



Evening Earliness
Parshas Balak

It happened every morning; the Rebbe would leave his room in the early hours of the morning, even before the sunrise. He would start every day by immersing himself in the Mikvah, and then would commence in the morning prayers, which lasted several hours.

The young man did not waste a moment. He quickly entered the Rebbe's room and hid himself in the closet. He knew the Rebbe would not check there. It was very difficult waiting in the closet. The young man was my grandfather whom I am named after, Rabbi Yitzchak Dovid Grossman OB" M, who took a long arduous journey from Israel to Russia to visit his Rebbe, Rabbi Aharon of Karlin. My grandfather filled himself with spirituality while visiting with the Rebbe. Every evening he witnessed the awesome spectacle of the Rebbe reciting the *Shma* before he turned in to go to bed. This sight was enough to melt anyone's heart. My grandfather was not satisfied. He knew there was a connection between the evening and the morning, and wanted to witness the Rebbe's morning prayers as well. He wanted to be a part of the Rebbe's morning worship, though the Rebbe prayed in solitude, alone in his room.

In our weekly Parsha, Bilam states in one of his blessings: "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."¹ Rashi recites the words of our Sages on this verse: "**Behold, a people that rises like a lioness:** When they awaken from their sleep in the morning they show the vigor of a lioness and a lion in grasping mitzvoth, to don a *Tallis*, prayer shawl, recite the *Shma* and put on *Tefillin*, phylacteries. **It does not lie down:** a Jew does not lie down on his bed at night until he consumes and destroys any harmful thing that comes to tear him. How so? He recites the *Shma* on his bed and entrusts his spirit to the hand of the Omnipresent."

There is a link between going to bed and waking up. This concept is fundamental, as the righteous would say that in the state one turns in he will also awake.

With this in mind, we can explain King David's words: "He thinks iniquity on his couch; he stands on a way that is not good."² If one goes to bed with iniquity, he will awake in a way that is not good; and all the more so if things are positive, if he goes to bed with positive thoughts he will awake in a positive way.

The Sfas Emes commentated on the words of the Mishnah: "The following are the things for which no definite quantity is prescribed...early attendance for morning and evening prayers."³ We can understand the connection between punctuality and morning prayers, but what relation does evening prayers have to early attendance? The answer is that any punctuality in morning prayers is interlinked with diligence at evening prayers. If one prepares himself properly before he goes to bed, this will impact how he awakens in the morning.

The Shulchan Aruch rules in the first clause: "One should strengthen himself like a lion to get up in the morning to serve his Creator."⁴ The Rema adds: "When one is in private and when one lies on his bed, he should know before whom he is laying." This clause comes to detail for us the day's progression, but the day actually begins in the previous evening.

Only after reciting the evening *Shma* which lasted for a long time, at the end of which the Rebbe collapsed in fatigue, was the Rebbe able to draw the strength for powerful morning prayers. This is what my grandfather learned.

The Rebbe hurried back to his room. My grandfather was crouching in the closet, struggling not to make a sound. Knocks were heard on the door. The Rebbe's aid was knocking asking the Rebbe to accept a visitor who needed immediate consultation with the Rebbe. If he was forced to wait until the Rebbe concluded his prayers he would be forced to lose a work day. The Rebbe was not happy, but his aid reminded him of the contributions made by the man at the door. The Rebbe accepted him, and the man told him of a new deal he was about to make concerning the wood trade he owned. The Rebbe thought for a minute, and replied: "Please listen, I have not yet said the morning blessings, and there is someone dear to me hiding in the closet, and I have no time for him. Now you come to trouble me with your business, even before the morning blessings?"

The businessman left him, and my grandfather learned how morning prayers are impacted by the evening prayers.

¹ Bamidbar, 23, 24.

² Tehillim 36, 5.

³ Tractate Peah 1.1. Tractate Shabbat 127a.

⁴ Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim, 1,1.