

Walk thru Davening

with Rabbi David Walk

GOD'S ON GUARD

UVA L'TZIYON - part 2

This is the second in a short series on the famous prayer K'DUSHA D'SIDRA, which is most commonly called UVA L'TZIYON. To most people this long paragraph looks like a collection of inspiring verses, but that point of view is far too simple. In reality, this is a carefully organized prayer made up of five parts. We covered the first two in Part One of this series. It begins with two verses from Yeshayahu, which replace an ancient custom to learn passages from NACH (Prophets and Writings) after daily prayers. Part two is a reprise of the doxology, the Holy, Holy, Holy declaration, but this time with Aramaic translation, again adding the element of studying the material.

The third section begins by asking the God of Avraham, Yitzchak, Yisrael and our ancestors to guard (SHOMER) THIS forever, in the desire and thoughts of the hearts of Your people, and direct their hearts towards You (Divrei HaYamim Alef 29:18). Beautiful verse, but what does the demonstrative pronoun ZOT (this) refer to?

In the actual context from Tanach, it refers to donations or offerings in the Beit HaMikdash. However, in our prayer most observers believe that we are referring to issues within our text. Probably, the most popular approach is to assume that we beseech God to SHOMER or protect our declaration of God's sanctity in the doxology. Perhaps, but I strongly believe our focus lies elsewhere.

In the larger framework of the prayer, we're discussing Torah study. The doxology is just one example of the genre. The continuation, I think, proves my point. The end of the verse discusses guiding our thoughts and feelings towards God. Our proclamation of God's KEDUSHA is very important but doesn't guide the entirety of our lives as Torah study does.

We now confront one of the most prominent verses in all of our davening:

He is compassionate; He forgives iniquity and does not destroy; He suppresses anger time and again, never rousing His full wrath (T'hilim 78:38).

It's been pointed out that this is the middle verse in the book of Tehillim, and therefore is a lynchpin to our attempts to approach God and receive Divine attention. It points out

God's compassion and patience for our people.

This verse introduces our weekday evening service, and is often paired with the verse: O LORD, grant victory! May the King answer us when we call (20:10), which we will encounter in just five more verses here. These two verses, begging for God's attention to our needs, bracket these other verses which refer to similar requests. We next turn to why God is so long suffering when dealing with our stiff-necked tribe.

The first reason for God's forbearance is the reality, 'That You, My Lord, are good and forgiving, abundantly kind to all who call on You' (86:5). In other words, patience and kindness are the basic attributes of God when dealing with those who seek out the Divine Presence. To those less inclination to seek out God, power and infinite strength would seem to be the overriding reality of God, but those of us who really try to know God realize that love, compassion and kindness are the principal realities of the Creator.

Next, we arrive, I believe, at the central issue of our request for God's attention: Your righteousness is eternally righteous; Your Torah is truth (119:142). People often (especially when suffering) question the

righteousness of the world God created and rules. We loyal Jews, however, daily express our firm belief that God's universe is just, even when we have difficulty fathoming the reality we face.

This verse ends by declaring, as well, our belief in the truth of our Torah. Rav Soloveitchik explained this phrase to mean that Torah demands 'authenticity'. Torah is the opposite of SHEKER, dishonesty and deception.

At this point, we quote the verse, 'Grant truth (EMET) to Yaakov; kindness (CHESED) to Avraham, as You promised to our ancestors in days of yore (Micha 7:20). Often this verse is understood to state that Yaakov was the man of truth; Avraham the man of kindness. No argument here, but I don't believe that is the point of our verse. Our verse in its literal meaning is explaining that God's largesse to Yaakov was the fulfillment of a deal or covenant (B'reishit 28:20-22), and, therefore, all of God's help was an act EMET, fulfilling the deal.

Avraham, on the other hand, also received great gifts and promises from God. However, there hadn't been any previous agreement. When God, or anyone, gives without any previous commitment, that giving is a

CHESED, an act of kindness, not a required act.

Moving on, we next encounter a verse which has become a famous response to the question, 'How're you doin'?' This verse begins, BARUCH HASHEM YOM YOM! (Blessed is God each and every day). Our Sages learned from this statement that we should repeat the appropriate blessings daily (B'rachot 40a). But on the literal level this phrase leads into the next statement, 'He has loaded us (with blessings).' Because God is the Power of salvations.

Then we declare God to be our Protector, who provides us a refuge in this cruel and dangerous world (T'hilim 46:8). The penultimate verse quoted, 'God, Master of Legions, fortunate is the one who trusts in You! (84:13). This tandem of praises emphasize how much we rely on God in this life on Earth. In our prayers, we must both make our requests, but also declare our faith that God is the proper address for all these petitions.

Finally, we end this middle section of Kedusha D'Sidra with the well-known verse: God save! May the King answer us on the day we call (20:10). This verse expresses our confidence that God will be there in our time of need. Our nation has survived because God intervened when our plight was dire.

We conclude this part of the prayer by making this declaration of hope and confidence in God's supervision over Jewish destiny. It's only because of this faith that we engage in prayer.

So, this concludes the middle of UVA L'TZIYON, which more than anything else is a statement about the efficacy of prayer, and is, as well, a declaration of our trust in God. Three parts down; two to go. 