

Dear Chavraya,

From words of Torah, prayers form, words become vessels to fill with our soul, Torah filling us, each of us filling Torah. As we make our way along the path of Torah from week to week, wooded glens open before us, places to pause and rest, oases from the strife and struggle along the way of life. There is succor for the weariness and worry held in the details of our own lives, and for the collective worry from all that assaults us in the political climate of these times. Given the gentle beauty of our sensibilities, we can't in conscience put aside our awareness of those who suffer, or not consider the ways we might help to meet their needs. Yet even here, there are times when we need to pause, to sigh, to breathe deeply, to remember the beauty of the world all around us and within us. There are times when we may recall places of beauty we have been, that gave of their gifts to us and helped us to relax. Perhaps a pond deep in the woods, a beautiful flower we saw along the path to get there. Perhaps it was a mountaintop and all the beauty along the way of hiking higher and higher. Perhaps we didn't have to go very far to come to such a place, delighting with the flowers and bushes that grow along the sidewalk, roots of trees breaking through the cement that invades their space. And in the changing of seasons, now to stop in the midst of all that swirls and see our breath that comes from within and reminds of a place even deeper where our very soul abides. Seasons continue to turn in their way, snowflakes then to melt upon our skin. We hold the memories of what has been, sensing the beauty, seeing it with eyes closed with all the freshness and clarity of when we were there, of when it was new and now, time and place shimmering, gifts of forest and field continuing to touch, to inspire and infuse.

It is the essence of an exquisite teaching of Rebbe Nachman of Breslov (1772-18:10) that is rooted in this week's Torah portion, *Parashat Chayei Sarah*. Following the trauma of the *Akedah*, of father's intended sacrifice of son, Yitzchak goes out into the field to meditate, *va'yetze Yitzchak lasu'ach ba'sadeh lifnot arev/and Yitzchak went out to meditate in the field at the turning of evening* (Gen. 24:63). It is the same root, whether of language or spirit, *la'su'ach/to meditate, to pray, to converse*, and so too the root of *si'ach/a bush, a shrub, green and verdant growing things*. So from his own traumas, so much pain and sorrow in his life, Rebbe Nachman would go out each day to be alone in nature, among the trees and grasses, finding solace and strength in field and forest. From words of Torah he formed words of prayer, *May I merit to make it my custom to go out each day to the field and be among the trees and grasses and every shrub of the field. And there may I merit to be alone and to increase in conversation between me and the one to whom I belong* (Likutei T'filot 2:11).

It is all in the way of Yitzchak going out into the field that Rebbe Nachman teaches, words of Torah become prayers, become vessels, become places of respite, of sanctuary. I share his teaching as I translated it long ago while sitting in the woods of a Jewish summer camp, children's voices all around, laughter and joy to inspire, Shabbos coming near.

Know, that when a person prays in a field, then all of the grasses come within the prayer, and aid the one praying, and give to the one praying strength in their prayer. In this way, prayer is called "sicha" (in all of its layers of meaning, prayer, meditation, and shrub). This is in the aspect, derived from B'reishit 2:5 which says "si'ach ha'sadeh/shrub of the field." Every shrub of the field gives strength and aids one in their prayer. This is the aspect of B'reishit 24:63, "And Yitzchak went out to meditate in the field," that his prayer would be with the aid and strength of the field, that all of the grasses of the field would give strength and aid to his prayer. For this reason, prayer is called "sicha," as explained above. Therefore, in the curse in D'varim/Deuteronomy 11:17 (which is in the second paragraph of the Sh'ma) it is said, "and the ground will not give its produce/v'ha'adamah lo titen et y'vulah," for all of the produce/herbage of the earth needs to give strength and aid within prayer. And when there is a defect or barrier concerning the earth's giving aid to prayer, of this is says, "and the ground will not give its strength. And even when one is not praying in a field the produce of the earth still gives aid to their prayer. That is to say, all that supports a person, for example, eating and drinking, goes forth to provide such support (as eating and drinking support the body, so the produce of the earth also supports the soul and aids one's prayer). When one is in the field, however, then nature's support for their prayer is greater, then all of the grasses and all of the produce of the ground give strength to their prayer, as explained above. And this word "produce/yivol" can be derived from the first letters of the verse (Gen. 24:63), "and Yitzchak went out to meditate in the field/Va'yetze Yitzchak La'su'ach Ba'sadeh..., for all of the produce of the field prayed with him, as explained above... (Likutei Moharan Tinyana 11).

As we go out to meditate in the field that is Shabbos, *L'cha Dodi/Come Beloved*, so may we find beauty and rest among all the delights of Shabbos. Aid and support given to our prayer, continuing then to inspire and nurture as we re-enter the world of time, may we merit to remember what we have seen and known, strength given to body and soul, renewed and refreshed.

Shabbat shalom,
Rabbi Victor