

Parashat Chayeh Sarah 5776, 2015

Yitzhak, Eliyahu and The Meaning of Minchah

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Dedicated to the sacred memories of my mother, Miriam Tovah bat Aharon Hakohen, father-in-law, Levi ben Yitzhak, sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra bat Yechiel, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, Chaim Mordechai Hakohen ben Natan Yitzchak, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Avraham Yechezkel ben Yaakov Halevy, HaRav Yosef Shemuel ben HaRav Reuven Aharon, David ben Elazar Yehoshua, the *refuah shlaimah* of Devorah bat Chana, and Yitzhak Akiva ben Malka, and the safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

Our *parasha* contains the first reference in *Tanach* (the Hebrew Bible) to *Tefilat Minchah* (the Afternoon Prayer Service): “And Isaac went forth to pray [many translate this as “meditate”] in the field towards evening, and he lifted his eyes and saw, and behold, camels were approaching.” (*Sefer Bereishit* 24:63, this and all Bible and Rashi translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*) The Hebrew word for “to pray” used in this verse is *lasuach*. Rashi (1040-1105) interprets this term in the following manner: “*Lasuach* is an expression of prayer, as in (Psalms 102:1): ‘He pours out his prayer.’” His comment is based upon *Midrash Bereishit Rabbah* 60:14, and *Talmud Bavli Berachot* 26b. The Talmudic passage states: “Isaac instituted the afternoon *tefilah* [prayer], as it says, And Isaac went out to meditate in the field at eventide, and 'meditation' means only prayer, as it says, ‘A prayer of the afflicted when he fainted and poured out his meditation before the L-rd.’” (Translation, *The Soncino Talmud* with my emendations to enhance readability)

It is fascinating to note that *lasuach* appears this one time in *Tanach*, whereas the more common verb for prayer, *lehitpallel*, appears seven times. Therefore, it appears that the

word *lasuach* was employed to teach us a particular lesson. In my estimation, this expression, with its dual meaning of to meditate and to pray, is particularly apropos in reference to Yitzhak. He was a complex and multifaceted person who was associated with both *pachad* (fear), "...And Jacob swore by the Fear of his father Isaac" (*Sefer Bereishit* 31:53) and *gevurah* (heroism and self-mastery), as we find throughout Kabbalistic literature. The Ibn Ezra (1092-1167) opines that Yitzhak demonstrated *pachad* at the *Akeida* (his binding). In my estimation, this moment of self-overcoming surely proved his *gevurah* as well.

How does one achieve a true sense of *pachad* and authentic *gevurah*? It appears to me that these qualities are achievable if and only if one has spent time in serious self-reflection and meditation. This is precisely what Yitzhak did when he originated and prayed *Tefilat Minchah*. His prayer was no mere lip service or attempt to "win over" or "cajole" Hashem. Instead, he revealed his innermost self to the Master of the Universe, and poured out his very being before Him. In short, he communed with G-d in the highest and purest sense of the I-Thou relationship. Yitzhak, in a word, taught us the singular significance of heartfelt prayer.

Tefilat Minchah is unlike any other prayer we pray during the course of the day. More often than not, praying *Minchah* requires us to cease whatever work or creative activity in which we are engaged. This demonstrates our devotion and loyalty to our Creator, and when undertaken in an introspective manner, allows us to follow the path forged by *Yitzhak Avinu* (our Father Yitzhak). As such, *Minchah* is a moment in time in the daily

life of a Jew that is *mesugal* (specially dedicated) to strengthening our relationship with G-d.

Moreover, *Tefilat Minchah* reveals the unique relationship that obtains between *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* (the Holy One Blessed Be He) and His people. One of the most spectacular demonstrations of this indestructible bond occurs in *Sefer Melachim I*. Therein we read of the spiritual and physical heroism of *Eliahu Hanavi* (Elijah the prophet), when he single-handedly stood up for G-d's honor against the 450 false prophets of Ba'al. When did he perform this unique act of heroism? When did he show the world that there is only one true Hashem? When did Hashem answer him? This all happened at the time of *Tefilat Minchah*:

And it was when the evening sacrifice [i.e. late afternoon] was offered that Elijah the prophet came near and said, "L-rd, the G-d of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, today let it be known that You are G-d in Israel and that I am Your servant, and at Your word have I done all these things. Answer me, O L-rd, answer me, and this people shall know that You are the L-rd G-d, and You have turned their hearts backwards." And the fire of the L-rd fell and consumed the burnt offerings and the wood and the stones, and the water which was in the trench it licked up. And all the people saw and fell on their faces, and they said, "The L-rd is G-d, the L-rd is G-d. (18:36-39)

Jewish history has been blessed with but one Yitzhak and one Eliahu. They were unique personalities who raised the recognition of Hashem to unheralded heights. They were, as well, paradigm-changing individuals, in that they enabled us to perceive Hashem in the crystal-clear light of truth. Fascinatingly, both did so at the time of *Tefilat Minchah*. True, we can never approach their ultimate greatness; yet, like our ancestors of old, we can emulate their dedication to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* and declare from the depths of our being "*Hashem Hu HaElokim, Hashem Hu HaElokim*" "The L-rd is G-d, the L-rd is

G-d.” May this ever be our watchword and the driving force within our lives. *V'chane yihi ratzon.*

Shabbat Shalom,

Past *drashot* may be found at my blog-website: <http://reparashathashavuah.org>
They may also be found on YUTorah.org using the search criteria of Etengoff and the parasha's name.

The email list, *b'chasdei Hashem*, has expanded to hundreds of people. I am always happy to add more members to the list. If you have family or friends you would like to have added, please do not hesitate to contact me via email rdbe718@gmail.com.

*** My audio *shiurim* for Women on “*Tefilah: Haskafah* and Analysis,” may be found at: <http://tinyurl.com/8hsdpyd>

*** I have posted 164 of **Rabbi Soloveitchik's** English language audio *shiurim* (MP3 format) spanning the years 1958-1984. They are available here: <http://tinyurl.com/82pgvfn>.

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