

He encountered the place and spent the night there. (28:11)

This was no ordinary place. It was *Har HaMoriah*, where Avraham Avinu bound Yitzchak (Avinu) on the *Mizbayach*, Altar, which would later serve as the site of the *Bais Hamikdash*. Chazal interpret the word *vayifga*, “he encountered,” as “he prayed.” Yaakov Avinu’s encounter was of a spiritual nature. He encountered Hashem. Since it was evening, this is when the Patriarch initiated *Tefillas Arvis*, the Evening Prayer. Chazal (*Chullin* 91:13) teach that originally Yaakov had passed the place without giving it a second thought. When he reached Charan, he realized that he had passed the place where his father and grandfather had prayed – and he did not. He immediately prepared to return. Hashem made a miracle which allowed him to have *kefitzas ha’derech*, contraction of the road, which is a reference to miraculous, instant time-travel between two locations. Why was Yaakov able to pass the first time, and what happened later to cause him to make an about-face?

The *Tchebiner Rav, zl*, explains that on the way to Charan, he was planning to stop at the *bais medrash* of Shem and Eivar. He felt that since he was about to learn Torah, it was improper to delay his objective by stopping to *daven*. He later realized, however, that *tefillah* is an essential requirement and prerequisite for Torah study; without *tefillah* the Torah study is deficient. Thus, he returned.

Torah achievement is not predicated upon acumen. It is a Divine gift given to someone who is worthy of *siyata d’Shmaya*, Heavenly assistance. One must pray, plead, supplicate for this Divine assistance. Otherwise, his learning will be an exercise in mental gymnastics – not Torah study. The *Chazon Ish* was a classic example. He writes: “Torah and *tefillah* are inexorably bound to one another, with the toil expended in studying Torah assisting in one’s perceiving the light of *tefillah*; and likewise, prayer aids in one’s perception of Torah.” He was wont to say that he had gained enormous levels of Torah and *yiraas Shomayim*, fear of Heaven, more due to his *tefillah* than due to his *hasmadah*, diligence.

Horav Isser Zalman Meltzer, zl, related that his *Rebbe*, the *Netziv, zl*, (He was also a close student of *Horav Chaim Soloveitchik, zl*. He was of the few who did not take sides when issues involving the leadership of *Yeshivas Volozhin* came to the fore. He sought only to learn Torah. Once, he refused to give the *shiur* which he would give daily.) No one had the temerity to ask the *Netziv* why he was not giving *shiur*. *Rav Isser Zalman* had a very close relationship with his *Rebbe*, so he asked. The *Netziv* replied with total equanimity, “I felt that today (during *Shacharis*), I did not have the proper *kavanah*, intention, during the blessing of *Ahavah Rabbah* (preceding *Krias Shema*). I do not have the brazenness to present my analysis of the *sugya*, topic of discussion, without first *davening* properly.” Without *tefillah*, one does not merit the *siyata d’Shmaya* to pinpoint the unvarnished truth.