

INSIGHTS

Into The Weekly Parsha

בס"ד

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This week's Insights is sponsored in loving memory of Malka bas Yosef, Malka Levine. "May her Neshama have an Aliya!"

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9 KISLEV

Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan Zweig

PARSHAS VAYEITZEI

Night and Day

And Yaakov departed from Be'er Sheva and went to Charan. He encountered the place and spent the night there because the sun had set [...] (28:10-11).

This week's *parsha* opens with Yaakov Avinu traveling to Charan to find a wife, following the behest of his parents Yitzchak and Rifkah. The Torah relates how he passed by the future home of the Beis Hamikdash on Mount Moriah (see Rashi ad loc). According to Rashi, Yaakov felt it would be inappropriate to pass up the opportunity to pray at the same place his father and grandfather had prayed. Therefore, he returned to the place and instituted the evening prayer known as *ma'ariv* (see Rashi 28:17 and 28:11).

Chazal teach us that the three prayer services (*shacharis*, *mincha*, and *ma'ariv*) were established by the three forefathers: Avraham Avinu instituted *shacharis*, Yitzchak Avinu instituted *mincha*, and Yaakov Avinu instituted *ma'ariv*.

Yet this seems a little odd. We know that every day begins with the onset of the prior evening. That is, Monday begins at sunset on Sunday. Thus, the first prayer that we pray each day is *ma'ariv*. Wouldn't it be more logical for Avraham, being the first of the forefathers, to have instituted the first prayer service of *ma'ariv*? Why is it that Avraham instituted *shacharis*, the second prayer service, instead?

People often look at prayers solely as something that we do out of an

obligation towards the Almighty. In other words, Hashem created man and prayers are what we do for him. While it is true that *davening* has a component of devotional service, the first time the Torah refers to the purpose of prayer it is in an entirely different context.

We find regarding the creation of the world: "These are the products of the heavens and earth when they were created on the day of Hashem's, God's, making of the earth and heavens. At this time there was no tree yet on earth and no herb of the field had yet sprouted for Hashem had not sent rain upon the earth and there was no man to work the soil" (2:4-5). Rashi (ad loc) explains that Hashem did not make it rain until man arrived and recognized what the world was lacking and he prayed for rain. At that point, everything began to grow. Hence, man's participation is required to make this world operate as it should.

From here, we find a critical aspect of man's responsibility in the world: as a partner to Hashem in creating a functional world. Prior to Adam's sin, man's contribution to the world was through his relationship to the Almighty and expressed through *davening*. This is how man fulfilled his responsibility to build and accomplish.



Thus, we see that a very basic component of *davening* is an expression of what we contribute to the world as Hashem's partner.

There are two distinct components to every twenty-four hour period: day and night. They are not merely differentiated by whether or not the sun is above or below the horizon. Rather, they have completely different functions. Daytime is the period in which mankind goes out and contributes to the functionality of the world, while nighttime is the period when man feels connected to it.

In Hebrew, the word "yom – day" is masculine and "leila – night" is feminine. Day is the time for people to **do** and night is the time to **connect**. This also explains why when a woman tries to express an issue to a man he focuses on trying to solve it (the do/give aspect) even though she really just wants him to listen (the connect aspect).

Avraham Avinu is the *av* of *chessed* – which is the attribute emblematic of giving. This is why he was the proper forefather to institute *shacharis*, the daytime service that defines all prayers. This is also why every regular *siddur* (as opposed to a *Machzor*, etc.) begins with *shacharis* and not *ma'ariv*.

Family Not Friends

And it was when Lavan heard the news that Yaakov, his sister's son [had arrived], he ran toward him and he embraced and kissed him and brought him to his house [...] Lavan said to him, "But you are my flesh and bone," and he stayed with him a month of days (29:13-14).

In this week's *parsha* we find a remarkable, if not outright shocking, distinction between when Eliezer the servant of Avraham Avinu went to visit Charan and the events that unfolded when Yaakov visited Charan.

When Eliezer arrived in Charan, charged with a mission to find a wife for Yitzchak, he was greeted by Lavan who made an extraordinary statement: *"Come, O' blessed of Hashem! Why should you stand outside when I have cleared the house and a place for the camels?"* (24:31).

Rashi (ad loc) explains that in saying he "cleared the house" Lavan was informing Eliezer that he had cleared out all the idols from the house. Meaning, Lavan knew that any servant of Avraham would find it abhorrent and downright repugnant to accept lodging in a home filled with idols.

Yet somehow, Yaakov, the greatest of our forefathers and grandson of Avraham, had no objection to staying in Lavan's home, which we know was replete with idols (Rachel takes some when they beat a hasty escape some twenty years later).

How is it possible that Yaakov was agreeable to staying in such a home? Perhaps even more peculiar, what was so obvious to Lavan that he knew that he had to clear out the house for Eliezer but not for Yaakov?

The difference between these stories is also relevant to our generation and the challenges that many families currently face.

A person who is *shomer shabbos* should feel very uncomfortable in a non-

shabbos environment, such as being in a room where many people are watching television or talking on their telephones. Therefore, one should try to do whatever can be done to avoid those types of situations.

But one of the outcomes of the *Bal Teshuvah* movement is that these newly observant Jews are now thrust into family situations where many or even most of their nuclear families do not keep *shabbos* or kosher. Consequently, their homes on *shabbos* exude very little of a true *shabbos* atmosphere. What are they to do? Should they return to their parents' house for a *simcha* such as a nephew's *bar mitzvah* even though their *shabbos* atmosphere would clearly be adversely affected?

The answer is a resounding yes. When it comes to family we must avoid breaking any Torah or Rabbinic laws, but we must also do everything in our power to maintain a close family relationship, even if participation makes us uncomfortable. This is because a connection to one's family is paramount to one's wellbeing.

This is the difference between the two stories. Eliezer is merely a servant seeking a wife for his master's son; he has no familial responsibility to stay connected to Lavan and his family. On the other hand, Yaakov was arriving in his uncle's home and hoping to marry one of his cousins. His obligations to tolerate being uncomfortable far exceeded that of Eliezer. This was obvious to Lavan who knew that Yaakov was hoping to become his son-in-law. This is why he felt no obligation to remove the idols from his home.

Did You Know...

In honor of Levi's birth in this week's *parsha*, we thought it appropriate to mention the following amazing discovery that is unfortunately not well known. This is based on an article written by Rabbi Edward Davis of Young Israel of Hollywood, Florida.

BIRKAS KOHANIM WRITTEN IN SILVER... An archeological discovery in 1979 revealed the *pesukim* of *Birkas Kohanim* (*Bamidbar* 6:24-26) in what appears to be the earliest biblical passage ever found in ancient artifacts. Two tiny strips of silver, each wound tightly like a miniature scroll, bearing the inscribed words, were uncovered in a tomb outside of Jerusalem and dated from the 7th century BCE – easily 400 years before the famous Dead Sea Scrolls. Many of the modern biblical "scholars" have claimed that the Torah was man-made and was probably written at the time of the first exile in the 6th century BCE, when the Jews were exiled to Babylonia. What this archeological discovery proved was that the words of the Torah predate what these "scholars" have been insisting for many years. This discovery was brought to light through the use of advanced imaging systems by scientists at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory, which made the writing legible and proved that it was truly *Birkas Kohanim* as we know it.

*This also debunks the ridiculous notion that Israel is a "settler colonial state" that is occupying Palestinian territory. Archeological evidence of Jews in 7th century BCE supports Israel as the native land of the Jewish people.



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