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5786 Parshat Vayetzei

November 25, 2025

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## תשפ"ו Vayetzei

In Parshat Vayetzei, Yaakov transitions from Isaac's son to the third and choicest forefather. At age 63, his holy parents send him to seek a wife and begin to establish the Jewish nation. However, before doing that, Yaakov spends 14 years in the yeshiva of Shem and Ever studying Torah, day and night. After 14 years of intense study, at age 77, Yaakov finally feels ready to embark on his mission to establish the Jewish nation.

Along his journey to his mother Rivka's brother Lavan's house, Yaakov passes the future site of the Holy Temple. Sensing that it had special holiness, Yaakov stopped there to offer the evening prayer, Arvit. He spent the night there and, in his dream, Hashem revealed to him the entire future of the Jewish nation that he would found.

Our Sages teach us,

האבות הן הן המרכבה

*The Forefathers are the holy chariot that Hashem rides on (so to speak).*

Hashem's qualities as they are revealed to man, were modeled and displayed to mankind through the forefathers.

Our Sages teach us that Hashem has three main attributes: **חסד** - *chessed* - Lovingkindness, **דין** - *din* - strict judgment, and **רחמים** - *rachamim* - mercy. Each of the forefathers chose to model and perfect in himself one of these attributes. Avraham perfected the attribute of חסד – Lovingkindness, Yitzchak the attribute of דין - strict judgment, and Yaakov the attribute of רחמים - mercy.

Hashem's first attribute is **חסד** - **lovingkindness** because Hashem is the beginning of everything and there is nothing before Him or over Him

that can compel Him to do anything. Therefore, whatever He does, comes “*from the goodness of His heart,*” so to speak, and a desire to bestow His goodness and love upon others. Hashem created this world and everything in it so that He should have others upon whom to bestow His goodness. This is the source and reason for all that exists.

Avraham modeled this attribute of Hashem by bestowing kindness upon every soul that came his way. This came in the form of food, lodging and everything or anything else that a person might need.

Hashem could have created people merely as souls and bestowed upon them spiritual goodness and pleasure for all eternity, but Hashem knew that because the soul came from Him, an Entity Who can only give and cannot take, (since Hashem is perfect) that soul would disdain accepting (having done nothing to earn it) unending pleasure as a gift. This would taint the pleasure making it bitter-sweet, maybe more bitter than sweet. Hashem is perfect and the reward He gives must also be perfectly pleasurable and without embarrassment.

Therefore, to remedy this problem, Hashem revealed His second attribute: **דִּין** - **strict judgment**. He created a system whereby one can justly demand (*din*) payment, or reward, for his actions. That system is this material world, where we must choose between right and wrong, good and bad. These choices are ours alone and entitle us to reward for our good decisions.

Yitzhak embodied the attribute of *din* because he lived a perfect life without sin. He did not require any kindness from Hashem; he received exactly what he deserved.

Hashem’s third quality **רחמים** - **mercy**, is a combination of *chessed* and *din*. That is because *chessed* is unlimited kindness without boundaries, and this alone would not allow for one to *earn* his reward.

*Din* is exact judgment without any “slack.” Were a person able to do everything exactly right throughout his life, he would earn great reward, but this is simply unrealistic. Man is far from perfect.

The Midrash ( פְּרָשָׁה מ' - פְּסִיקְתָּא רַבְתִּי ) explains that originally, Hashem wanted to create man to live in a world with only *din*, so that man would get exactly what he deserved. But He saw that the world would be unable to endure because the first time that man stepped out of line he would be destroyed for rebelling against the Great and Mighty Hashem. Therefore, Hashem combined *chessed* and *din* to create *rachamim*. The *chessed* component, giving one more than he deserves, allows a person time to reflect on his actions and to repent for them. And, when Hashem ultimately punishes the person, it is also with mercy, and not to his death. The *din* aspect judges and determines exactly how much *chessed* one will receive, putting a limit on it. Moreover, unless a person has removed the sin through *teshuva*, *din* ultimately visits a judgment upon the person.

*Rachamim* comes from the word רַחֵם - “womb” for it is the attribute that allows for a future, much like a womb, which gives a future to a fetus. For this reason, *rachamim* is also called the attribute of אֱמֶת - *emet* - *truth* because it allows for Hashem’s creation to remain true to its goal and continue to exist.

Yaakov embodied the attribute of *rachamim*, a combination of *chessed* and *din*. The world could not exist on either *chessed* or *din* alone. It is only through the combination of the two that we can get through life. Hence, Yaakov embodied the future of the Jewish Nation.

The Jewish nation is built on the foundation founded by Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov. Each Forefather provided an essential component to the foundation that would give it the ability to support the Jewish nation for eternity.

What are these components?

The Shaloh Hakadosh says they are three presents that Hashem gave exclusively to the Jewish people, Torah, Eretz Yisrael, and the World to Come (Berachot 5a).

תניא רבי שמעון בן יוחאי אומר שלש מתנות טובות נתן הקדוש ברוך הוא לישראל וכולן לא נתנן אלא על ידי יסורין אלו הן תורה וארץ ישראל והעולם הבא

*Rabbi Shimon Ben Yochai says, Hashem gave the Jewish people three great presents...and these are them. Torah, Eretz Yisrael, and the World to Come.*

Torah came in the merit of Avraham, Eretz Yisroel came in the merit of Yitzchak, and the World to Come came in the merit of Yaakov.

Rabbi Yitzchak Isaac Chaver says that the Jewish people have three exclusive gifts. They are; the Torah, Divine Providence (hashgacha pratit), and Prophecy. Torah in the merit of Avraham, Divine Providence in the merit of Yitzchak, and prophecy in the merit of Yaakov.

It is easy to see that these two opinions are not at odds with each other, rather they are describing two different aspects of the same attribute.

Both provide that the Jewish people merited Torah in Avraham's merit. The ultimate kindness that Hashem did for His people was to give them the Torah. The Torah is the quickest way to Hashem's heart (so to speak). It through the Torah that a Jew creates his unique deep and personal connection to Hashem.

In Yitzchak's merit Hashem gave us Eretz Yisrael and hashgacha pratit.

Eretz Yisrael is the place about which it says Deuteronomy (11:12),

(יב) אֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר יְדוּד אֱלֹקֶיךָ דִּרְשׁ אֹתָהּ תִּמְיֵד עֵינֶי יְדוּד אֱלֹקֶיךָ בָּהּ מִרְשִׁית הַשָּׁנָה וְעַד אַחֲרֵית שָׁנָה

*12) a land that Hashem, your G-d, seeks out; the eyes of Hashem, your G-d, are always upon it, from the beginning of the year to year's end.*

When the Jewish people would be living properly in Eretz Yisrael as we were intended to, Hashem's watchful eye would be upon us 24/7/365, and we would have merited a supernatural existence. Now that we are in exile and scattered across the four corners of the earth, although Hashem's watchful eye is still on His beloved children, we no longer are worthy of the supernatural mode. Righteous individuals who live their lives constantly connected to, and for Hashem still merit supernatural intervention from Hashem, but people who are distant from Hashem will find Hashem distant to them. Our Sages explain that Hashem responds to us commensurate to how much we dedicate ourselves to Him.

The verse in Psalms (121) says:

(ה) יְדוּד שִׁמְרָךְ יְדוּד צְלָךְ עַל יַד יְמִינֶךָ

*5) Hashem guards you; Hashem is your shadow on your right side.*

*Hashem is like your shadow.* Just as your shadow follows your every motion, so too Hashem follows your every motion, but you have to make the motion and only then will Hashem follow. This means that to the degree that you put your trust in Him, to that very degree He will respond to your need. This special gift belongs to the Jewish people exclusively.

In Yaakov's merit Hashem gave us the World to Come and prophecy, both referring to the future. Prophecy - the future of the Jewish nation and the World to Come the future of every Jew.

Yaakov's image is engraved on Hashem's Chair of Honor. The 600,000 Jewish souls that came from Yaakov, are hewn from under Hashem's Chair of Honor. Thus, every soul in the Jewish nation has a place in the World to Come, because of Yaakov.

The three holy Patriarchs, Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov created the foundation of our nation. It is only through their holy and righteous lives that we have the special relationship with Hashem that we have.

We are all privileged to be carrying on their mission through saying the prayers that they instituted.

A Jew must pray three times a day, morning, evening, and night. The source of this law is the subject of an argument in the Talmud (Berachot 26b). One opinion holds that the forefathers originated the prayers, viz, Avraham instituted the morning prayer, Yitzchak the afternoon prayer, and Yaakov the nighttime prayer.

We learn that Avraham prayed שחרית - *Shacharit* - the morning prayer- from the verse (Genesis 19:27):

(כז) וַיִּשְׁכֶּם אַבְרָהָם בַּבֹּקֶר אֶל הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר עָמַד שָׁם אֶת פְּנֵי יְדֹד

27) Avraham arose early in the morning to the place where he had stood before Hashem.

What did Avraham do there? He prayed to Hashem. From this we learn that Avraham prayed the morning prayer.

We learn that Yitzchak prayed מנחה - *Mincha* - the afternoon prayer- from the verse (Genesis 24:63):

(סג) וַיֵּצֵא וַיִּצְחָק לְשׂוּחַ בַּשָּׂדֶה לְפָנוֹת עָרֶב

63) Yitzchak went out to supplicate in the field towards evening. "Towards evening" implies as the day approaches evening, at the end of the days light, is the proper time to pray the afternoon prayer, Mincha.

We learn that Yaakov prayed ערבית - *Maariv* - the nighttime prayer- from the verse (Genesis 28:11):

(יא) וַיִּפְגַּע בַּמָּקוֹם וַיִּלֶן שָׁם כִּי בָא הַשָּׁמֶשׁ

11) He [Yaakov] encountered the place and spent the night there because the sun had set. The Hebrew word used for “encountered” is also a word that means prayer, from which our Sages derive that Yaakov prayed during the night because the sun had already set.

The simple understanding of the Talmud is that Avraham originated Shacharit, Yitzchak prayed Shacharit and then originated Mincha, and Yaakov prayed Shacharit and Mincha, and then instituted Maariv.

The forefathers did not pray the same prayers that we have in our Siddur (*prayer book*), the text of which was composed by the אנשי כנסת הגדולה - the Men of the Great Assembly - much later. The forefathers composed their own prayers and said them daily, but they are credited with introducing the concept that a Jew must pray morning, afternoon, and night.

The second opinion holds that the Sages instituted the daily prayers to correspond to the daily sacrifices: Shacharit corresponds to the קרבן שחר - *the daily morning sacrifice*; Mincha corresponds to the קרבן תמיד של בין הערבים - *the afternoon sacrifice*; and Maariv corresponds to the pieces of the sacrifices that remained on the altar throughout the night until they finished burning.

The Talmud concludes that both views are correct. All agree that the forefathers established the three daily prayers, which, from that time forward, were always prayed by the Jewish people; but they were not obligatory. Later, upon the destruction of the second Holy Temple, the Sages made the daily prayers mandatory to substitute for the missing daily sacrifices.

This is where the מוסף - *Musaf* “additional” service on Shabbat, Yom Tov, and Rosh Chodesh- prayer comes from. Although there was no forefather to institute it, after the Temple’s destruction the Sages

introduced it to replace the missing “added” sacrifices brought on those special days.

The following ideas were gleaned from the lectures of my teacher, Rabbi Moshe Shapiro ל"צ.

Generally speaking, one prays to Hashem when he needs something. Avraham and Sarah were without children and beseeched Hashem for a child. Yitzchak and Rivka were also barren and similarly implored Hashem. These specific requests are not the prayers to which we are referring. Instead, we see that each forefather found a daily need to speak to Hashem at a specific time of day: Avraham in the morning, Yitzchak in the afternoon, and Yaakov at night. What was the motivation for this? And, is there a connection between the forefather and the prayer that he introduced?

“Prayer” in this context refers specifically to the עמידה - the *Shmoneh Esrei*- also called the “silent devotion” because it is recited silently while standing. The prayers leading up to it are designed to prepare us and put us in the proper frame of mind so we can focus properly on the main prayer, the silent devotion.

We tend to think that because the words of all three prayers are the same, we are merely repeating the same prayer three times each day. We see from the forefathers, however, that this is clearly not the case. Avraham instituted Shacharit, *the morning prayer*, because something about the morning compelled him to pray to Hashem every morning. That prayer is unique to the morning and would be inappropriate for the afternoon or night. The same is true of Mincha towards day’s end, and Maariv during the night. Something about that specific time of day inspired Yitzchak and Yaakov to pray to Hashem at that time every day. What was that?

If we could understand what inspired each forefather about their specific time of day, perhaps it would help us to appreciate the unique quality of each time of day and make our prayers during that time zone more meaningful.

### **Avraham established Shacharit.**

Morning signals the beginning of a new day. King David said (Psalm 136:7),

לְעִשָּׂה אוֹרִים גְּדֹלִים כִּי לְעוֹלָם חֲסָדוֹ

*7) (Give thanks) To the One who **makes** the great lights, for His kindness endures forever.*

The verse is stated in the present tense, indicating that Hashem is creating the world anew each and every second. This concept is expressed in our morning prayers in the leadup to Shema:

הַמְחַדֵּשׁ בְּטוֹבוֹ בְּכָל יוֹם תְּמִיד מֵעֲשֵׂה בְּרֵאשִׁית

*(Hashem) Who, in His goodness, renews every day and constantly, the work of creation.*

Unlike a table that stands on its own after the carpenter has completed his work, the world requires Hashem to recreate it every second of every day. If He would not, the world would disintegrate. Avraham Avinu realized that with each morning, Hashem has renewed His kindness to mankind by recreating the world and once again giving humanity the opportunity to earn eternal reward through their deeds on this world. This wholly altruistic and amazing act of Hashem is a great reason for a prayer of thanks and acknowledgement.

But there is more.

Our Sages teach us that when we are asleep, our souls leave us and return to heaven to report our daily activities to Hashem. When a soul

leaves the body for good, the person, of course, dies; but a sleeping person's entire soul does not leave him during the night. Because *some* of a person's soul *has* left him, though, he is considered "partially" dead. Indeed, our Sages teach us that sleep is 1/60<sup>th</sup> of death, and when we awaken in the morning, our full soul is returned to us for another day.

This is why the very first thing that one says upon waking up in the morning is the *Modeh Ani*:

מוֹדָה אֲנִי לְפָנֶיךָ מֶלֶךְ חַי וְקַיִם. שְׁהַחֲזַרְתָּ בִּי נִשְׁמָתִי בְּחַמְלָה. רַבָּה אֶמְוִנְתְּךָ

*I give thanks before You, living and everlasting King, that You have restored my soul to me with compassion; **great is Your trustworthiness.***

If we have awakened, our soul has been restored to us.

The phrase ***great is Your trustworthiness*** carries two meanings. One is that Hashem is trustworthy in that He has returned my soul to me; I entrusted it to Him, and He has not betrayed my trust. The second explanation is *how great is the trust that You have placed in me*. By restoring my precious soul to me, You have shown me once again that You trust me to use it appropriately.

Because a person is considered somewhat "dead" when asleep, awakening is considered his rebirth, and he is like a new creation. When he awakens with all his faculties and abilities, it is as if they have all been granted to him for the first time. Just a minute ago, while asleep, he was incapable of seeing, standing, or walking. Upon awakening, his abilities are fully restored to him.

Imagine a blind person who suddenly had his sight restored to him by a doctor. How much thanks would he owe the doctor who healed him! This same level of thanks is what we should feel towards Hashem every morning upon discovering that we have our faculties with us once again.

This idea is expressed very clearly in the ברכות השחר, *the morning blessings* that the Sages composed for us to say every morning. This list of blessings expresses our thanks to Hashem for our ability to hear the rooster crow, for our sight, for our freedom to move about, that we can stand erect, and many other abilities that we assume are ours for life. And, because we realize that Hashem has just *recreated* us, it is as if He has endowed us with all these blessings anew. How much thanks do we owe Him for that! This is what these blessings express. We acknowledge Your great kindness to us by granting us once again our faculties and abilities and we thank You profusely for them.

This is what Avraham Avinu found so special every *morning* that compelled him to make this a daily requirement. He saw the dawn of a new day as the supreme act of kindness from Hashem to recreate the world and everything in it once again, so that mankind can earn the most sublime reward in the World to Come through their deeds.

Avraham Avinu dedicated his life to modelling Hashem's attribute of kindness by bestowing kindness upon anyone and everyone he could. He was most acutely aware of Hashem's kindness to man, and therefore it was he, specifically, who instituted Shacharit, the morning prayer.

### **Yitzchak established Mincha.**

Yitzchak chose to serve Hashem by living his life according to Hashem's second attribute, מִדַּת הַדִּין - *strict judgment*. This means that he received no mercy from Hashem. He lived his life in complete awe of Hashem and never committed a sin; hence, everything that he had he deserved without needing any "slack" from Hashem. In this regard, Yitzchak took nothing for himself from this world. He used everything that he had only for his service to Hashem, just as he was prepared to give up his life for Hashem when his father put him on the altar.

Man is able to accomplish and function in daylight when he can see where he is going and what he is doing, and, through his sight, connect to all that surrounds him. In today's world with its many forms of artificial light, we have little experience with absolute darkness. We function at night almost as well as during the day.

There is a fascinating museum in Israel called "Dialogue in the Dark," which gives people who are gifted with sight a glimpse of what it is like to live without light, as blind people do. They have created an environment of complete, dense darkness. Experiencing it is like no other darkness you have ever experienced. The darkness is so complete that you literally feel as if you have no eyes to see.

In the old days, when night came, you were in that kind of dark, pitch black. During the night, it is as if you have nothing because everything you have is inaccessible to you. The Sages explain that the real meaning of the word for darkness - חשך- is *withheld*. In total darkness, everything is withheld and inaccessible to us.

As the day comes to an end, we approach the point where all our possessions will cease to belong to us, so to speak. As the darkness descends upon them, they slowly become inaccessible to us as if we no longer own them. We are thus, in a sense, returning them to Hashem Who gave them to us to use for the day. It represents the purpose for which we came into the world: to use this world and everything in it to serve Hashem. We are not able to take any of it for ourselves, and after using it during our lifetime, we must return it all to Hashem.

The Talmud informs us that Rabbi Judah the Prince was so wealthy that year-round he had radishes, romaine lettuce, and cucumbers on his table. Yet, the Talmud tells us (Ketubot 104a):

בשעת פטירתו של רבי זקף עשר אצבעותיו כלפי מעלה אמר רבונו של עולם גלוי  
וידוע לפניך שיגעתי בעשר אצבעותי בתורה ולא נהניתי אפילו באצבע קטנה

*Before Rabbi Judah the Prince died, he stretched his ten fingers heavenward and declared. "Master of the Universe, it is known to you how I toiled with my ten fingers in Torah, but I did not take even a pinky's worth for myself!"*

Yitzchak also took nothing from this world for himself. This is the connection between Yitzchak and Mincha. At the end of every day, as he gave everything that he owned back to Hashem, so to speak, he thanked Hashem for having given him the tools with which to serve Him. His prayer signifies that he always understood that they were not his.

Avraham Avinu's Shacharit focused on the beginning of the day, and the beginning of life, and Yitzchak's prayer, Mincha, focused on the end of the day, and the purpose for life.

As our day of life comes to an end, we will return our souls to Hashem without any of the material possessions that we spent our lives acquiring. We came into this world to use it to earn a place in the World to Come. When we leave this world, we will take nothing of this world with us, except the Torah and mitzvot gained by using the tools - the material wealth- that Hashem has graciously bestowed upon us.

### **Yaakov established Maariv.**

Maariv is prayed in the pitch-black night. When one is enveloped in the blackness of the night, he has nothing but himself. He has no connection to anything around him, because it is obscured by the darkness and, for all purposes, doesn't exist. Being alone in the middle of a pitch-black night could be the most petrifying and debilitating situation that a person could ever experience. This was Yaakov's situation. The verse says (Genesis 32:25):

25) *Yaakov was left alone.*

The Midrash (Berishit Rabba 77:1) compares Yaakov's being alone to Hashem being One and Only. We see that Yaakov lived his life as if he was in the middle of ultimate darkness. How did he survive?

Yaakov knew that, in reality, a Jew is never alone. By virtue of one being alive, Hashem per force is there with him, because only Hashem can give life. This is how Yaakov lived his life; it was just him and Hashem. He did not have or need, anything else in life; in his connection to Hashem, he had everything. When one sees Hashem so clearly, the deepest darkness is transformed into the brightest light. In this sense, Yaakov's very existence was a reflection of Hashem.

Yaakov connected neither to the beginning of creation like Avraham, nor to the end of creation like Yitzchak. He was connected to Hashem by his very existence; his entire life, that which is between those two points. Just realizing that he was alive connected him to the true and only source of life, Hashem.

We will all experience being alone with Hashem, as did Yaakov. That will be, though, after we leave this world. Then, we will stand alone before Hashem with only the life that we lived to show for ourselves.

As we go through the weekly portions centered on the forefathers and their closeness to Hashem, we are at a loss as to how to connect ourselves to them. These three prayers are the legacy that they have bequeathed to us, and each time we pray one of these prayers, we connect ourselves to them, imbuing our prayers with their greatness and holiness. Thinking about the uniqueness of each prayer can also inspire us to embrace our forefathers' sterling attributes and help us grow closer to Hashem.

May we merit to internalize the gifts our forefathers left for us, and through their prayers and their attributes, draw ourselves ever closer to Hashem. And may our own tefillot, offered with sincerity and thought, strengthen our bond with the One who renews our lives each day and guides us through every moment of light, dusk, and night.