

תפילות אבות תקנות

Three Typologies of Prayer

Rabbi Daniel Fridman

Our sedra opens with Yaakov venturing forth from his home. The tone of the opening verse is matter of fact, informational, and little more. Immediately, *in medias res*, the Torah erupts with a sudden burst, וַיִּפְגַּע בָּمָקוֹם, meaning, Yaakov encountered, or happened upon, a place. Chazal discerned a second layer in the Biblical narrative, וַיִּפְגַּע בָּמָקוֹם, he encountered the one who is referred to as the Makom, the Almighty. In other words, as he ventured forth upon his journey, Ya'akov engaged in prayer. Given that this encounter takes place with the setting of the sun, Chazal interpreted that on this singular evening, Ya'akov was engaged in innovating the ma'ariv prayer.

Our Sages perceived a dialectical element in Yaakov's contribution of ma'ariv; it was, at once, completely innovative and unprecedented, and at the very same time, built on the foundation laid by his father and grandfather. After all, Avraham was the founder of the Shacharit prayer, whilst Mincha had been developed by Yitzchak. By granting the night its very own prayer, Yaakov was completing the process of infusing each distinct component of the daily cycle- morning, afternoon, and evening- with its own unique *tefillah*, thereby placing his own indelible imprint upon the masorah.

Had all the Patriarchs accomplished with respect to prayer been the infusion of each component of the daily cycle with its own unique prayer, that achievement would obviously have been enormous in its own right. Yet, if one carefully studies the Talmudic passage (Brachot 26b) wherein this idea is developed, what emerges is that the Avot not only gave us three different times for prayer, but three utterly distinct typologies, or modes, of prayer.

Avraham's prayer, Shacharit, is derived from the word עמידה, literally meaning to stand. The connotation of עמידה in the context of prayer is an existential awareness that one is in the presence of the Almighty, in the sense of Chazal's expression, דע לפני מי אתה עומד, and it was this awareness which was the essence of Avraham's contribution. Chazal teach that Yitzchak's prayer, Minchah, has its roots in the term פיחה, to converse, to engage the Lord in a dialogue in the context of *tefillah*. Whereas the mode of prayer which Avraham was innovating was internally oriented, focused on the sheer experience of being in the Divine Presence, Yitzchak's, in contrast, was dynamically oriented, focused on a conversational interaction between the petitioner and the Almighty.

Yaakov's prayer, derived from the term פגיעה, to encounter, represents a qualitatively distinct paradigm of prayer. In the modern Hebrew idiom, לפגוע connotes invasive penetration, either the causing of a physical wound or deep psychic pain. This is precisely the type of prayer which Yaakov was innovating, an almost violent encounter with the Almighty, borne of a profound sense of crisis. It is precisely this sense of near violence which is connoted by the dramatic shift of tone in the Biblical text, from the prosaic opening verse telling us that Yaakov

journeyed from Be'er Sheva to Charan, to the dramatic וַיִּפְגַּע בָּمָקוֹם . Yaakov, with literally nothing but the 'staff in his hand,' was caught betwixt and between, fleeing for his life , but knowing full well that he was a refugee without hope of finding immediate refuge, as the specter of Lavan loomed. It is no coincidence that Yaakov was the founder of מעריב, of night prayer, a man crying out for succor and sustenance in the darkness which had engulfed him.