

# Walk thru Davening

*with Rabbi David Walk*

## BEAUTIFUL MORNING

### BIRCHOT K'RI'AT SH'MA - part 3

In the last couple of articles, I began discussing the blessings surrounding Sh'ma as recited on Shabbat. Now it's time to visit the normative version used on weekdays. After the opening blessing of 'Who forms the Light and creates darkness; Who produces peace and creates everything.' On Shabbat, we pick up the theme of 'everything' (HAKOL) and declare that 'everything' acknowledges God. On weekdays, on the other hand, we jump to 'Who illuminates the Earth, with compassion.'

This weekday version makes a lot of sense because, historically, most people davened relatively early to get working without losing much sunlight hours. Especially farmers or shepherds who needed to get working with the dawn. So, the amazing event every AM was the MA'OR, the 'great light' which pierced the dreaded darkness. Providing the dawn was the greatest kindness to humanity, before Edison. Thus, we begin:

The great light which He provided in compassion for all the dwellers upon the Earth, and in Divine goodness

there is a daily renewal of Creation.

It's a brand new world of endless possibilities. That's how we begin our preparation for the Torah-mandated morning recitation of the Sh'ma. And what does the dawn have to do with SH'MA? Well, good question! The Sh'ma has three parts: Passage 1 (D'varim 6:5-9) is about accepting God as our Deity and Sovereign, Passage 2 (D'varim 11:13-21) declares our commitment to Torah and Mitzvot, while accepting the consequences of that decision, and Passage 3 (Bamidbar 15:37-41) describes the Mitzva of TZITZIT but its connection to the Sh'ma declaration is the acknowledgment of the Exodus and the Jewish nation's historical relationship to God.

Sometime during the fourth or fifth century BCE, the Men of the Great Assembly wrote three blessings to be recited with the Sh'ma every morning. Each blessing relates to the commitment we accept in each passage. So, this first blessing is about accepting God's rule over us. Our Sages decided that the best way to do this is by daily declaring our belief that God created us and the Cosmos around us.

So, we started this blessing with our awe over the Sun, and then we continue: O Lord, how many and

varied are Your works! In wisdom You have made them all; The earth is full of Your riches and Your creatures (T'hilim 104:24).

Initially, the Sun dominated our consciousness, but then, in its light, we survey the scenery around us. We are struck by the variety and wealth of God's world, and then conclude: You are the exalted, unique King. Since the beginning of time You are to be praised, glorified and exalted for the compassion displayed by being our Rock, Shield and Stronghold.

Then our Rabbinic poets wrote a praise of God alphabetically. This stylistic trope is meant to declare that God's greatness is so comprehensive that one needs all the letters of the alphabet to include all the praises.

At this point in our prayer there is a shift. Until now we have been praising God, but now we begin to describe the praises for God which are being proclaimed by all the ME'OROT, celestial lights. This change makes the rest of our prayer about the universe, and no longer about me and my relatively tiny needs and miniscule perspective. It's sort of like the little girl who wrote her address as my house, my street, my town, my country, my world, the

Solar system, the Milky Way Galaxy, the Universe. Even though God provides for me personally, our Deity can't be limited to us or even our world.

This transformation to a much larger perspective continues into the next paragraph, which begins 'May you be blessed, our Rock, King and Redeemer (TITBAREICH TZUREINU)'. At this point, we put away our telescopes scanning the vastness of space. We begin to imagine the unreachable, spiritual realm, which we can neither know nor fathom. And there, the Ministering Angels are praising God at the pinnacle of existence (B'RUM OLAM).

Our puny efforts are an attempt to emulate their awesome, celestial praises of God. These beloved, pure and mighty Beings also perform rites of praise every day. Our attempts to reconstruct their blessings, praises and declarations are based upon the two famous descriptions of the angelic ceremonies witnessed by the prophets Yeshayahu and Yechezkel. We will attempt to describe that process in our next article.

At this point, I'm going to inject a Halachic point. The Rambam, when discussing the blessings around the Sh'ma states: These blessings and all the rest of the blessings familiar to

the Jewish people were instituted by Ezra, the scribe, and his court. One may not detract from them or add to them... The general principle is that anyone who deviates from the set form of blessings established by the Sages is mistaken and must recite the blessing again in its proper form. Anyone who does not say [the paragraph of] "True and certain..." in the morning prayer or [the paragraph of] "True and faithful..." in the evening prayer does not fulfill his obligation (Laws of Kri'at Sh'ma 1:7).

According to Rav Soloveitchik, the Rambam is informing us that these blessings are integral to the Torah command to recite Sh'ma. Therefore, these blessings must also be recited in the proper times, because one hasn't really recited Sh'ma without them. These blessings were instituted as part of the very fabric of the Sh'ma recitation. They can't be chanted piecemeal.

In this blessing, we're attempting to inject into our prayers the daily experience of our awakening to the new dawn. We've described our awe. Then we attempted to survey the magnitude of God's Creation from the perspective of our world and universe. In my next article, I'll try to follow this blessing's effort to understand, describe and emulate

the Angels' daily ceremony to glorify God.

None of this is easy, but if we can, even for a moment, feel celestial connectivity, then the effort is well worth the attempt. 