly in prayer. He comes into prayer flustered; he arrives already overwhelmed.

Our brain has a certain mode of operation, a way, and a system of functioning. To succeed, it must operate correctly and with the proper tools. If someone buys an electrical appliance, before using it, common sense says he should check the basic instructions — the user's manual — to know how to use it. The same with the broad tools that G-d has given us — our mind and our heart: we must learn how to use them.

Therefore, one of the foundations of the Rayatz's teachings was — learning Chassidut before prayer. Why learn Chassidic teachings? Because nothing opens both the mind and the heart together during prayer like spending twenty minutes to a half-hour studying before prayer.

I have known Jews who managed to stick to this routine consistently. I don't

Ma'ariv — The secret of self-nullification

King David sang in his praises: “*Evening, morning, and noon I speak and moan, and He hears my voice*” (Psalms 55:18). The commentators explain that this verse refers to the three daily prayers: *Ma'ariv*, *Shacharit*, and *Minchah*. The Talmud (Berachot 26b) teaches that these prayers were instituted by the Patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The Midrash (Genesis Rabbah 68:9) adds:

Abraham established *Shacharit*, as it says, “*And Abraham arose early in the morning to the place where he had stood before the Lord*” (Genesis 19:27).

Isaac instituted *Minchah*, as it says, “*And Isaac went out to*

converse in the field toward evening” (ibid. 24:63).

Jacob established *Ma'ariv*, as it says, “*And he encountered the place*” (ibid. 28:11).¹⁴

Hundreds of years later, in the times of the Second Temple in Jerusalem, the Men of the Great Assembly fixed the wording of the prayers, and since then, all of Israel prays three times daily.

The *Zohar* (Terumah 129b) states that Abraham and Isaac blazed the trail for all of Israel, so anyone who prays *Shacharit* or *Minchah* follows in their footsteps and achieves those same rectifications. *Ma'ariv*, however, which Jacob instituted, though its

...*~* **Wellsprings of Wisdom** *~*...

know if they would open a Torah book later in the day, but for those few minutes before prayer, they gave their all in these holy Torah books.

Even though they were very simple Jews, they reached very lofty heights.

May G-d so merit us, amen.

14. Regarding Abraham, it uses the term “standing” (*Amidah*) — as it says, “*to the*

place where he stood before G-d” (Genesis 19:27); regarding Isaac, it says “conversation” (*Sichah* — “*Isaac went out to converse in the field,*” Genesis 24:63); and regarding Jacob it says “encounter” (*Pegiah* — “*He encountered the place,*” Genesis 28:11). *Amidah*, *Sichah*, *Pegiah* — the initial letters spell *Shefa* (שׁפּא, “abundance”). For all *shefa* (Heavenly flow) comes to a Jew by virtue of prayer, and especially through the three prayers of each day.

path was opened, cannot be fully rectified by everyone; therefore, one opinion in the Sages (Berachot 27b) holds that *Ma'ariv* is optional.¹⁵ (In practice, however, *Ma'ariv* is obligatory; see Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 235 — 237, where its laws are detailed.)

Why can every person achieve lofty rectifications through *Shacharit* and *Minchah*, yet not necessarily through *Ma'ariv*?

Because the entire essence of *Ma'ariv* is total self-nullification before G-d — utter bittul in every state of the soul, at its highest exaltation or its deepest low. That degree of nullification is exceedingly high, and not everyone can attain it in full; hence, the opinion that *Ma'ariv* is voluntary.

But since halachah rules that *Ma'ariv* is mandatory, power has

been granted to every person — through *Ma'ariv* — to merit and feel, each according to his level, a true sense of nullification before G-d. In our exile, that alone is our great hope.

We quote the holy words of Rabbi Aryeh Tzvi Frumer HY"D (Eretz Tzvi, Vayetze, 5684/1924):

Jacob, at age thirty-six, was commanded to go to Charan. Instead, he diverted to the study hall of Ever and hid there for fourteen years. Yet the Torah hints at none of this. Why? To show that Jacob's Torah study was conducted in such concealment that no created being knew of it — only G-d Himself. As Rabbi Chanoch Henich of Aleksander said, a Jew must learn so discreetly that even the seraphim are unaware. Thus, Jacob remained

— *~ Wellsprings of Wisdom ~* —

15. The holy Zohar says: “*Evening, morning and noon I supplicate and cry aloud, and He hears my voice*” (Psalms 55:18)...

“‘Evening’ — as it is said: ‘*And also a mixed multitude* (erev rav) *went up with them*’ (Exodus 12:38). For all the destructive

forces roam during the dominion of the night. And for that reason, the Sages did not establish the evening prayer as obligatory — because no one could rectify them the way Jacob did.

For Jacob was the Master of the House (the Tabernacle) and rectified it properly.”

completely hidden; the Torah itself contains no hint of those fourteen years to indicate he was secreted away, veiled from every eye, unrevealed even in the Torah.

Afterward, “*he encountered the place*” — Jacob instituted *Ma'ariv* — alluding again to worship concealed from every eye and every being, as though darkness covered it and no human knows of it, save for G-d, “*Who knows what is in darkness, and the light dwells with Him*” (Daniel 2:22). Jacob's initial service was hidden Torah study, and through that he came to hidden prayer, for Torah leads to prayer.

When a person's service is truly for the sake of Heaven, in every depth of the heart, he becomes exceedingly humble afterward; his work does not seem of any particular significance or account, and he constantly finds fault and lack in himself. The more genuine and purified the prayer — utterly selfless — the less one feels it, and he is consequently not impressed with himself, thinking that surely every Jew is better and purer of heart than he...

The Jerusalem Talmud (Yoma 5:2) comments on the verse concerning the High Priest entering the Holy of Holies on Yom Kippur: “*And no man shall be in the Tent of Meeting*” (Leviticus 16:17) — even the angels, of whom it says “*the likeness of their faces was the face of a man*” (Ezekiel 1:10), were forbidden to be there. His service was so absolutely pure and hidden that even the heavenly beings knew nothing of it — precisely on Yom Kippur while he was within the innermost chamber.

The Kotzker Rebbe explained that no one ever reached the ultimate point of truth except the High Priest on Yom Kippur, within the Holy of Holies when all of the world's points of holiness — place, time, and soul — converged: *lifnai velifnim* — the holiest place; Yom Kippur — the holiest day; and the High Priest — the holiest soul.

Upon reaching that point, he could serve with such purity and concealment that not even an angel knew of it.

Parshat Vayetze - Ma'ariv — The secret of self-nullification

And indeed, thus says the *Zohar*: hidden — divine service in
Jacob established ultimate concealment — and not
Ma'ariv, making prayer so everyone merits this.

Shabbat Shalom !



Summary and Practical Conclusions

1. Every Jew must fix a place for his prayers and change it only when truly necessary. It is not enough to designate a synagogue; within that synagogue, he should have a fixed seat. The reward for such consistency is lofty indeed: through it, G-d helps him in every need and reveals within him special powers to stand firm against all the trials of the world.

2. Abraham instituted *Shacharit*, Isaac *Minchah*, and Jacob *Ma'ariv*. Morning is the time for *Shacharit*, noon for *Minchah*, and evening for *Ma'ariv*. Because the prayers have fixed times, one must, of course, pray them at their appointed times. Yet greater still is the merit of someone who has a set hour each day for his prayers. My father, Rabbi Yoram Michael Abergel Zatzal, would say: "Happy is the man who has both a fixed place and a fixed hour for the three prayers — *Shacharit*, *Minchah*, and *Ma'ariv*."

3. The root of all life successes is consistency; the root of all failures is instability. A person who is steady and stable finds it easier to guard himself from the evil inclination, from spiritual pitfalls, sudden swings, and undesirable places. Therefore, we must exert ourselves with all our might to arrange for ourselves a fixed order in the service of G-d.

4. In the evening, we pray *Ma'ariv*, a prayer whose whole essence is total self-nullification before G-d — complete bittul in every state of the soul, whether at its loftiest or its lowest. This level is exceedingly high, and not everyone can attain it in full; hence, one opinion holds that *Ma'ariv* is optional. Since halachah has ruled it obligatory, however, every person is empowered — through *Ma'ariv* — to experience, each according to his level, self-nullification before the Divine. In itself, that is our great hope in exile.

Parshat Vayetze - Summary and Practical Conclusions

5. When a person's service is truly for the sake of Heaven, in all of the depths of the heart, he becomes very humble afterward. His divine work consequently counts for nothing in his own eyes; he always finds deficiency in

himself. The truer and purer the prayer, and the more it is utterly selfless, the less he senses it and the less he is taken with himself, believing every Jew to be better and more wholehearted than he.

That is indeed a lofty level!

Shabbat Shalom !



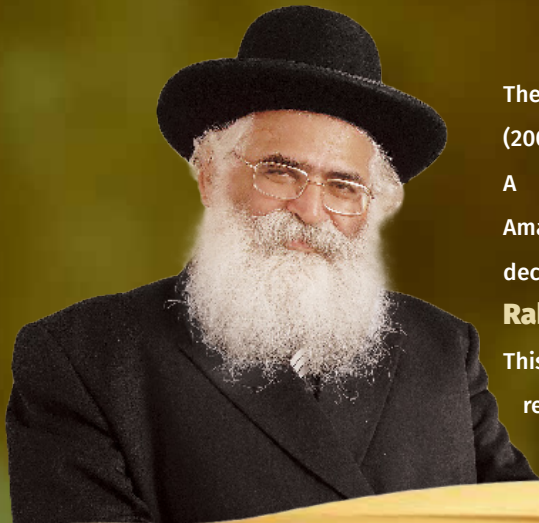
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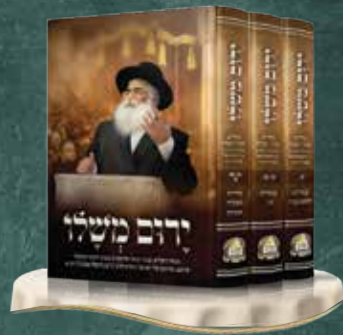


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Shabbat Times Vayetze

9th of Kislev, 5786

City	Candle Lighting	Shabbat Ends	Rabbeinu Tam
New York	4:12 pm	5:14 pm	5:41 pm
Miami	5:11 pm	6:06 pm	6:41 pm
Los Angeles	4:27 pm	5:25 pm	5:56 pm
Montreal	3:56 pm	5:02 pm	5:25 pm
Toronto	4:25 pm	5:30 pm	5:54 pm
London	3:39 pm	4:53 pm	5:08 pm
Jerusalem	4:20 pm	5:10 pm	5:43 pm
Tel Aviv	4:16 pm	5:07 pm	5:38 pm
Haifa	4:13 pm	5:07 pm	5:38 pm
Be'er Sheva	4:18 pm	5:11 pm	5:43 pm

Pathways to the Heart

From the Words of

HaRav Yoram Abargel zt"l

The faculty of thought can be repaired and corrected through joy, for, as stated prior, a sad person has harmful thoughts, but no harmful thoughts can enter a joyous person.

Therefore, the Hebrew word machshavah ("thought") consists of the same letters as b'simchah ("in joy"); Machshavah is also an acronym for "Erase, in Your abundant mercy, any record of our debts."

A person who is joyful has no sin remembered against him. The Holy One, blessed be He, assists and elevates those who are joyful.



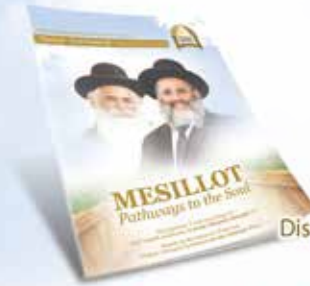
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