

Parshat Vayetze 5778

Origins of Shemoneh Esrei The second possuk in the sedra (28:11) states *Vayifga BaMokom* (“and he [Yaakov] encountered the place”). Rashi tells us that our Rabbis explain the word *Vayifga* as an expression of ‘prayer’, and it teaches us that Yaakov instituted Maariv.

Berachos 26b – The Source R’ Yose the son of R’ Chanina stated that the prayers were instituted by the Avos. In contrast, R. Yehoshua ben Levi stated that the prayers were instituted by the *Anshei Knesset HaGedolah*, corresponding to the daily tamid offerings. The Gemara then brings a Baraisa to provide support for each view. R’ Yose the son of R’ Chanina argues:

1. Avraham instituted the Shacharis prayer as it says (Vayera 19:27): “And Avraham arose early in the morning to the place where he had stood”. And ‘Standing’ (‘Amidah’) refers to prayer (we learn this from “And Pinchas stood up and prayed” – Psalms 106:30).
2. Yitzchak enacted Minchah as it says (Chaye Sarah 24:63): “And Yitzchak went out to speak in the field towards evening”. And ‘Speech’ (‘Sicha’) means prayer (see Psalms 102:1).
3. Yaakov enacted Ma’ariv as it says (VaYetze 28:11): “And he encountered the place and spent the night there”. And ‘encountered’ (‘Pegiah’) refers to prayer (see Jeremiah 7:16).

In contrast, a Baraisa is then brought showing how the times of the 3 daily prayers were based on the daily Korbonos that were offered up in the Beis Hamikdash. The Gemara subsequently concludes that even R’ Yose the son of R’ Chanina admits, though the Avos instituted these prayers, the Rabbis subsequently came and connected them to the Korbonos. Otherwise the obvious question arises as to who established the Mussaf prayer (if not the *Anshei Knesset HaGedolah*)?

The Commentaries The Kesef Mishneh holds that Rambam paskens like R. Yehoshua ben Levi - the tefillos were instituted by the *Anshei Knesset HaGedolah* to represent the *Korbonos*.

Einayim La-Mishpat adduces evidence for this view from the words of the Rambam in Sefer HaMitzvos (dealing with Kerias Shema) where he says “the times of tefillah (Shemoneh Eshrei) are not min Hatorah though the mitzvah of tefillah itself is. It was the *Chachamim* who instituted the times and this is what is meant by the dictum ‘tefillos keneged tmidim tiknum’ i.e. they related their times to those of the sacrifices”.

Further proof can be found in Hilchos Tefillah 3.2 where the Rambam paskens “we have already said that the time for Tefillah Mincha was instituted to correspond with the afternoon Tamid.....”

On the other hand, Lehem Mishneh holds that Rambam paskens like that of R’ Yose the son of R’ Chanina. Evidence for this view can be brought from Hilchos Melachim 9.1 where Rambam states that Avraham was the first to pray Shacharis; Yitzchak added a tefillah “towards evening”, Mincha; and Yaakov, Maariv.

Makom Kavuah From the above possuk in 19:27 regarding Avraham instituting Shacharis, we learn that one should adopt a fixed place for one’s Shemoneh Esrei, for that is the significance of the words “to the place where he had stood”. This is codified in OC 90:19 – “one should therefore have a fixed place where he prays always, that he does not change, unless it is necessary for him to do so” (i.e. one has a good reason). *Mishnah Berurah shom sk.59* adds that “at home he should also have a fixed place where he prays, so that the members of the household will not disturb him”.

There is a moshol heard in the name of HaRav Shimon Haliva, where he explained that when we daven, it is as if we are trying to pierce the iron curtain which Hashem has (kavyochol) placed between Himself and us. Each tefillah is like banging with a hammer and chisel on that barrier. The more Kavanah, the greater and effective is the penetration. However if each time one bashes a different part of the metal sheet, any cumulative penetration is lost. It is only if one hacks away time and again at the same spot that there is any chance of getting all the way through. So too the effect of tefillah is dissipated unless one keeps to one’s Makom Kavuah.

However..... “*He is sitting in my seat. My seat! The seat I occupy whenever I am in Shul. Has he never heard of a Makom Kavuah? So I have every right to ask him to move ... Correct?*” Wrong! Firstly, the Mishnah Berurah on the above OC 90:19, sk.60, writes that “within four cubits [about six feet] is considered the same space as one cannot restrict himself to an exact spot”. Secondly, the statement “that he does not change [his place] unless it is necessary for him to do so” (i.e. he has a good reason) implies that someone already sitting in a person’s place trumps the right to a Makom Kavuah (especially if there are available seats nearby). And finally, there is the concept of *derech eretz* - being a respectful mentch! Regarding this seemingly ultra-sensitive issue, it seems appropriate to end with an anecdote, in the name of Rabbi Bernstein Z”L, how a man was telling him how vitally important it was to have a Makom Kevurah!

דבר תורה לפרשת השבוע לעילוי נשמת אמה של סוון מרתה מרת לאה בת יצחק ע"ה ביום היארצייט לפטירתה יא כסלו