

Kinder Torah

Parashas Vayishlach

The Heavens are His

“Come, Avi. It is almost dark. The time is approaching to begin the *Ma'ariv* prayer.”

“May I ask a question before we begin, Abba?”

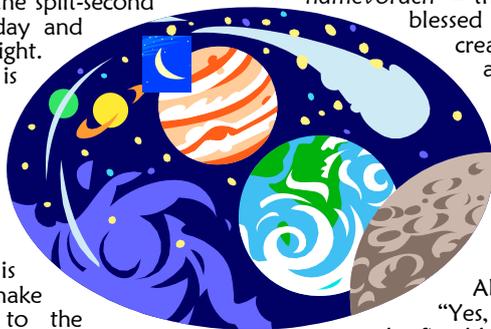
“Go right ahead, Avi.”

“We finished praying *Mincha* before *'shkia'* (the setting of the sun). Why do we wait until *'tseis hakochavim'* (when three little stars come out) to begin *Ma'ariv*? Why can we not start right away after *'shkia'*?”

“Excellent question, Avi! The time between *'shkia'* and *'tseis hakochavim'* is called *'bein ha'shemashos'* (twilight). The day ends and the night begins at one precise point during this interval of time. We would begin *Ma'ariv* at that exact point, however, we are unable to perceive or calculate it. Only the Almighty knows the split-second of the end of the day and beginning of the night.

This concept is expressed in the words of the first blessing of *Ma'ariv* – *'u'mavdil bein yom u'vein layla* – and (Hashem) separates between day and night'. He is the One Who can make this separation ... to the precise split-second.¹ We mortal beings of flesh and blood must add on several minutes before and after to be sure that we end the daily prayers while it is still day, and begin the night prayers when it is definitely night. Since we have a few minutes, Avi, let me give you an overview of the *Ma'ariv* prayer.”

“Thank you, Abba.”



“In the morning we recite two blessings before *Kriyas Shema* and one after. At night, there are two blessings before *Kriyas Shema* and two after, for a total of seven. Rashi² *darshens* this from the verse, ‘Seven times a day I have praised You’.³ The first evening blessing describes Hashem’s control over nature, seasons, and cycles of light. The second speaks of Hashem’s gift of Torah, the very essence of Klal Yisrael’s survival. The third refers to Yetzias Mitzrayim, with an emphasis on the future redemption. The fourth stresses the Almighty’s protection of His people from the terrors and dangers of night and slumber.”⁴

“I see that this is quite an important prayer, Abba.”

“Indeed it is, Avi. The blessings before the evening *Kriyas Shema* are preceded by *'Borchu'*, as they are in the morning. Rav Shamshon Refoyel Hirsch, in his commentary on the Siddur relates that the congregation calls upon itself through its *shliach tsibbur* (one who leads the prayers) to make a public declaration: *'Borchu es Hashem Hamevorach!*’ – ‘Bless Hashem, the blessed One!’⁵ The congregation then

responds, *'Boruch Hashem Hamevorach li'olam vo'ed!*’ – ‘Blessed is Hashem, the blessed One, for all eternity!’ The *shliach tsibbur* repeats the declaration to include himself in the congregation.⁶ The sefer *Yesod Vi'shoresh Ho'avodah* adds a passage from the mystical sources – a *minyán* of ten men is not permitted to pray together until they first bless the Holy One. *'Borchu'* is that blessing.”

“Abba, how can we bless Hashem? What can we possibly accomplish? He is perfect, and gains nothing from our blessing.”

“True, Avi. We discussed this concept in the beginning of our learning about the morning *Berachos*.⁷ He is the source of all blessing, and the abundance of His blessings upon us should always increase in quantity and quality.⁸ We should become a veritable *'breicha'* (pool) of *'bracha'* (blessing)! We add that Hashem is *'hamevorach'* – the blessed One. He is blessed by the myriads of creatures, both physical and spiritual, that He created. Each and every one blesses, praises, glorifies, and sanctifies His Holy Name.”⁹

“I see that our *'Borchu'* accomplishes a lot, Abba.”

“Yes, Avi. It is followed by the first blessing, which proceeds to describe a bit of the tremendous Divine wisdom in the movement of the heavenly bodies. *'Uvis'unah meshaneh itim'* refers to the intricacy of the sun’s movements. Its daily route is from east to west, yet its annual cycle is from west to east. Only Divine understanding can make a heavenly body move in contradictory directions. *'Umachlif es ha'zemanim'* – the days and nights become shorter and longer corresponding to the seasons of the year. *'Kochavim ... kirtzono'* – all of the stars in the sky proceed along their paths only by virtue of His *ratzon* (will). *'Hashem Tzvakos shemo* – the Lord of Hosts is His Name’. He created and controls all of the heavenly hosts – stars, planets, day, night, light, and darkness.”¹⁰

“Abba, I have another question.”

“I am anxious to hear it, Avi.”

“Since Hashem knows the precise moment of change from day to night, why does He make the light fade away gradually; slowly giving way to the darkness? He can make it happen in an instant.”

“I see that you are paying attention to what I say, Avi. Please let me share with you another passage from Rav Hirsch, which elucidates this entire *bracha* and will greatly enhance your understanding. Hashem, in His loving care and insight, causes day and night to alternate not suddenly, but by means of slow and very gradual changes that take place with every passing minute so that the transition should not be too abrupt. The stars

appear as watchmen appointed by Hashem to stand guard over the sleeping world below. He has assigned them in their places in definite orbits in accordance with purposes that are known only to Him. The continual creation of day and night is a repeated testimony of the truth of the Oneness and unique nature of Hashem in His world full of contrasts and opposites. Day and night are created by One and the same Almighty Power, and day and night alike serve the unified, harmonious purpose of the One G-d. He requires the service of both light and darkness, of day as well as night, and He gives to each of these phenomena the sphere it needs in order to function in accordance with His will. *'Golel'* – the light of day is literally ‘rolled back’ as the lengthening shadows of night advance. Similarly, at dawn darkness retreats as the light of day grows stronger. *'Uma'avir yom'* – and when the day has done its appointed task, Hashem relieves it from its duty and assigns night to begin its work. *'Umavdil'* – He arranges this alternation in such a manner that neither one of these contrasting phenomena interferes with the function of the other. Therefore, His Name is *'Hashem Tzvakos'* – He Who takes all the infinite variety of hosts of creations and unites them so as to act and interact as parts of one single unified Universe. *'Kel chai'* – He is the one eternally living Power among all the mortal forces of the universe. He is the One Who will remain when all else have departed. He reigns *'tomid'* – constantly over us *'le'olam vo'ed'* – for all eternity. Therefore we are all subject to His sovereignty and to His guidance not only during the days, but also during the nights which we spend on earth.”

“Awesome, Abba. Just awesome.”

Kinderlach . . .
We pray Ma'ariv at the beginning of the night, a time when we enter into the fear and uncertainty of darkness. We take this opportunity to reiterate and solidify our knowledge that the Almighty controls every facet of the movement of the heavenly bodies, including the coming of day and night. Both the darkness and light serve Him, as they slowly give way to each other, for the benefit of the creatures of the earth. Hashem is “chai vi'kayom” He is beyond time, exists forever, and therefore is “tomid yimloch aleinu li'olam vo'ed” ruling over us forever and ever. We who cleave to Him merit eternal life, both as a nation in this world and also as individuals in the World to Come.¹

¹ Maggid Tsedek
² from Gemora Brachos (Mishna 11a)
³ Tehillim 119:164
⁴ Artscroll Siddur
⁵ עייני תוספות מסי' ברכות דף מט : ד"ה תני
⁶ טור או"ח סימן נ"ז
⁷ “Kinder Torah” parashas Korach 2010
⁸ Siddur Kavannah HaLev
⁹ בד הקמח הובא ע"י נצי יוסף הובא בסידור אוצר התפלות
¹⁰ Siddur Iyun HaTefillah