

## He encountered the place and spent the night there because the sun had set. (28:11)

*Chazal* credit Yaakov Avinu with introducing *Tefillas Arvis*. Thus, the word "*vayifga*," which is usually translated as "*he encountered*," means, "*and he prayed*." Prayer is, in essence, an encounter with the Almighty. The Patriarchs initiated each of the daily *tefillos*. Regarding Avraham Avinu, who originated *Tefillas Shacharis*, the *Torah* says, "*Avraham rose early in the morning to the place where he had stood before Hashem*" (*Bereishis* 19:27). The *Torah* uses the word, "*amidah*," standing, regarding Avraham. In contrast, *pegiah*, encounter, is used in regard to Yaakov. Finally, the word, "*sichah*," - "*Yitzchak went out to supplicate (lasuach) in the field*," (*Bereishis*, 24:63) is used to describe Yitzchak's introduction of *Tefillas Minchah*. Why does the *Torah* characterize the individual *tefillos* of the Avos in such disparate terms?

*Horav Nissan Alpert, zl*, explains that each *tefillah* represents the unique form of *avodas Hashem*, service to the Almighty, manifest by the individual Patriarch who instituted it. Avraham Avinu's major goal in life was to disseminate to the world a monotheistic concept of belief in the Almighty. He accepted every challenge that came his way, overcoming enormous odds and trials. He succeeded as a result of one specific attribute, his ability to stand firm, stalwart and unyielding in his commitment. He synchronized every talent and ability he possessed toward reaching that goal. He was immovable and resolute. His standing to pray reflected his unique form of *avodas Hashem*.

Yitzchak, the heir to Avraham's outreach efforts, was mired in a predicament. Although he certainly was following in his father's footsteps, he needed to differentiate between his own conviction and his imitation of his father's approach. In order to make this distinction, he had to delve into the innermost recesses of his psyche. To enable this introspection, he went away from the activity of the city to a quiet field where he could concentrate on an intimate prayer between himself and his Creator. Yitzchak's *tefillah* represented the "*kol demamah dakoh*," a still, thin sound, through which only the soul of a person is able to understand his true intention.

Yaakov's *tefillah* was an encounter with Hashem. This was in contrast to the *tefillah* of his grandfather, Avraham, who sacrificed himself to bring others close to Hashem, who devoted his life to performing acts of *chesed*. He also was different from his father, Yitzchak, who set the standard for *mesiras nefesh*, self-sacrifice. Yaakov stood between an Eisav, who sought to destroy him physically, and a Lavan - whose goal it was to prevent his spiritual development. He was not like Avraham or Yitzchak. What could he do? How could his prayer make a difference? What could he add to the concept of *tefillah* which his father and grandfather had developed? He was so absorbed in his predicament that he "fell" asleep. Hashem showed him a ladder that reached from earth to Heaven. Yaakov woke up and declared, "*This is the House of G-d and the gateway to Heaven*." He now understood that it was not necessary to offer sacrifices, especially since he could not offer anything that his ancestors had not already offered. Yaakov perceived that he,

through his demeanor and service to Hashem, could concretize this ladder that traversed from earth to Heaven. He was to consecrate his physical dimension through *Torah* study and *avodas* Hashem. He could pray wherever he was. His prayer was not introducing something new. Rather, it was an encounter with the past. It demonstrated to the world that wherever we are, in whatever area of endeavor we are involved, we can reach out and encounter Hashem through prayer, through *Torah*, through *mitzvos*. Our purpose is to sanctify our lives - wherever we are, under whatever conditions we find ourselves.

Yaakov *Avinu* instituted *Tefillas Arvis*, the prayer recited after dark, the prayer that coincides with the darkness of *galus*, exile. Our mission throughout the long *galus* is to encounter Hashem and be that ladder/bridge that reaches between Heaven and earth.