

CLOSE YOUR EYES AND SEE

By Ozer Bergman

God said to Yaakov, "Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt...I will go down with you and I will bring you up. Yosef will place his hands on your eyes" (Genesis 46:3-4).

Yaakov Avinu (our Patriarch) heard the unbelievably good news. He received a royal invitation to move to Egypt from his long-lost son, an invitation that had to be taken seriously, on many levels. Whatever fatherly emotions and desires visited Yaakov Avinu, he knew he was not just a father but, even more (importantly), a forefather. He knew that going to Egypt was not a personal move to a retirement community. It was a national move to exile. It was a move fraught with danger, and a move that could be avoided.

Yaakov Avinu was afraid. He knew that "my son, the viceroy" was good for helping his family in the short-run, for their immediate physical future. What about the long-run for the Jewish people? Would his descendants return to their promised homeland, and in what sort of condition? What would his children – and theirs and theirs and theirs – gain in exile? Would they acquire any skills or tools that would keep them strong and focused in exile? Would those also help them to re-grow, progress and expand their mission in later stages of their history?

God allayed Yaakov Avinu's fears. "I will go down with you and I will bring you up." Yes, they will return. No, I will not abandon them. But what does it mean that "Yosef will place his hands on your eyes"?

Rebbe Chizkiyah said, "I have something to teach, but am afraid to reveal it. Wisdom can be found in the way the world operates." Rebbe Abba came over and patted Rebbe Chizkiyah on the back. "Say it – but be ready to battle in Torah!"...

Rebbe Chizkiyah said, "When a man dies, his son honors him by gently spreading earth on his eyes. The world is now hidden from the deceased. His son inherits it in his stead..."

"The eye is the world in miniature. The white is the great sea, the iris the dry land that surrounds it. The third color, immediately around the eye's center, is Jerusalem, the center of the world. The fourth color, what sees and in which the human face is visible, is named Bat Ayin. Bat Ayin is Tzion, the center of the center.** Its beauty is the greatest because the Shekhinah, the world's beauty, dwells there."*

Rebbe Abba added, "Before placing the earth on his father's eyes, the son must close them. People do not stop to think why. In his last moments, a person sees the Shekhinah (Zohar 1:217b). It is so beautiful, he cannot shut his eyes. Someone there must do it. If a son is there, he should do it...."

"Because as soon as the person expires, the Shekhinah leaves, and the Unholy rush in to show themselves. But a person who has seen the Shekhinah should not look at the Unholy" (ibid., 1:226a).

Yaakov Avinu established *Arvit*, the Evening Prayer. He was also no stranger to hardship and challenge. Before we ask, we already know there is a connection. At night, the *dinim*, judgments, come out. Some are simpler, easier to deal with: we need to invest more time, energy, perseverance. Some are quite difficult: we don't know why they have come or how to react. We struggle to continue. We consider quitting. Nighttime is exile writ small.

So we need *Arvit*. *Arvit* is a prayer of *bitul*, of closing our eyes from short-sighted, ego-first objectives and desires, and opening them to the Divine long-view. (Arizal recommends praying all of *Arvit* with your eyes closed.) Yaakov Avinu knew that he could instill *bitul*, closed-open eyes, into Bnei Yisrael when he was alive, but who could do it after he died? God told him, "Yosef HaTzaddik can." In the night of Egyptian exile, Yosef HaTzaddik proved that a Jew can stay focused on his Divine mission and grow Jewishly. All the money and wealth that Egypt acquired, Yosef brought "to Pharaoh's house" (Genesis 47:14). Yosef did not eat with Egyptians (ibid., 43:32). He famously resisted Mrs. Potiphar (ibid., 39:12) and, less famously, married a Jewish girl (*Pirkey d'Rebbe Eliezer* 38).***

SIDEPATH

The suffering is bad enough while you are going through it, may God save us. No matter what, though, do not dwell at all on your difficulties...Just study Torah, pray and go about your business. Relax your mind with things that cheer you and bring yourself to joy; even, if need be, with silliness. You have no idea what is really going on in the world! (*Reb Noson, "Healing Leaves,"* p. 95).

Since the Jewish day begins at night (Genesis 1:5), *Arvit* is the first prayer of the day. It gets us through the night and strengthens us in the day. The better our *Arvit*, the better we can do. Rebbe Nachman describes the beauty of praying, and the challenge:

*When a person stands to pray, he walks in a heavenly field, gathering the most beautiful blossoms, flowers and plants, making them into bouquets and garlands. Every letter and word of prayer that passes his lips, hugs his soul, holding it with a fierce love, not wanting to let him go. A person must go on to pray the whole prayer, but he must also stay with the letter that holds him. His prayer can be whole only when he realizes that everything is operating as one. He realizes this only if he is totally focused on the objective of Creation. Such focus requires a willingness to forego personal, ego-centered interests by closing his eyes from looking at this world (*Likutey Moharan I*, 65).*

We can make it through the night of exile. Remember that God is with you. Close your eyes to what's Egyptian and open them to what's Jewish.

* The pupil.

** The Holy of Holies. It's pretty obvious how holy our eyes are and how we should treat them!

*** Asnat was Dinah's daughter by birth, and Potiphara's by adoption (Genesis 41:50).

Based on *Likutey Halakhot, Arvit* 4:1-2

A gutn Shabbos! Shabbat Shalom!

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DISTRACTIONS AT THE DOOR

By Yossi Katz

Our minds are very powerful. Using our minds, we can relive moments long past, analyze the things that surround us, and dream about the future. At the same time, our tests and challenges are primarily psychological. That's because our ability to choose between right and wrong is most influenced by what we're thinking – or often, by what we're not thinking.

When we try to live our lives in a spiritual way, focusing on Torah and Godliness, we experience some very difficult mental challenges as our evil inclination creates illusions in order to sidetrack us. Especially when we try to pray with true concentration, those seductive illusions lure us into a fantasy world. Our thoughts hop from one scene to another until, before we know it, we find ourselves in a place very far removed from God.

Pharaoh represents the power of illusion. His name, *PaRoH*, literally means “uncovered.” Pharaoh is the doorkeeper who uncovers entrances to all the desires and lusts that distract us when we try to serve God. We have to do whatever we can to keep away from those distractions and keep those doors closed. Even if we see that we already have one foot in, we can still stop ourselves and run back out.

But what if we have fallen into the darkness and can't find our way out?

Truth is the light of God Himself. By attaching ourselves to the truth, even when surrounded by gloom, we can draw down light that will enlighten our eyes to find the doorways out. Especially when we pray, we can attain truth by saying at least a few words of sincere prayer. But what if we are

confused and we aren't sure what is true anymore?

The verse states: “Judah approached (Joseph) and said, ‘Please, my lord, let your servant speak a word in my lord's ears...for you are like Pharaoh” (Genesis 44:18).

Seductive illusions lure us into a fantasy world

YeHUDah (Judah) represents the *YeHUDim* (Jews); Joseph (who is called Joseph the Tzaddik) represents the tzaddik. We must approach the tzaddik and implore him to rescue us from our situation. We tell him that he is like Pharaoh – meaning that the same way Pharaoh distracted us and led us through the doors of doom, the tzaddik is a doorkeeper who knows how to lead us back out. He is able to do this by revealing the truth to us, enabling us to once again see the Heavenly light and follow it back to our safety and well-being.

Based on *Likutey Halakhot*



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KITZUR L”M WEEKLY

18 — “Rabbi Yonatan related – a basket” (*Bava Batra 74a*)

4. Sometimes there exists a lack in the world in that [people's] faith is not completely intact [even though a certain amount of faith does exist]. Consequently, God's anger, God forbid, and the hiddenness of His countenance are not so readily recognizable [since the lack of faith is only very slight]. Only when this lack of faith “trickles down” and reaches the tzaddikim, the latter hide their faces from the world and do not want to lead it. But since God's anger is then very minimal – only lasting for a split second – the tzaddikim do not attribute the fact that they are hiding their faces to this rage. Instead, they attribute it to their own insignificance, saying that they are not fit to lead the world. The truth is that they do not know about or sense this infinitesimal trace of anger, either. But when rage and Divine anger are tempered by compassion, then the Divine anger that exists for the tzaddikim is mitigated by compassion. Consequently, compassion prevails upon them and they take pity on the world. They are willing to lead, and the world merits a true leader who will lead them with compassion.

[When idolatry and atheism exist in the world, Divine anger prevails in the world, as our Sages, of blessed memory, said; and this consists of the hiding of God's countenance. But when there is not actual idolatry and atheism, but only imperfect faith, then the Divine anger and the hiddenness of God's countenance are not so readily recognizable. Nevertheless, when this anger “trickles down” and comes to the tzaddikim, they consequently hide themselves.]