

Walk thru Davening

with Rabbi David Walk

REDEMPTION @ NIGHT

MAARIV - part 4

Last week I wrote an article about the blessing after the recitation of Sh'ma at night (Ma'ariv #3, Truth & Faith). In that piece, I emphasized the profound difference between what we declare after the Sh'ma in the evening as opposed to the parallel affirmation in the morning. In the AM, we're all: It's true and obvious! In the dark, we're all: Well, I do really believe it all. Day equals clarity; night is murky and scary, at least before Edison invented light pollution. So, it's a bit of a wonderment to me that before we go on very far, these two blessings merge into the exact same issue: The Exodus from Egypt.

In the morning the start of the section about the Exodus begins: From Egypt You redeemed us, Lord our God, and from the house of bondage you delivered us. All their firstborn you killed, while your first born You redeemed.

At night, the corresponding material reads: You brought vengeance upon Pharaoh, Who performed signs and wonders in the land of Ham's children; Who smote in wrath the

firstborn of Egypt and brought out His people Yisrael from their midst into everlasting freedom.

Notice, please, two things. First the emphasis on the Tenth Plague, killing the firstborn of Egypt in both versions. This is critical because Moshe was informed before he ever went to Pharaoh that the Exodus would not happen until God smote the first born of Egypt (Sh'mot 4:22). So, without killing the firstborn there's no Exodus. Second, in the morning we mention redemption, at night (although we will mention redemption later) initially we emphasize revenge.

Then we ready ourselves to quote from the SHIRAT HAYAM (Song of the Sea) both morning and evening by declaring: Moshe and B'nei Yisrael recited (raised their voices) to You with great joy, and they all exclaimed. Whether it's day or night, belief or clear knowledge the material we use to declare our allegiance is SHIRAT HAYAM.

Thus we proclaim: Who is like you, O Eternal, among the mighty (EILIM, gods?)? Who is like you, sublime in holiness, awesome in praises, working wonders? (15:11). We rhetorically ask: Is there anything else out there in the universe to compare to the omnipotence of God?

However, there's another approach. The word EILIM could also come from the word for mute or silent. Thus we render the verse: Who is like You among the mute (Gitin 56b). Rav Soloveitchik considered this possible translation and commented:

How can the Talmud leave a question with TEIKU ('there the issue stands', in other words, unresolved)? If a Jew never says TEIKU, and all life's problems are resolved, he is nothing more than a fool... Unanswerable, unexplained tragedies have likewise accompanied the Jew in his long history... as one tears his clothing at the moment of his greatest grief, a Jew recites a blessing, Blessed is the True Judge. This expresses a person's ability to engage in passive acceptance when appropriate (D'rashot HaRav, p. 30-31).

In the morning, we declare God's great power. Perhaps, in the evening, we express our inability to fathom much of human history, and God's mysterious role in it. We stand mute before life's greatest dilemmas.

Then we refer again to the wonders of YAM SUF: Your children beheld Your majesty as You parted the Sea before Moshe, 'This is my God!' they declared, and then said: God rules forever!

This last sentence is the most quoted verse in our liturgy. On a regular day we recite this verse eight times, and refer to it at least three more times (in Aramaic translation or the extended version recited in YEHI CH'VOD). The Jewish nation finds great comfort and resilience in this knowledge of God's permanent rule over the Cosmos.

When we review the verse by quoting Onkelos's translation that version goes: The Lord's Kingship is established for ever and to all eternity. Okay, so this Aramaic translation is assuming that the future tense in our verse is really a present tense. We use this future tense because this present situation will extend into an infinite future as far as we can imagine and beyond. It is true now, and will always be true. Cool!

However, there are commentaries who explain our verse in the following manner: The word for EVER (L'OLAM) is spelled deficiently, missing the VAV. This means that the rule of God will not be complete until the four enemy empires have disappeared: Babylonia, Persia, Greece, and Rome. Some commentaries explain that the four words in our very short verse also hint at the four empires.

In the daytime we are declaring God's contemporary rule over heaven and earth. At night, perhaps, we are declaring our belief that one day God's rule will be complete and total, but not today, not yet. Again, there is a dichotomy between the clarity of daylight and the fog of night.

Rav Shagar described Faith as belonging to the subjective plane, while Truth reflects objective cognition. It is only when one's subjective certainty is joined with an objective recognition (that is, one's understanding of reality as it is rather than from one's personal point of view alone)... that a faith may be formed that has the potential to lead to redemption and reparation. Rabbi Nachman educates his listeners to reach the desired harmonization of Truth and Faith, to a combination that can create real Faith on the one hand and a Truth that concerns one's own life on the other.

In other words, the total religious experience requires Faith and Truth, Night and Day, Shacharit and Arvit.

