



Hidden in the Rebbe's Closet  
Parshas Balak

The Rebbe quickly exited his room even before day broke. That's how the Rebbe would start his day, immersing himself in the Mikveh and preparing himself for hours of prayer.

The young man wasted no time. He quickly entered the Rebbe's empty room and hid himself in a closet. He knew that the Rebbe would not waste his time on superfluous actions, and would therefore not open the closet.

Waiting in the closet was difficult and required much self sacrifice. The person hiding was my great grandfather and namesake, Rabbi Yitzchak Dovid Grossman, he had made a long trip from his home in Jerusalem to Karlin in Russia, to spend time with his Rebbe, Rabbi Aharon of Karlin.

He was in Karlin to invigorate himself spiritually, and spent many hours with the other Chassidim enjoying the living word of G-d. Every night he would witness the unbelievable spectacle of his Rebbe reciting the *Shema* before going to bed. It was holy work like none other. At those moments, the Rebbe was in a state of pure spirituality. He would accept upon himself the yoke of Heaven with a great display, while many Chassidim needed only a glimpse to melt their heart and repent.

However, my grandfather wanted more, he wanted to be present during the morning prayers as well, when the Rebbe was completely alone.

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In our weekly parsha we read: "Behold, a people that rises like a lioness and raises itself like a lion. It does not lie down until it eats its prey and drinks the blood of the slain."<sup>1</sup>

The Midrash<sup>2</sup> explains that "when they [the Jews] awaken from their sleep in the morning they show the vigor of a lioness and a lion in grasping Mitzvoth; to don a Tallith, recite the *Shema* and put on Tefillin. A Jew does not lie down on his bed at night until he consumes and destroys any harmful thing that comes to attack him. How so? He recites the *Shema* on his bed and entrusts his spirit to the Omnipresent. Should an army or a troop come to harm them, the Holy One, blessed is He, protects them, fights their battles and strikes them [their attackers] down dead.

Here we see the direct connection between lying down to sleep and awakening in the morning. This is a foundation of Judaism, and as the righteous would say: "the way a Jew goes to sleep is the way he will awake."

This is how the words of King David in Psalms are explained: "He thinks iniquity on his couch; he stands on a way that is not

good; he does not reject evil."<sup>3</sup>If one goes to bed with sin or negativity, he will arise with it as well, and all the more so the alternative, when one goes to sleep thinking about a Mitzvah, he will arise in a positive fashion.

This is what the Sfas Emes would teach on the words of the Mishnah: "These are the things that have no limit...the awakening for the morning and evening prayers." There is an awakening for morning prayers, but what "awakening" is there for evening prayers?

He explains that every morning awakening depends on the evening awakening. If one prepares himself properly in the evening, his awakening is in accordance.

This is what the Shulchan Aruch<sup>4</sup> tells is in the first verse: "One should strengthen himself like a lion to get up in the morning to serve his Creator, so that it is he who awakens the dawn." The Ramah adds that "when he lies on his bed he should know before Whom he lies."

Only after such a *Shema* was recited before going to bed, which would render the Rebbe almost senseless, great grandfather understood that immense morning prayers would follow.

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The Rebbe quickly returned to his room. Grandfather hid in the closet and tried not to make a sound. Light knocks were heard on the door. The Gabai, sexton, asked the Rebbe to meet a community member who needed immediate consultation.

The man knew that if he waited until after prayers he would lose a day's work.

The Rebbe initially declined, but the sexton reminded him that the man was a contributor to the community and deserved the attention. The Rebbe relented, and the man came in to discuss a new business deal he was contending.

The Rebbe thought for a moment and then told him: "Listen, I have not yet even recited the morning blessings. You must understand me, I am in this situation, when in my closet there is someone hiding, who is very important to me, and I have no time for him. And you come and disturb me with business before the morning blessings?!"

The man got the message and left. Grandfather understood and learned then how the morning service looks after such an evening *Shema*.

<sup>1</sup> Bamidbar 23:24.

<sup>2</sup> Tanchumah Balak 14.

<sup>3</sup> Tehillim 36:5.

<sup>4</sup> Orach Chaim 1:1.