

**Walk  
thru  
Davening**

*with  
Rabbi  
David  
Walk*

# **Walk thru Davening**

## *with Rabbi David Walk*

### **Why Pray?**

There are many people who claim that they never pray. I don't believe them. Many years ago, I was an irresponsible teenager who decided to become an Orthodox Jew with many wonderful friends who thought that I was crazy. Part of their critique of my new lifestyle was the fact that, to their thinking, I was davening 'all the time'. They all insisted vigorously that they never, ever prayed. However, one December morning while driving on an icy road (US Route 3, Plymouth, NH) we got into a skid. With the car slowly sliding into a gas station, two of my 'I never pray' buddies were chanting with great devotion, 'O, God, I don't want to die. Please, God, don't let me die!'

Okay, most of us don't spend much time in slow motion car accidents, but still a lot of people pray. Why? Generally, I believe most people pray, because they believe it works. There are many studies which show that people who pray regularly live longer and have happier lives. I'm skeptical. It may just mean that the people who pray are the type who live longer and are happier. So, I don't really know why most people pray. As an

Orthodox Jew, I pray because it's obligatory, but does the story end there?

According to the Midrash, there are ten terms for prayer: (1) prayer, (2) beseeching, (3) call, (4) cry, (5) outcry, (6) chant, (7) encounter, (8) falling, (9) sing, and (10) stand. Actually, there are more, like 'converse', 'ask' or 'recite'. The point is that our Sages recognized that there are many reasons why people pray, and each term for prayer can represent another motivation for TEFILA.

However, the two greatest Jewish religious thinkers of the twentieth century, Rav Kook and Rav Soloveitchik both wrote that there are really only two reasons to pray, even though they express it differently. Rav Kook wrote that we can divide the reasons for our modern praying into the mystical and rational. In the rational realm, we find Torah obligations based on historical, objective obligations to interact with God, because we have intellectually concluded that there is a Supreme Being, to Whom we owe obeisance.

This commitment began as KORBANOT (offerings) in the Temple. We continue those obligations through our public recitations of the SHMONEH ESREI (the AMIDA) prayer.

This reality is most noticeable on Shabbat, Chag and Rosh Chodesh in the MUSAF service, when we actually recite the verses about the offerings. But our weekday morning and afternoon SHMONEH ESREI prayers are in place of the daily offerings (TAMID offerings).


The less objective or spiritual approach to prayer is expressed in our silent SHMONEH ESREH, when we are allowed or even encouraged to interject personal requests and thoughts. This is our time with God. Our Patriarchs did this when they invented the morning (Avraham), afternoon (Yitzchak) and evening services (Ya'akov). Even though now there's a script, we must do everything in our power to make this a conversation. Those blessings which our Sages composed are guidance for these visits.

The Rav said that the material our Sages wrote for us means that we don't have to primarily 'need to say what we feel; we are required to feel what we say'. We should work hard to understand what our Sages composed, because they are guiding us in this encounter with our Maker. We should pour our souls into this endeavor.

This is hard. We feel the obligation to say the prayers but often don't feel

that the process is working. Rav Soloveitchik once observed that many of us 'don't want to daven; we want to have davened'. It's a conundrum. I feel this often. There are days when I have trouble remembering my morning davening experience, and that's not a sign of significant involvement in the process. It's something to work on, for me and for everyone.

Rav Steinzaltz z"l was once approached by a young observant man who taught Torah. This individual divulged that he had 'become distant or disconnected from the prayer service'. Rav Steinzaltz suggested that the young man 'wrestle' with one sentence of one prayer: Grapple with that one sentence, and say it with intention (KAVANA). That will change the whole day that lies before you.

That's the point of why I'm starting this new series of articles on T'FILA. To daven better, it's important to try to understand our prayers. Then we can follow Rav Steinzaltz's advice. Together, let's find that one sentence which will make our prayers more meaningful, then our day, then our life. 

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### **The Evolution of Prayer**

#### **Shmoneh Esrei - part 1**

Our people have been praying since Avraham Avinu. The Avot are credited with 'inventing' SHACHARIT when the sun rises, MINCHA as it sets, and ARVIT during the distressing darkness. But what did they say? Except for a few snippets scattered throughout Tanach, we don't know what they shared with God during these encounters. Rambam explained 'that every person should daily, according to his ability, offer up supplication and prayer' (Laws of Prayer 1:2). He goes on to explain that this process should include praises, requests and thanksgiving. But through tribulations and exile people lost the focus or clarity to accomplish this task on their own without guidance. So, during the time of Ezra, the Men of the Great Assembly composed the Shmoneh Esrei prayer. My first articles on Jewish prayer will focus on this master work of liturgical composition.

The most remarkable aspect of this prayer's design is its flexibility. The introductory material of praises for God and the concluding section of

thanksgiving vary only very slightly throughout the year. However, the middle part is always dedicated to the purpose of this particular prayerful encounter with God. Generally, the goal of the prayer is supplication to God for the needs of both the individual and the community. This petitionary text of thirteen blessings is exchanged on Shabbat and Chag for a single blessing which expresses the sanctity or special nature of the day.

On those days upon which the Torah (Bamidbar chapters 28 & 29) decreed a MUSAF (additional offering) in the Beit HaMikdash, we have a Musaf prayer. This iteration of our basic prayer format has one blessing in the middle which is based upon that day's special additional offering. It's these prayers which remind us of the dual nature of our davening. These prayers continue the obligation of daily prayer begun by the Patriarchs, but also are formatted to remind us of our presently abandoned offerings in the Beit HaMikdash.

Before we begin our analysis of the text of the Shmoneh Esrei, I think that it's important to note three innovations that our Sages thought important enough to impose upon those reciting their master prayer. The first is to stand with our feet

together. This obligation to be on our feet gives our prayer its most popular name, the AMIDA - the Standing Prayer. Our Sages based this custom on the angels who are described as 'standing upon a single leg' (Yechezkel 1:7), in the famous passage about God's Divine Throne, the MERKAVA.

Rav Kook uses this custom to explain that we have two great services to God. One is Torah study, and is described by the term HALACHA - movement. Torah study and its resulting legal observances are a work of persistent progress. We are expected to always move forward both individually and communally. Communally, we must always allow HALACHA to evolve and remain relevant no matter what innovations appear in contemporary society. Individually, every one of us is required to study and develop so that we are always reinventing ourselves as we mature and age. HALACHA is always a work in progress.

Prayer, on the hand, is a statement of where we are at the given moment that any prayer is recited. Prayer is sort of in a stasis. Today I stand before God and try to describe my situation and needs, at that moment in my spiritual journey. Sharing that information is a major part of what I

communicate in my attempt to contact the Infinite.


The second rabbinic innovation is to face Yerushalayim, or if one is privileged to be in the Holy City, then to turn towards the Temple Mount. This wrinkle in our daily devotion adds two dimensions to our attempt to communicate with God. First, it gives the individual supplicant a sense of national unity. All the world's Jews are focusing on the same point. This adds a new dimension to our communication with our Maker. We are not alone. I'm a small part of a much greater effort.

Turning towards the place of the once and future Beit HaMikdash, also reminds us that our prayers are, in part, a replacement for the Temple offerings. It also calls attention to the fact that we believe that Yerushalayim is the interface between this world and the heavenly realm. All of our prayers travel to the Divine Throne via the Temple Mount. Zionism unites us politically, nationally and spiritually.

The third addition instituted by our Sages to help us daven better is to begin our Shmoneh Esrei with the verse: O Lord, open my lips, that my mouth may declare Your praise (T'hilim 51:17). This plea reminds of an extremely important reality: Daven-

ing is very difficult! It's so hard to communicate with God that Divine support is required. It's almost a chutzpa to address our Creator. We seek permission for this possible impertinence.

Rebbe Nachman points out the numerical value (GEMATRIA) of HEICHAL, God's divine palace, 65, is also the value of the first word in our verse ADONAI. One requires the permission of the BA'AL HaBAYIT to receive the honor of visiting God's Sanctum. As God's servants we need the Master's indulgence to enter the Divine presence. This verse reminds us of the WOW factor involved when entering God's presence. Humility is required for this enterprise.

So, now we're ready to open our mouths in prayer, praise, supplication. In the following articles, I'll try to make our Sages' wonderful Shmoneh Esrei prayer come to life. I hope that I'm equal to the task. 

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### **Permission to Pray**

Our Shmoneh Esrei prayer, the AMIDA, is a marvel of liturgical engineering. The Men of the Great Assembly (established c. 516 BCE), under the guidance of Ezra HaSofer, designed a remarkable service, which can be easily adjusted to fit any day of our ritual calendar. This Silent Devotion is full of requests and petitions on regular weekdays, but its list of pleas can be removed from its center and replaced with a description of the special nature of the occasion on Shabbat and Chag. Over the next weeks, we will explore the intricacies of this amazing prayer, and, hopefully, this endeavor will contribute to a more meaningful davening experience. I know that I can use a supplication overhaul.

This endeavor at communication with God is called Shmoneh Esrei because there were originally 18 blessings in this prayer. The first three and last three remain pretty stable all the time, and this present article will deal with the opening blessing. This first paragraph is called AVOT (Patriarchs), because it focuses on the reality that our relationship with our Maker is based upon God's love affair

with our Founding Fathers, Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya'akov. Our Sages credit them with inventing the concept of regular prayer, every morning (Avraham), afternoon (Yitzchak) and night (Ya'akov).

Invariably, our litany of blessings follows the set format, 'Blessed are You, O Lord, King of the universe.' But not here at the outset of our Amida. Here, instead, we begin, 'Blessed are you, O Lord, our God, and the God of our ancestors.' Why? Rav Soloveitchik responds: The words 'King of the universe' are omitted here, for how can temporal, flesh and blood humans purport to approach the eternal and infinite King of the Universe for fulfillment of one's personal needs? Invoking the Universal King in the beginning of our Amida would negate our very ability to approach God in prayer. Instead, we invoke 'God of our forefathers'. If we are able to engage in prayer at all, it is only through the precedent of our forefathers who instituted the very institution of prayer.

So, our first blessing is a preamble to the Amida in which we state: We're here because our ALTE ZEIDIE paved the way. This introductory blessing continues by specifying that our God was the God of Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya'akov. Why is it necessary to

list them individually and to attach the word God to each? Because each of them related to God differently, one through CHESED (kindness), one through GEVURA (spiritual stamina), and one through TEFERET (splendor, perhaps a synthesis of the first two approaches, but maybe through Torah study in his tent). We, too, are all different in our personalities and, as a result, connect to God from different perspectives and needs. Our master prayer must be flexible and versatile to meet the needs of all.

Now we begin to describe our perspective on how we view God and how we relate to our Creator. Not surprisingly, these descriptions appear in sets of three, corresponding to the AVOT. We start with by describing God as 1. GADOL (great), 2. GIBOR (mighty), 3. NORA (awesome). Then we move on to categorize God 1. is the most-high God (E-L ELYON), 2. bestows acts of loving kindness (GOMEL CHASADIM), and 3. creates and, therefore, owns everything (KONEI HAKOL). Next, we relate God's actions on our behalf; 1. God remembers the kindness of the AVOT, 2. brings a redeemer to their descendants, and 3. this is all accomplished through the Divine name in love. Finally, we declare that God is the King who will 1. help, 2. save, and 3. shield us.

It's important to point out that we love three-part concepts. At the beginning of Pirkei Avot, these same authors of the Amida, the Men of the Great Assembly, teach us three ideas: 1. Be careful (cautious, patient) in the administration of justice, 2. raise many disciples and 3. make a fence round the Torah. Then Shimon HaZadik, one of the last members of this august council informs us that this world stands on three pillars, 1. Torah, 2, Divine worship (AVODA), and 3. acts of loving kindness (GEMILAT CHESED).

Please, be aware that this love of triple ideas is a bedrock of this world of ours. Our earthly realm is three dimensional and can only find stability in groups of three, as in a three-legged stool. Therefore prayers, hopes and wishes for this earth will often be expressed in triplets. This is in stark contrast to God and the Celestial Realm where there is perfect unity. Never forget: God is absolutely ONE!

We end this first blessing of the Amida with a bit of a surprise: Blessed are You, O Lord, Who is the Shield of Avraham. Really! After all that effort to keep our observations about God in threes, out of respect for the three Avot, we end by just mentioning Avraham, and God's

promise to him when he felt vulnerable: Fear not, Avram, I am your shield, your reward is truly immense (B'reishit 15:1).

Our religion is the result of contributions of all three Avot, but our right to address God will always stem from the SACHAR (reward, merit, wages) of Avraham. He not only started our people; he began the Divine bank account which we will always draw upon. He will always be our permission to pray. The ticket into God's Presence is the membership card in Avraham's family, either by birth or by choice.

There is a curious HALACHA, law and custom, about this blessing. Even though one should have KAVANA (intention and sense of purpose) for the entire enterprise of davening, it's only this BRACHA which absolutely requires it. Without KAVANA for this blessing, one has not fulfilled the traditional requirement of prayer. Why? Because this blessing describes, not only how Jewish worship developed from the efforts of the Avot. These ancestors, and primarily Avraham, began the eternal relationship with the Eternal One. Without acknowledging that reality, we have no right to think that we have offered a Jewish prayer. ❤️

# Walk thru Davening

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## Unlimited Power

The first blessing of our Amida or Shmoneh Esrei prayer is all about love, kindness and relationship. That changes fast. The second of the trio of blessings described as SHEVACH or 'praise' is about power, and is called GEVURA. But we shouldn't let ourselves be intimidated, because the Sages who composed this script for our conversation with God remind us that God's unlimited capability is utilized for good and the benefit humanity. This is a complex text, and we'll navigate it carefully.

We begin with 'You are GIBOR!' What do we mean when we discuss God's GEVURA or unlimited strength? Well, like so much else in Jewish tradition it's an argument. Many aver that we are discussing those activities which can only be accomplished by God. The Vilna Gaon disagrees, and explains that the powers listed here are about activities which can't be predicted or regulated. Things like rain or fertility which can't be predicted easily. These issues contain uncertainties, and are by no means inevitable.

The only certainty is that God is GIBOR, and that this Divine power leads to RAV L'HOSHIYA, immense salvation. This power will always be utilized for good and spiritual advancement, the betterment of humanity. We call this Y'SHUA, deliverance or redemption.

At this point, we encounter the dominant example of God's GEVURA, namely MECHAYEI HaMEITIM, giving life to the dead, or lifeless. This exact phrase appears three times in our blessing, and twice more in slightly different wording, MEMIT U'MECHAYEI and L'HACHAYOT MEITIM. So, the famous question is: Why do we emphasize this particular aspect of God's GEVURA?

This question sparks an interesting dichotomy between the two most popular English translations of our traditional Siddur. Art Scroll goes for the more traditional answer, that we repeat this phrase because there are so many examples of God giving life to the lifeless, unborn, or dead. These include our daily awakening from 'deathlike slumber', the bringing of rain which has life sustaining qualities, and, of course, the literal revival of the dead. I would add to that list the initiation of life during the Creation week and God's continued involvement in fertility as

described in the beginning of tractate Ta'anit.

On the other hand, The Koren Siddur, with commentary by Rav Sacks z"l, offers a historical approach. Rav Sacks wrote: The fivefold reference to the resurrection of the dead reflects the controversy between the Sadducees and the Pharisees in the late Second Temple era. The Sadducees rejected belief in resurrection; the Pharisees, whose heirs we are, affirmed it (p. 110). It is true that the Shmoneh Esrei prayer did contain material meant to bolster rabbinic positions, but I'm not sure that this was the intent of our particular blessing.

We wholeheartedly accept the veracity of the idea that there is some form of life after death, without going into the myriad debates about its format. There are enough references to its existence in the Prophets and rabbinic literature to attest to its normative position in our tradition. The Mishna at the end of Sanhedrin is very clear: And these are the people who have no share in the World-to-Come: One who says: There is no resurrection of the dead from the Torah (10:1).

Back to our second blessing, after the declaration about resurrection, we have the praise of God for

bringing the rain in its proper season. This declaration is seasonal based upon the needs of Eretz Yisrael, rain in the winter and dew in the summer. This is not a request for rain, that would come in either the blessing about livelihood or the general requesting blessing, SHMA KOLEINU. Remember the first three blessings are about praising God, not asking for things.

The next section has a list of specific powerful activities carried out by God: sustains all life with kindness (CHESED), revives the dead with great compassion (RACHAMIM), supports the fallen, heals the ill, and frees the captive. This list inspired Rav Soloveitchik to remind us of the rule of Rambam (Moreh Nevuchim 1:54), 'we are permitted to describe God's attributes or actions only if they impose upon man an ethical obligation. We have the imperative to emulate the ways of God... It would have been prohibited for us to praise Him in any way if that praise did not obligate us to follow in His ways (Worship of the Heart p. 159).


When God performs all of these mighty deeds of CHESED, our Maker is not only fulfilling the Divine will, there is also a continued implementation of the Covenant with our Patriarchs. This eternal deal is

referred to in the phrase: Who maintains His faithfulness to those asleep in the dust. This statement is based on a verse: Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt (Daniel 12:2). But I have always connected this to God's eternal relationship and commitment to our Patriarchs. This line contributes to davening in Ma'arat HaMachpela, above their eternal abode, so very intense and satisfying.

As the blessing moves toward denouement, we paraphrase the well-known and oft quoted exclamation of the Jews at the sight of the Splitting of the Sea: Who is like unto You amongst the mighty? Who is like unto You, majestic in holiness, awesome in praises, doing wonders? (Sh'mot 15:11). In our blessing, our Sages rendered this idea: Who is like unto You, Master of might, and to whom can You be compared.

It could be said that this is the main idea of our blessing. Personally, I believe that it is secondary to the idea of God the Provider of life to the dead, but it is a powerful statement of the Omnipotence of God. Compared to God there are no competitors.

Our second blessing of the Eighteen,

ends by echoing the primary idea: Blessed are You, Reviver of the dead. We have moved from declaring that we have inherited an intimate relationship with God from ancestors in the first blessing to this resounding statement of the incomparable might of our Creator. From here we will move to the third great SHEVACH (praise) of our Maker: God is transcendent. That's to be our next discussion. 

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## **I'VE GOT A SECRET**

Shmoneh Esrei 4

Everyone loves a secret! Growing up I loved the game show of that name; my family were big Gary Moore fans. But we Jews have secrets, too. The Kedusha service recited whenever we have a repetition of the Amida contains a profound and ancient secret. Actually, we refer to the secret in the text itself. In my Ashkenazic rite we only mention the existence of this obscure idea in Musaf on Shabbat and Chag, but Eidot HaMizrach and Nusach Sefard shuls mention it every Shacharit. Here's the quote: NA'ARITZ'CHA V'NAKDISH'CHA K'SOD SARFEI KODESH, We revere and sanctify You, just like the SECRET recited by the holy Serafim. But what is this, ironically, well-known secret? Well, that will take a little time to reveal.

The Hebrew word SOD (which reminds modern Israelis of cleaning products) really refers to a deep mystery. This isn't like a Miss Marple or Sherlock Holmes mystery, which a clever mind can unravel. This is a mystical truth which can only become known when revealed by

heavenly forces. This isn't a puzzle; it's an unknown.

The SOD is embedded in the declaration of the Serafim, which we know only because of the prophecy of Yeshayahu: Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts; the whole world is filled with His Glory (6:4). Before we get to the SOD, we must deal with a P'SHAT (literal meaning) problem: What are the three holies?

It has been famously said that the SERAFIM were informing Yeshayahu, and us, that there are three forms of holiness available to us. In ascending order, there is the holiness of time, like Shabbat and Chag; there is the holiness of place and objects, like Yerushalayim or a Sefer Torah; there is the holiness of human beings.

However, there are two explanations to this repetition problem in the davening. We recite this formula of Kedusha three times in the morning services. The first time it surrounds the recitation of SH'MA, the second is the Kedusha service (if there's a minyan), and then in K'DUSHA D'SIDRA (which we call UVA L'TZIYON) towards the end of Shacharit. In that third recitation, we present an explanation of the triple sanctity. It is from the Aramaic translation of the verse: Holy in the highest heaven, holy on earth... holy

forever and all time.

I think that we give another explanation in the very text of the BRACHA itself: 1. You are holy, 2. Your name is holy, and 3. holy ones praise You daily, SELAH!

So, now back to the secret. The declaration is that God is KADOSH, which we have been translating as 'holy', but the true implication of the term is transcendent or unreachable. Then the Serafim inform us that God's presence fills the entirety of our world. How can God be unavailable, yet, at the same time, all around us? It's a paradox! The Rav often said that Jews must learn to live with paradoxes.

Now we've encountered the SOD. God is the ultimate beyond. God inhabits a spiritual plane unreachable for us mere mortals. When God created our realm (through a Kabbalistic process called TZIM-TZUM, 'contraction'), some Divinity was left behind. This holy remnant makes God accessible to those who seek it. That's the SOD! Through spiritual efforts we can make the SH'CHINA accessible and imminent. The Serafim trusted us with the great secret: The Unreachable is attainable to those who seek It with sincerity, purity and love.

The next curiosity in the KEDUSHA service is the fact that we, sort of, say the same thing again, when we quote from Yechezkel (3:12) in the very next line: Blessed is the Presence of the Lord from His Place. In other words, we can bless, praise, contact God, even though the Divine presence is elsewhere, in God's abode in another dimension. Why must we reiterate this idea?

Rav Soloveitchik explained that Yeshayahu was reporting about his vision 'enveloped in an environment suffused with holiness'. The daily morning offering was being offered on the Altar, and the smoke of the incense rose... The entire Temple was filled with the spirit of God in holiness, purity, and majesty... Moreover, Israel was economically prosperous and resided in its land... There was no doubt or uncertainty; all had knowledge of God and affirmed their belief (Before Hashem, p. 5).

The Rav went on to describe the situation facing Yechezkel: The historical conditions in which Yechezkel witnessed his revelation were entirely different... He experienced his vision not in Jerusalem, not in the Temple, not in the palace of God, but as a refugee and exile. Jerusalem and the myriad


of holy communities of Israel were in ruin... His people were sold into slavery, beaten and subjected to hard labor... But despite the fact that it was a time of HESTER PANIM (God seemingly in hiding) ... Yechezkel demonstrated, God is still accessible despite His distance... Yechezkel's answer speaks specifically to us, who are in exile, we who must find God, Who is hidden, distant, and abiding in His 'place' seemingly removed from man (Before Hashem, p. 5-7).

That leaves one more declaration in Kedusha to be explained; God shall reign forever, your God, O Tziyon, from generation to generation, HALLELUYAH! (T'hilim 146:10). We are affirming our faith that our relationship with God is everlasting. But, like always, there's an issue. I mentioned before that we recite the Kedusha formula three times every morning, but in the other two recitations, just before Shmoneh Esrei and in UVA L'TZIYON, we end with a verse from the Song of the Sea, GOD will rule forever (Sh'mot 15:11). Why the change?

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks noted that the first and third recitations describe the song of the Serafim; the second is a reenactment of the scene. This holier endeavor requires a minyan. A minyan adds another dimension.

Rebbe Nachman pointed out that everyone of us has different and unique attributes. We have to observe and learn from each other. Actually, the Rebbe learns this idea from the Aramaic translation of the introduction to the angelic declaration in Yeshayahu: They accepted (M'KABLIN) from each other. We must emulate that and learn from each other.

Our verse from T'hilim is saying a very similar idea. When we daven in a minyan, we each add something unique we learned from our parents and teachers. Plus, minyanim, ideally, have different generations present, each historic layer informing the other. Experience encounters youthful exuberance. We are sharing the SOD from different vantage points.

I love reciting Kedusha. It is a very moving declaration of the most important concept of T'FILA: we can encounter God. As Rabbi Sacks once commented: In Kedusha, we move beyond the priestly prayer-as-sacrifice, and the prophetic prayer-as-dialogue, to prayer as a mystic experience. And we share a secret. 

# Walk thru Davening

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### TO ERR IS HUMAN

Shmoneh Esrei 6

This is the fifth in a series of articles exploring the daily Shmoneh Esrei prayer, also called the Amida or standing prayer. We've just explained that the fourth blessing is about recognizing that all intelligence derives from God. It is this intelligence which separates us from the rest of Creation, so we begin our Amida shopping list by requesting more grey matter. In blessings five and six, our Sages have advised us to ask God for repentance and forgiveness, because we know that we generally have fallen short of the Divine expectations for humanity. It's ironic that once we've attained a certain level of understanding, the first thing we realize is that we're wrong.

These two blessings present us immediately with a dilemma: Aren't T'SHUVA (repentance) and S'LICHA (forgiveness) basically the same thing? I mean don't we seem to combine these concepts during the Ten Days of Repentance? BTW we're going to have a similar issue of apparent duplication when we get to

the blessings about rebuilding Yerushalayim and restoring the Davidic monarchy, but we must wait a few weeks to resolve that quandary.

Actually, the more basic problem is that most of us assume that T'SHUVA is always connected to sin. That's just not true. Look at the wording which begins blessing number 5: Bring us back, our Father, to Your Torah. We're not discussing specific sins or transgressions. We're discussing that life has brought impediments to our continued progress in Torah, Mitzvot and MIDOT (character development). Every morning we remind ourselves that we received a 'pure soul' (ELOKAI, N'SHAMA SHE'NATATA LI T'HORA HI) from our Maker, and now we're asking God to return it to the factory settings.

This, I believe, is what the Rambam is teaching us in his majestic Chapter 7 of Hilchot T'shuva: Do not say that no repentance is needed except for sins to which action is attached, for example: promiscuity, robbery, or theft. For even as it is necessary for each one to repent from such, so it is necessary for everyone to search one's bad tendencies, to turn in repentance from anger, from hatred, from jealousy, from deceit, from pursuing wealth, honor, feasting and

the such; in fact, from all of these it is necessary for one to turn in repentance. Indeed these failings are more grievous and more difficult for one to separate from than those which require action, for on such spiritual issues the prophet Yishayahu (55:7) said: "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the man of iniquity his thoughts" (Halacha 3).

The difference between the normal view of T'SHUVA from sins and the issue in this B'RACHA is, I believe, described by our Sages as T'SHUVA MIYIR'A (repentance out of fear of sin and punishment) and T'SHUVA MEI-AHAVA (repentance from love of God and Torah). In our scenario, the individual hasn't done anything specifically prohibited, but has a feeling that the gap between this Jew and the Infinite is, paradoxically, growing. It's time to commit to the path God would want for us.

So, this B'RACHA continues to discuss that one must reconnect to Torah and to Divine service. We, therefore, ask God to bring us back SHLEIMA, completely and totally, to the spiritual highway. Then we conclude that it's right to ask for this help because, 'Blessed are You, HaShem, who truly desires this T'SHUVA route.

Then we turn in B'RACHA 6 to the

regular garden variety of T'SHUVA, namely sin. This blessing is famous because when we mention the two examples of sin we hit our hearts. This signifies that it was our heart-based emotions which have caused us to transgress God's law, not our minds. If we had thought things through, we wouldn't have sinned, maybe.

Now a public service announcement: Don't bang your chest! This isn't a Tarzan moment. We're embarrassed by our faux pas, so, please, a gentle tap. The rest of us don't want to hear your enthusiasm.

We have two terms for sin, and two terms for forgiveness, and they directly correlate to each other. We begin with S'LACH or 'forgive' for our CHEIT, one of many words for sin. But what kind of sin? I first encountered the original meaning of CHEIT at the rifle range in the IDF. It means to miss the mark or target. Not that I ever missed. Here, too, it refers to missing the expectations God has for us. It generally refers to sins of error, called SHOGEG. I didn't realize that act was prohibited. Famous example: I thought the piece of animal fat was SHUMAN (permitted fat), when in reality it was CHELEV (prohibited fat).

The word for forgiveness for this


type of mistake is S'LACH or forgive the misstep. That's why we begin our blessing by referring to God as AVINU, our Parent. This is the kind of mistake a loving parent will make allowances for.

Next we encounter PESHA, a much more severe variety of sin. This transgression was done on purpose. The individual knew it was prohibited and, at least, for that moment didn't care. Hence, we refer to God as MALKEINU, our King, in this circumstance. We should have the proper awe and fear of the Master of the World when we behaved so poorly.

This transgression can't just be excised and forgotten so easily, therefore we ask for M'CHILA, pardon from severe penalty. It's akin to commutation of a sentence. The sin doesn't disappear, but we mitigate its impact.

Missing from our blessing is the highest level of clemency, KAPARA, atonement, erasure of the sin. There are commentaries who explain that KAPARA is assumed in the next blessing, GE'ULA, redemption. I believe that we don't ask for KAPARA on a daily basis. This level of amnesty is reserved for Yom Kippur. It's important to maintain our fear and trepidation of sin throughout the

year. We reserve our begging for this special gift of God, for the anniversary of the revelation of the 13 Attributes of Compassion while forgiving the sin of the Golden Calf.

These two blessings are a daily reminder of the spiritual dangers lurking in our world. We must commit on a regular basis to tread carefully on the path of life. We recognize that we need God's help in this project. 

# Walk thru Davening

## *with Rabbi David Walk*

### THE BASICS

#### Sh'moneh Esrei 7

About half of all Americans claim to pray daily. That's a lot. The things they claim to pray for are varied indeed. Along with the expected items like forgiveness and health, many people pray for the success of their sports team or to find a parking space. Maybe it's just me, but I can't remember praying for my sports team since 1967, when my prayers for the Red Sox were thwarted by the curse of Babe Ruth. In my experience as a rabbi answering questions about prayer, I think that safety, health and prosperity are the most common goals people desire Divine help for. These are the three issues in blessings 7, 8 and 9 of our Sh'moneh Esrei prayer.

Blessing 7 is called GE'ULA or Redemption. But it's not about redemption like from Egypt or the future Messianic Era. It's about being saved from suffering and oppression in our day to day lives. Throughout history (at least the last 2000 years of it) Jews have been an oppressed minority. This blessing is mostly about begging God to save us from being trapped by forces beyond our

control. Often Jews have been victims of cruel regimes, and this blessing is about being saved from the long list of brutal overlords who have victimized us.

Until this blessing, the issues discussed have been spiritual in nature, this and the next two blessings are about requesting help from God concerning our physical existence. But there is a spiritual aspect of note. We ask to God to help against these forces which we can't control, and then say it's 'for Your name's sake'. Why? It's similar to what Moshe Rabbeinu said to God while pleading for the Jews after the sin of the Golden Calf: Let not Your anger blaze forth against Your people... Let not the Egyptians say that it was with an evil intent God delivered them, only to kill them off in the mountains (Sh'mot 32:11-12).

We are God's nation and representatives in this earthly realm. It does cause a CHILUL HASHEM, desecration of God's holy name, when we wallow in shame and disgrace. We should never cause embarrassment to God, and Moshe begged God to not be the cause of such a debacle.

The Sages ended this blessing with the words GO'EIL YISRA'EL, Who redeems Yisrael. This statement is in the present tense. We see the GA'AL

YISRAEL, in the past tense very often. When we praise and thank God, we refer to the past. When we entreat God to save us, we speak in the present tense.

Blessing number 8 contains the issue that I was asked about the most during my rabbinic career. More people asked me about praying for an ill relative or friend than any other topic, and by a wide margin. I don't think a week ever went by without someone either asking me to pray for someone or seeking advice about Psalms or prayers to recite for an ill person. It's no accident that we recite the MI SHEBEIRACH for the ill, with great solemnity during our services.

This request has an odd feature about it. We say 'heal us and we will be healed, save us and we will be saved'. That seems odd. Of course, if we're healed then we're healed. Well, maybe not. Doctors are great, but they don't always succeed. With God, when healing is on the agenda, it succeeds.

The line before the closing B'RACHA is: For you God, are a faithful and compassionate Healer. Why must we emphasize compassion in the healing process? Sadly, there are many situations when the healing process is extremely uncomfortable and

painful. We believe that God takes the least painful route towards the healing process.

As we close this blessing we recite: ROFEI CHOLEI AMO YISRAEL (Who heals the ill of His nation Yisrael). This is in contrast to the blessing for bodily functions, when we say: Healer of all flesh. Why is our blessing focused of Jews, while the other B'RACHA is universal? I think that we definitely concern ourselves with the whole world, but Sh'moneh Esrei is the prayer for the home team, for the heirs of the Covenant of the Patriarchs, which we reference in the opening blessing.

Our final blessing for today is blessing number 9, for livelihood. We call this BIRKAT HaSHANIM, the blessings of the years. Historically, our ancestors were agrarian. Prosperity was an annual concern, based upon harvests. The ability to survive and thrive was calibrated by annual rainfall figures. Therefore, this B'RACHA emphasizes rain. Even though this blessing appears in the part of the Sh'moneh Esrei concerned with personal needs, nevertheless the Talmud informs us that this request is based upon the needs of Eretz Yisrael. If another part of the world requires rain, we ask for it in the general request B'RACHA, SH'MA KOLEINU.

Then we request SAB'EINU MITUVECHA, satisfy us through Your goodness. This is a more general request for our needs to be taken care of. At this point we should have in mind anyone we know who may require Divine support for their livelihood.

We then ask that this year should be blessed 'like the best of years'. This, again, makes most sense in an agricultural context. In a business framework, it may make sense to ask for the greatest productivity or profit ever, like sales records. However, in agriculture there are only so many acres available for cultivation, so it made sense to ask for one of the really good years.

The closing blessing praises God as the Blesser of Years. This makes senses, of course, in the agricultural context. I must add, though, that traditionally, we viewed our blessings as an annual issue. Our Sages believed that our fate for the year was established on Rosh HaShana. We always viewed God's bounty in that yearly format.

The Vilna Gaon pointed out that we should ask for TAL or dew in the summer time, because it's important to recognize the little items which contribute to our well-being, as well

as the large cloudbursts of support. We sometimes ignore those small things which can make a big difference.

To a certain extent, these three blessings are the heart of the norms of prayers to God. We next turn to the specific requests which are required for the maintenance of well-run society. ❤️

# **Walk thru Davening**

## *with Rabbi David Walk*

### **SOCIETAL NEEDS**

#### **Sh'moneh Esrei 8**

Beginning with blessing number 10, we turn our attention to communal needs. This is important. The Jewish nation survives or fails based on our concern for one another. We believe that KOL YISRAEL AREIVIN ZEH BAZEH, every Jew is responsible for every other Jew. I saw this first-hand last Thursday at Ben Gurion. I went to pick up my wife Rivka from visiting the US. Outside entrance 3 were young women (B'NOT SHEIRUT) handing out flags and backpacks to Jewish refugees from war-torn Ukraine. The singing (HAVEINU SHALOM ALEICHEM) and the tears told the whole story: Jews care about Jews!

This fits right in with the topic of Blessing 10: Blast the great Shofar for our freedom, and raise high the banner to gather our exiles. This thrilling start to our blessing paraphrases two famous verses from the book of Yeshayahu:

(1) On that day a great ram's horn will be blown, and those lost in the land of Assyria will come, as well as those dispersed in the land of Egypt; and

they will worship the Lord at Jerusalem on the holy mountain (27:13),

(2) And he shall lift up a banner (NES) to the nations, and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth (11:12).

The first verse has a prominent place in the Rosh Hashanah davening.

The reference to a 'great ram's horn' prompts the Midrash to note that the ram which Avraham slaughtered in place of Yitzchak had two horns. The smaller was blown during Revelation at Sinai. The larger being reserved to be blasted at the outset of the final redemption. Clearly, the final redemption will dwarf the former.

This is clearly just the first stage of the redemptive process, because we don't discuss the rebuilding of Yerushalayim and the restoration of the Davidic monarchy until later blessings. Nevertheless, the reunification of the scattered nation is a significant step. The idea that there is tremendous power in the unity of all the Jews is seen in the mitzva of HAKHEL, when the whole the nation gathers every seven years to hear the king read from Sefer D'varim. In Kabbalistic thought KNESSET YISRAEL is actually a manifestation

of SH'CHINA, Divine Presence, in our world.

The sad historic reality of the dispersion of our people has been a weakness of our nation for 2700 years. When Haman wanted to describe the decrepit nature of our people, he told Achashveirosh, 'There is one nation which is scattered and dispersed (M'FUZAR UMFORAD) among the other peoples in all the provinces of your realm (Esther 3:8). The Malbim describes this double whammy: M'FUZAR, they have no land for themselves; M'FORAD, even in the lands in which they do dwell, they have no cities or specific territory for themselves. This dispersal has made us extremely vulnerable.

We conclude, 'Blessed are You, God, Who gathers the dispersed of His people, Yisrael.' This term for 'dispersed', NIDACH, implies more than just separated. Again, the Malbim explains that NIDACH means truly isolated and alone. It's a pitiable image.

When, at long last, the Jewish people finally begin to reassemble, what is our first need? Well, that's blessing number 11. We need good leadership. The term SHOFET means so much more than only a 'judge'. As in the book of that name, these are leaders

who have judicial, political, and military power. These leaders require expert advice, and that's where YO'ATZEINU, 'our advisors' come in. These are people with technical and logistical knowledge, who can provide sage advice for the SHOFTIM. Never denigrate the contributions of competent technocrats and bureaucrats.

This reference to judges and advisors is a paraphrase of a verse in Yeshayahu at the end of chapter one, which makes up the Haftara for the Shabbat before Tish'a b'Av. Destruction has come to the Jews as a result of corrupt leadership. Yerushalayim will never return to its former glory as a City of Righteousness, Faithful Citadel unless the leadership is caring and compassionate.

Now comes one of my favorite lines in the whole Sh'moneh Esrei: and remove from us YAGON (suffering, sorrow, discomfort) and ANACHA (sighing, groaning). Under Anti-semitic regimes our people have suffered beyond belief. Now, we can finally reverse that trend of governmental oppression. This line is an exhortation to Jewish leaders, including rabbis: Rule with a light touch! Don't burden the people unnecessarily!

Understanding full-well that we will


never find such perfect leaders, we turn to God, and beseech, 'May You alone, O Lord, reign over us.' The rabbinic authors of the prayer then use four terms to describe this desired kind of leadership: CHESED (kindness), RACHAMIM (compassion), TZADKEINU (vindicate us, find us innocent), BAMISHPAT (in justice).

Jews have been unjustly accused of horrible crimes throughout history. Blood Libels and claims of terrible depredations have been the common fare of Antisemitic screeds for many centuries. This last phrase is a specific demand that we be exonerated from all those lies hurled upon us by our unscrupulous enemies from time immemorial.

We close this blessing by describing God as the 'King, Who loves righteousness and justice' (from Psalms (33:5), 'Who loves TZADAKA U'MISHPAT'). This is remarkable. It's the only blessing in the requests section where the words 'King' and 'love' appear. Rav Yeshayahu HaLevi Horowitz (Shnei Luchot HaBrit) explains that when you love something there is no need to explain your attachment. God loves TZADAKA U'MISHPAT. That's all there is to say.

When we refer to God as MELECH, king, we are describing our Creator as being in total control over our

lives. Historically, a king had unlimited power over his subjects. Even though, in our modern world we've become accustomed to constitutional monarchies which limit the rulers, the authors of our prayers were thinking of kings as a force of unbridled power.

Our vision of society demands TZ'DAKA U'MISHPAT. There must be an enforced system of justice and fair play. That's definitely worth praying for. 

# Walk thru Davening

## *with Rabbi David Walk*

### **BAD GUYS**

#### Sh'moneh Esrei 9

We definitely have enemies. If we Jews are paranoid, there's a good reason for it. I could fill this whole column with a just list of all the Hamans and Hitlers we've endured over the past 4000 years. However, the blessing in our Shmoneh Esrei which I'm going to discuss isn't about those villains at all. Actually, we've already begged God to deliver us from oppressive bad guys in the request to save us from 'our afflictions' in the blessing about GEULA or physical redemption. Oh no, here we're talking about the worst possible threat to our continued existence: enemies from within.

This B'RACHA is an enormous anomaly. The most striking thing about this blessing is that it's negative. All the other requests are 'Please, give us this,' or 'Please, provide us that.' Not, so here. We implore God to: uproot, crush, smash, cast down, obliterate. Pretty tough stuff. Like the screen-overs from a Batman fight.

What's going on? Clearly, the Jews at

the time of its writing were suffering horribly because of the machinations of these trouble makers. Let's set the scene: It's approximately 100 CE. The great Jewish court, Sanhedrin, has fled the destruction of Yerushalayim and is situated in Yavne, near the coast, not far from Ashdod. Rabban Gamliel II, head of the Court, sees Jewish malcontents stirring up the Roman Empire against the down-trodden Jews of Judea. These persistent attacks threaten the fragile existence of the Jewish community in Eretz Yisrael. What to do?

Rabban Gamliel asks who can compose a prayer against those fellow Jews who threaten our very ability to survive. The meekest of the Court, Shmuel HaKatan stepped forward to compose the original version of this B'RACHA. Rav Kook explained that he was uniquely able to do this because he lived his whole existence based upon the principle: Never rejoice over the downfall of your enemy (Pirkei Avot 4:19).

We're not sure what the original version of this prayer looked like. To this day, there are more variations on this B'RACHA than any other in our Shmoneh Esrei prayer. There is still a debate about which term should headline our plea. Is it against the

MINIM, sectarians or heretics, or MALSHINIM, slanderers or informers?

Let's go with MINIM first. These are Jews tearing apart the fabric of our nation by claiming that they have the only, true concept of what Judaism stands for, and all others are not only wrong, but will never inherit the ultimate reward which God has in mind for the Chosen People. There were many such sects in the first two centuries of the Common Era. The most famous, of course, was the various guises of Christianity. Until they broke off, and went a separate way. But there were also Essenes, Boethesians, Sadducees and others.

What about MALSHINIM? These are members of the Jewish community who collaborate with our enemies, and, thereby, endanger every other Jew. Quislings, if you will. These informers may really have believed that siding with the enemy will be for the ultimate good of us all. On the other hand, they may just be selfish and want to flourish personally at a time when the Jews are being oppressed and persecuted. In any case, they are very bad news, indeed.

Which threat is worse? I don't know. But at various times and places in our history one threat would look more perilous, and the rabbis of that era

would emphasize one over the other. The core idea, though, is that the greatest danger to the Jewish people are these internal factions. Judaism's success depends on cooperation between Jews, the ability to accept every Jew, almost without exception.

The actual language of the blessing is very sharp and violent. We can feel the strong emotions of the authors. For these perpetrators of Jewish self-loathing 'let there be no hope'. Then we ask that RISHA'A, evil itself must immediately perish. We still hope these people can survive if only the evil motivations are destroyed.

All of the enemies of our people must be cut off. This imprecation, Y'KAREITU, means to have no future. This threat must be eradicated, and never seen again.

Now, we introduce a new term to describe these bad guys: ZEIDIM. This term implies a willful intent to perform evil. This person is described as knowing that their actions are wrong, but are willing to do them anyways.

Then there appears a list of terms which might come from an ad for a wrecking company: T'AKEIR, uproot; T'SHABEIR, break or crush; T'MAGEIR, cast down; and TACHNI'A, bring low or humble. Wow, that's a

powerful list! It's meant to intimidate any members of these groups who might still be present to participate in or spy on our religious services. Actually, this B'RACHA acted as a litmus test, if someone had trouble enunciating these imprecations, we assumed the worst about them.


These requests are demanded to be fulfilled K'REGA, 'this minute' or M'HEIRA (2x), 'speedily'. These internal threats were so dangerous that they must be eliminated as swiftly as possible. We can't live very long with these efforts to destroy us.

This difficult blessing ends with a fascinating twist. We ask that 'enemies be broken', but ZEIDIM, those members of the Tribe who act brazenly to derail Jewish destiny, should be MACHNI'AH. This term means 'brought low' or 'caused to submit'. We would prefer them to end their destructive ways and rejoin our community. Bring them home.

The urgency of the plea is in direct correlation to the magnitude of the threat to the well-being of the nation. These threats within our community constitute an immediate and dire threat to all other Jews. This B'RACHA is in direct proportion to the risk level posed by these traitors.

It's for this reason that our Sages

added this petition to our Shmoneh Esrei. There is precedent for this emergency request. Besides our list of 12 requests for the well-being of our Jewish society, there are other examples of the number 12 representing the norms of a well-ordered community, like the 12 Tribes or the 12 months. And each of these twelves can be augmented, in an emergency, with a thirteenth member. Like after the sin of the Golden Calf, the tribe of Levi replaced the firstborns as spiritual leaders. From those precedents, we added this 13th B'RACHA, different from all the rest.

There is a certain melancholy aspect to begging God to eradicate these bad apples, but it was seen as a necessary step for the safety of all. May the need for this request soon disappear. 

# Walk thru Davening

*with Rabbi David Walk*

## THE GOOD GUYS

### Sh'moneh Esrei 10

The last B'RACHA we analyzed is about the most dangerous enemies of Jewish society. Those Jews who turn on our faith by joining or supporting our foes. That uniquely negative blessing in our prayer expresses the fear and frustration caused by these turncoats. It's a prayer drenched in loathing. But now, our prayer turns back to its primary goal of communicating to or with God about our most important needs. The new need? After begging God to eradicate those most dangerous villains, we now describe the most valued members of our ideal society: The Good Guys.

So, who are the Good Guys, those people our Sages view as crucial for a well-run society? Here's the list: TZADIKIM, CHASIDIM, Z'KEINIM, SOFRIM, and GEIREI TZEDEK. Now, let's try to figure out what kind of individuals are described by these terms.

What is a TZADIK? Basically, the root of this word denotes just and right. This is a person who is always endeavoring to do the correct thing.

Remember, no one gets it right every time, 'Indeed, there is no one upon earth so good (TZADIK), that this one never sins (or 'errs', Kohelet 7:20).' However, the TZADIK is always trying to perform Mitzvot and avoid transgressions.

That's already a very high bar. So, what constitutes a CHASID? The Etz Yosef suggests BA'ALEI MA'ASEH, people whose every deed is good and kind, whether this performance is a mitzva per se, or not. Generally, we define CHASIDUT as going beyond the letter or demand of the HALACHA, Jewish law.

The Z'KEINIM, on the other hand, are known for their scholarship. A ZAKEN is one who has acquired knowledge. The first two categories strive to fulfill Jewish Law; this class of individuals is working hard to discover what the HALACHA truly is. This group is always struggling to apply HALACHA to the latest technological advances.

Who are the PLEITAT SO-F'REIHEM, the remnant of the transmitters of Torah? They are the elders amongs us who knew and experienced the greatness of previous generations of Torah giants. In my post Holocaust generation, this group was so vital for the continuity of our people and our MESORA, which the Nazis tried

so hard to stamp out. The term SOFER, often rendered 'scribe', comes from the word to count, because they carefully counted every word and letter of texts to assure its accuracy.

Rav Soloveitchik waxed poetic about this group. For me, of course, he bore witness to the greatness of the Jewish world which existed before the deluge. He explained: Jewish scholarship must be linked to previous generations to be authentic, to be part of the MESORA. The MESORA isn't only abstract concepts; it's also feelings, reflecting an experiential continuity... This bridge to the past can tip the balance in favor of holiness over the profane.

Full disclosure: There is another explanation for the identity of PLEITAT SO-F'REIHEM. There are commentaries who believe that these are those patient and saintly individuals who dedicate their lives to teaching the youngest children. We never again experience the same simple honesty as we receive from these dedicated pedagogues.

The fifth, and last, category of this handful of components for a successful Jewish community is GEIREI TZEDEK, righteous proselytes who remind us of how inspiring Torah observance can be to a sincere,

outside observer. The Torah warns us to never denigrate the convert. Rav Steinzaltz z"l points out that we include righteous penitents in this grouping. He notes the continuity of the verses, 'a nation that didn't know you, will come running back to you' (Yeshayahu 55:5) with 'let the wicked abandon his ways and evil thoughts, and turn back to God, Who will be compassionate and his Lord, Who is abundant in forgiveness' (verse 7).


We now beseech God to grant SACHAR TOV, 'a good reward', to these individuals, and to us. Are there bad rewards? Well, it could mean an appropriate reward, because people often ask for things which aren't really good for them. As Aesop warned: Be careful what you wish for! But I like the Ramban's definition for TOV, in the first chapter of B'reishit. The things which are TOV are long lasting.

The other request is V'LO NEIVOSH, 'let us not be ashamed'. Another curious request. But is it? Maybe, because I wasn't always observant, I remember going through a stage when public Mitzva performance concerned me. What would people think if I wear a KIPA or DAVEN in public? But when we have strong faith in God and in the Torah's demands, then we should be confi-

dent, and never concerned of embarrassment. Do what's right, and never fear the consequences.

Then we conclude this blessing: MISHAN U'MIVTACH LATZADIKIM (ArtScroll: Mainstay and Assurance of the righteous). MISHAN, for me, is an Ulpan word. It's the back of a chair, which gives us support. What's the difference between the support of MISHAN and the security of MIVTACH? I believe strongly that MISHAN is a physical support, as in the first time it appears in the Torah, 'If one strikes another with stone or fist... if he then gets up and walks outdoors upon his staff (MISHANTO, Sh'mot 21:18-19).

On the other hand, MIVTACH is spiritual or emotional support. In our prayers, we beg God for both. We exchange our faith and trust in God (BITACHON) for the hope and expectation that God will reciprocate by supporting us both physically and psychologically. We invest of our soul's power to do Mitzvot, and pray for God's protection.

Everyone wants and needs BITACHON, a sense of security and safety. The blessing puts that desire into inspiring words. 

# Walk thru Davening

## *with Rabbi David Walk*

### **FUTURE TENSE**

#### Sh'moneh Esrei 11

In these articles discussing the Shomneh Esrei prayer, we've noticed the fact that this name, which means 18, is an anachronism. Around the year 100<sup>CE</sup>, our Sages added a nineteenth blessing of request. However, the number of these requests is even more complicated, because the Yerushalmi (Jerusalem Talmud) says that the two blessings which I will describe today were once together in the same blessing. At that point, apparently, there were 17 blessings, which is nice because that's the numeric value, GEMATRIA of TOV or good.

These two requests are for the rebuilding of Yerushalayim and the reestablishment of the Davidic Monarchy, you know Mashiach. Our Sages have separated them into two distinct requests, because the first is about God's presence on Earth, while the second is about our ultimate aspiration: a partnership with God in developing a just, moral and spiritual society on Earth.

Actually, the first request, a place for God on Earth, is a more remarkable

plea than the second, an inspired ruler. We've always believed that God can imbue certain humans with revelation, but asking God to dwell in our midst seems to be asking a lot. Our blessing is aware of the audacity of the petition and, therefore, informs us that we have the right to ask for this only because God has previously informed us of this possibility. The blessing says KA'ASHER DIBARTA, 'As You have promised'.

In the Midbar, God told the Jews, 'Build for Me a sanctuary and I will dwell in your midst' (Sh'mot 25:8). This dwelling within Yerushalayim (V'TISHKON B'TOCHA) is, perhaps, our greatest desire. This Divine Presence, the SH'CHINA is the goal of every prayer. Ultimately, this request only makes sense, because God has previously guaranteed it. It's unlike any other request in our Shmoneh Esrei which we could generate on our own.

This reality, we believe, can only be achieved in Yerushalayim, because that term, like every Hebrew word which ends in AYIM, denotes a duality. Like YADAYIM, means two hands; Yerushalayim means two Jerusalem's, one here and one in heaven. Many authorities claim that's why our B'RACHA begins with a VAV

for connection between the paired entities.

We beg that this rebuilt BEIT HaMIKDASH reveal itself B'KAROV, soon, because it's important to God as well as to us. The Talmud informs us that God has said, 'I will not enter the Yerushalayim of Heaven, until I have entered the Yerushalayim of down here (Ta'anit 5a). And we assume that this rebuilding will be eternal because God will make it happen. The body of this blessing closes by referring to the next blessing: And the throne of David should speedily be established within it.

Blessing number fifteen is about the reestablishment of the King descended from David in the Holy City. The Messianic wish appropriately is numbered 15, because that number has holy connotations. It's the GIMATRIYA of the shortest name of God (YUD HEI), and represents the 15 steps leading from the outer court of the Beit HaMikdash to the inner area, upon which the Leviyim sang the 15 Shir HaMa'alot.

We refer to this new scion of the House of David as TZEMACH. There are two reasons for this, both based on verses. In Zecharia, it says, 'Behold a man named TZEMACH will flourish (branch?) from this place

(6:12). So, perhaps, his name will actually be Tzemach, even though there are sources which suggest Menachem. But it does describe the phenomenon of the development of the Messianic Era, as described in Yirmiyahu, 'In those days and at that time, I will raise up a true branch (TZEMACH) of David's line, and he shall do what is right and just in the land (33:15).'

There is another description of the new King. He is also called KEREN, a magnificent horn or antler. This seems to reference that the individual will be the pride or glory of the nation. Historically, many crowns or helmets had horns attached to them to be more impressive.

At this point, there is a line which does not appear in the Siddur of either Rambam or R' Sadya Gaon: For we await Your Salvation every (perhaps: all) day. This is a paraphrase of a line in the blessing given to Dan by Ya'akov Avinu (B'reishit 49:18). This powerful three-word verse is recited as an acrostic by many Jews every day at the end of TEFILA (ArtScroll p. 180).


But more importantly, it expresses the constant expectation of the future, great Salvation, which has sustained our nation all these millennia. In fact, the Talmud teaches

that when a Jewish soul ascends to heaven, God asks six questions. One of which is, 'Did you consistently anticipate My Salvation?' (Shabbat 31a).

Earlier in this essay, I tried to distinguish between asking for the rebuilt Yerushalayim and requesting Mashiach, but there's another distinction which must be made as well. In blessing number seven, we asked for GEULA. Here in blessing fifteen, we are asking for Mashiach and Y'SHUA. What's the difference between GEULA (usually translated as 'redemption') and Y'SHUA (often rendered 'salvation')?

Even though these two terms are often used interchangeably, they shouldn't be. GEULA implies being freed or released from incarceration or from being oppressed. Leaving Egypt was definitely an example of GEULA. Y'SHUA, Salvation, on the other hand, means spiritual liberation from the mundane and profane. GEULA describes a physical state; Y'SHUA characterizes a metaphysical circumstance. They require different requests, because they describe very different situations and needs.

In blessings fourteen and fifteen, we are expressing the deepest historic yearnings of the Jewish people. Our longing for Yerushalayim and Mashi-

ach have allowed our people to keep the faith through exile, destruction, Inquisition, pogrom and Holocaust, and continues to sustain us. 

# **Walk thru Davening**

## *with Rabbi David Walk*

### **HEAR MY PRAYER**

#### **Sh'moneh Esrei 12**

With blessing number sixteen, we end the middle section of the daily Shmoneh Esrei prayer. This large block of material which appear in the weekday service is called BAKASHOT - requests, and we conclude it all with what seems to be a general catch-all for human needs and longings. And, indeed many authorities view our blessing that way. It is common to see printed in Siddurim requests for health or livelihood to be inserted before the KI ATA SHOMEI'A T'FILOT AM'CHA YISRAEL (For You hear the prayers of Your people Yisrael). But there is another approach, which I subscribe to: This B'RACHA presents its own request for a basic human need.

What is this new human urgency? The need to pray! The human soul wants to express itself to our Maker. We need to pray more than we need any other requests fulfilled. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks z"l explains this, when the first sentence of our blessing (Hear our voice, HaShem our God, spare us and have compassion upon us) introduces the confessional part of the Selichot service:

This is the core of our faith on which the whole life of prayer is predicated... God is a personal God, that is to say, One who loves, cares, forgives, and relates to us as persons with our own fears and loves. God is more than an impersonal concept, entity or force, the God acknowledged by philosophers and scientists through the ages, Whom Yehuda HaLevi called 'the God of Aristotle'. For us, He is also the God of Avraham, who calls to us and listens when we call to Him... An impersonal force cannot hear a prayer. An 'It' cannot forgive. Only One to whom we can say 'You' can do these things' (Koren Yom Kippur Machzor, p. 161).

Our B'RACHA then begs: And receive in compassion and favor (RATZON, we will further elucidate this term next week, when we discuss the R'TZEI blessing) our prayers. Why do we add these conditions to receiving our prayers. Why not just beg God to give us what we want? Well, that would be a grave mistake. Often, we ask for things which aren't in our best interest (but I want to win the lottery!!). In 1932, Rav Soloveitchik fervently prayed for circumstances which would have allowed him to stay in Europe rather than emigrate to America. God's not fulfilling that request saved his life, and immeasur-

ably enriched American Jewry and my life.

The Rav went on to explain that we have the assurance that God indeed hears or pays attention to our prayers, but doesn't necessarily accede to our specific requests. It is our persistent hope that our requests be fulfilled, but it is not our 'primary motivation' for prayer. The Rav concluded, 'In praying, we do not seek a response to a particular request, as much as we desire a fellowship with God.'

At this point in the blessing, we have a practice of inserting specific BAKASHOT (requests) for any pressing need in our lives. After the asterisk, we confidently announce: For You pay attention to the prayer of Your people, Yisrael, with compassion. Then we conclude the blessing with this closing CHATIMA: Who pays attention to prayer.

This expression SHOMEI'A T'FILA (Who pays attention to prayer) apparently comes from this verse: O You, Who hears prayer, all flesh (BASAR) will come unto You (T'hilim 65:3). The previous verse gives us some context, which, in turns, explains our prayer habits: Praise befits You in TZIYON, O God. So, before asking for our personal and national needs, it is appropriate to


praise God. Plus, we must understand that the praises and prayers are addressed and focused towards Yerushalayim.

We understand that praise and prayer can get us into intimate contact with God. But there's a term in that verse 3 which requires some explanation. We say that all flesh and blood human beings will come to God, but how close? The word in the verse is ADECHA, variously translated as 'to You', 'unto You', 'approach You', or the old fashioned 'unto Thee'. But we're still not getting the full impact of this term. The Malbim explains that this expression means that the supplicant can reach all the way to the Divine Presence in the Heavenly Court, as opposed to mere flesh and blood kings, who often are unapproachable, and are persuaded by bribes to a lackey, without ever encountering the king.

But I am really moved by Rav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch's explanation for this phrase: Through the medium of prayer, we reach a level of delight (perhaps bliss, SHALVA) and exaltation (MITROMAMUT) which brings us to make the right decision, pertinent to our life, which we previously never even considered. It's this reality that God pays attention to our prayers, which brings assurance

to the human psyche that we can truly achieve connection to the Divine... At that moment, we can overcome all barriers to reaching all the way to (AD) God, achieving SHALVA and fulfillment for our soul.

So, we end this list of both personal and national human needs with the declaration that this effort has been worthwhile because our God is SHOMEI'A T'FILA, the Being who hears our yearning for connection. This is all the more remarkable because we readily acknowledge that we are mere 'flesh' (BASAR). Nevertheless, we are imbued with a soul which desires this connection to the Infinite, and God grants this great boon.

This ends the weekday shopping list of BAKASHOT. It culminated in the realization that our greatest needs are really spiritual, and all we really desired was connection. As Avraham Yehoshua Heschel explained: We pray to pray. There is no greater need. 

# **Walk thru Davening**

*with Rabbi David Walk*

## **Ya'aleh V'yavo - The Elevator Prayer**

Sh'moneh Esrei 13

Remember the old joke: What's the B'RACHA for going up in elevators? Of course, the corny answer was YA'ALE V'YAVO, which means 'may one rise and arrive'. That corny pun does remind us of the awe and thrill we should feel in our prayerful ascent towards God on special occasions. We add this extraordinary request on the days upon which MUSAFIM were brought when our ancestors would ascend to the Beit HaMikdash, even on days when work was permitted, namely Chol HaMoed and Rosh Chodesh. It's important that we feel the added sanctity of these occasions, in spite of performing regular creative activities.

The idea of a special prayer for these days is mentioned in the Talmud (Shabbat 24a), and is based on a verse (Bamidbar 10:10), which demands special trumpet blasts on days with MUSAF offerings. The name of this prayer isn't mentioned until Masechet Sofrim, written in the 8th century. So, there is speculation over the origin of this prayer.

Although there is no consensus, many authorities believe that this prayer was originally a PIYUT, liturgical poem, recited during the section of ZICHRONOT (remembrances) in the MUSAF of Rosh HaShana.

In my last article in this series, I discussed the blessing R'TZEI. Note that this blessing contains a unique 'request': Please, God, consider this prayer which I'm directing to You as a Divine service, similar to the Temple offerings of old (and of the soon future, IYH). In other words, this isn't about any physical needs, just let me cleave to You. That would be sublime. This addition is also begging that our additional service be acceptable, favorable and delightful to You, our God.

After the normal beginning for PIYUTTAM (ELOKEINU VEILOKEI AVOTEINU, our God and the God of our ancestors), we have a list of eight verbs. There are a number of beautiful ideas about how to understand this list. The most famous is that these verbs correspond to the seven levels of Heaven:

YA'ALE is VILON,

YAVO is RAKIA,

YAGI'A (should reach) is SH'CHAKIM,

YEIRA'EH (be seen) is MA'ON,

YEIRATZEH (be accepted or favored) is Z'VUL,

YISHAMA (Be heard) is MACHON,

and the last two verbs, YIPAKEID (be considered) joins YIZACHEIR (be remembered) to arrive at the highest level, AREIVUT.

That is very moving and a wonderful way to describe the elevation of our offerings or prayers to Heaven, but I prefer another approach. These verbs are describing a pilgrim's ascent to Yerushalayim and Har HaBayit. In this scenario we are following the supplicant's climb up the stairs, entering the outer gate, reaching the courtyard, being acknowledged by God or the Kohein, then having the offering accepted, one's plea be heard, request be granted, and this merit being remembered and recorded for posterity.

The next part of this prayer or PIYUT continues to emphasize the last two verbs, POKEID and ZACHOR. We are remembered and, in some way, recognized or even given an assignment (TAFKID) by God. The term ZICHRON (remembrance appears five times. That seems to acknowledge the 5 times God informs us of Divine remembrance of the BRIT AVOT (Patriarchal Covenant with God, Shmot 6:4, Vayikra 26:42,45). The reference to PAKDEINU is assumed

to come from Moshe Rabeinu's experience at the Burning Bush, POKEID POKADTI ETCHEM, and appears to be a code which the Jewish elders, Z'KEINIM, would recognize and believe that the redemption was at hand (Shmot 3:15, based on Breishit 50:25).

The specific entities to be remembered are the AVOT, MASHIACH, Yerushalayim, and God's nation Yisrael. This request to remain in God's attention is for the purpose of P'LEITA, deliverance or survival. That word is related to PALIT, refugee or one who escapes. That is, as Jews, who we are: history's survivors.

Just before we announce the special occasion that we are celebrating we list the six blessings for which we are requesting to be remembered for: TOV (goodness or well-being), CHEIN (grace), (CHESED (loving kindness), RACHAMIM (compassion), CHAYIM (life), and SHALOM! It's been pointed out that this same sextet appears in the last B'RACHA of the Amida, SIM SHALOM. There are those who aver that these six also correspond to BIRKAT KOHANIM, two corresponding to each of the three verses.

After identifying the specific special day that we are commemorating, we have three declarations. These statements are famous because, when

recited in a minyan aloud, the community responds AMEIN! We are supplicating to God for

1. Remember us for good (probably here means forever),
2. Recollect us or visit upon us blessing (increase),
3. Save us for life.


Remember at the beginning of this piece I suggested that this whole prayer was probably originally a PIYUT for Rosh HaShana? If that's true, then these three phrases can be connected to the holidays of Tishrei. Remember us on Rosh HaShana, recollect us on Yom Kippur, and save us on Sukkot, when we recite HOSHANOT.

We close the prayer with a supplication for God to fulfill the Divine promise (D'VAR) to always treat Yisrael with RACHAMIM, CHUS (mercy), and CHEIN. Because we have always looked to God to be our gracious Monarch.

Whenever rabbis discuss YA'ALEH V'YAVO, they always focus on what to do when you forget to insert this prayer. There's a plethora of web sites which address that sad issue. I say it's sad because we forget it because we're not concentrating when we recite our T'FILOT. Me. Too.

I'm more interested in why on weekdays we place this prayer in the blessing of R'TZEI, but on CHAGIM, we recite it as part of the main middle blessing, which describes the sanctity of the occasion.

I think it belongs in R'TZEI on work-days, because the middle blessings are about more mundane requests for human needs. R'TZEI is a spiritual appeal for God to accept our service. But on CHAGIM, the middle blessing is about the special, religious nature of this celebration. YA'ALEH V'YAVO fits right in with that material. It gets skipped entirely in Musaf, because that entire AMIDA prayer is already about begging God to accept our special holiday offerings.

This little prayer is truly cool. It reminds us that the special holiday mood should be about the spiritual high we should be feeling, and not just the special holiday foods and comraderrrie. On Rosh Chodesh it helps us to recall that in Temple days Rosh Chodesh was a festive occasion. In any case, let this modest prayer help you to soar to amazing spiritual heights, just go up the elevator. 

# **Walk thru Davening**

*with Rabbi David Walk*

## **Always say Thank You**

### **Sh'moneh Esrei 14**

We were all brought up with the idea that there are two 'Magic Words', namely 'please' and 'thank you'. Well, most of our Shmoneh Esrei is built on the concept of 'please', as we ask God for so many favors. So, it's about time, as we conclude this magnificent prayer, to say 'thank you'. But there are a few surprises in our thank you list. It doesn't reference the specific requests of the prayer itself, as one would have expected, 'Thank you, God, for hearing my pleas.' But that would be wrong. This list is very different, indeed.

First, a word about the introductory term MODIM, usually translated 'we are thankful'. However, this same term is used in Jewish courts of law to mean, 'I admit' or 'I confess'. Rav Yitzchak Hutner explained, 'We give thanks equals we admit. We find it hard to admit that we need others. This is an admission that we are not complete.' So, according to Rav Hutner, a sincere thank you requires a profound level of humility.

There is another famous approach to this term. We find in many Psalms and prayers the famous expression,

'HODU LASHEN', which is another form of the same root MODEH. This is almost always translated as 'Praise be to God'. So, another aspect of 'thanks' is praise for the other. So, we have 'thank you', 'I admit to you' and 'I praise you'. Might there be an explanation that encompasses all three ideas?

Rav Ezra Bick of Yeshivat Har Etzion, I believe, has an idea which fits the bill. He explains that what we're expressing in this phrase is akin to what serfs owed to feudal lords in the Middle Ages. He suggests that the best explanation might be that the supplicant is expressing fealty, loyalty, allegiance and deference to God.

In any case, we have a major shift in the temper of the prayer. We have moved from active requests to an appreciation or, at least, acceptance of what life may present us with.

Our first expression of appreciation is for the very fact that we are known as God's nation. God lends the Divine name to our identity. You, God, are our God, and the God of our ancestors. We gladly acknowledge and accept this.

Then we acknowledge that we grow and develop on the TZUR CHAYEINU, Cornerstone (Foundation?) of our lives. Who is this TZUR? I would have

thought God (and I believe that's the literal meaning), but the Eitz Chayim commentary on prayer declares that it's our ancestors and parents. We thank God for being the Lord of our ancestors and providing these marvelous forebears who anchor our being. We are hewn from that hard stuff which embodies our progenitors.

Then we acknowledge God, our Shield. God You are our solid foundation, and also a protective bulwark against the vicissitudes of life. There was an old toothpaste commercial about providing an 'invisible shield' for our teeth (Colgate with Gardol). Then a tennis ball, coconut or baseball was launched at the announcer who remained perfectly safe behind a clear barrier. Please, forgive me, but that's the image I still have over 60 years later, as God our MAGEN, invisible shield, enabling us to continue our march through the ages.

Now we have the essence of thankfulness: I will acknowledge and relate Your praise. Every meaningful thank-you must have an explication of the specific deed for which we are grateful. To my horror, I learned this while writing the thank you notes after my Bar Mitzva. Courtesy required me to mention the specific

gifts I resented receiving. BARUCH HASHEM, with God this is easy:

Thank You for our very lives entrusted into Your hand; our souls, placed into Your charge. For Your miracles which are with us daily; Your wonders and Goodnesses which appear at all times, evening, morning and afternoons.

What do we mean by 'souls placed into Your charge'? Some say this refers to placing our immortal souls into God's care while we sleep every night. But I prefer to think that we are thanking God for entrusting us with this little piece of Divinity, which resides deep in our psyche.

And what are these 'miracles, wonders and favors'? Well, the simplest to describe is 'wonders' NIFLA'OT, those are the rare amazing events like splitting the Sea. NISSIM are miracles that the recipient doesn't realize were really changes in the natural order of things. Rav Soloveitchik says this includes life itself, 'the greatest of all miracles'.

These are with us at every turn of the day, night, sunrise and the sun's march toward setting. These are, of course, the three time frames for our daily prayers, MA'ARIV, SHACHARIT, MINCHA. We must exalt God for these benefits at all times (TAMID,


constantly), and for all eternity (L'OLAM VA'ED), as well.

In the home stretch of this the longest blessing in our Shmoneh Esrei (by far, which emphasizes the importance of gratefulness), we declare that all living beings must acknowledge their debt and gratitude to God. The less sentient living things do this by just following the dictates of their DNA. We, who often fight our instincts, are required to make a cognizant effort to be thankful. This idea of the universality of thanks is punctuated by a SELAH, which means an emphatic punctuation of exclaim.

We, the Jewish nation, who receive God's salvation (YESHU'ATEINU) and help (EZRA'TEINU), must praise God's Holy Name. God gave us the ability to think and decide. We must use those powers to express our gratitude to the Good or Beneficent One (HA'TOV). And that deserves a SELAH!, too.

As we end the B'RACHA, by acknowledging how appropriate (NA'EH) this activity is, we are reminded that, even though it is sometimes difficult, when we give the proper gratitude, it ultimately feels good and right.

We could end here, but our Sages, in their wisdom, decided that there

should be another version of this thanksgiving prayer, MODIM D'RABBANAN, and we'll explore that famous prayer next week. 

# **Walk thru Davening**

*with Rabbi David Walk*

## **Communal Gratitude**

### **MODIM D'RABANAN**

Sh'moneh Esrei 15

It's a curious conundrum that our silence during the repetition of the Amida is pierced by the congregation bowing and reciting Modim d'Rabanan. What's going on? The Rambam is clear: Everyone stands, listens, and recites AMEIN after each and every blessing (Laws of Prayer, 9:3). But not at blessing number 18. Here we join the CHAZAN and simultaneously recite MODIM ANACHNU LACH (We are grateful to You). Why does this happen? What is different about this blessing?

Apparently, the first authority to discuss this question was the Abudarham, writing in the 14th century. He claims that MODIM really means 'we admit and accept Divine authority'. His commentary on the Sidur makes the case that acceptance of OL MALCHUT SHAMAYIM, 'the yoke of Heavenly Kingship', requires personal commitment and can't be done by proxy. In other words, our SHALIACH TZIBUR, 'communal representative', can be our emissary for our requests to God,

but can't make God our Sovereign.

Rav Soloveitchik, on the other hand, believes that MODIM primarily means we give thanks. He agrees that the CHAZAN can't say MODIM on our behalf, but for a totally different reason. Showing gratitude must be done personally to be meaningful. Every person must thank God for themselves for the effort to succeed.

This brief paragraph is called MODIM D'RABANAN, the thanksgiving of the Rabbis. It acquired this name from the two sources of our text, one in the Babylonian Talmud (Sota 40a) and the other from Yerushalmi Talmud (B'rachot 1:4). In each text we have a list of Rabbis stating their version of this communal gratitude. Our accepted version is selected excerpts from these prayers. So, we have the MODIM of all these Rabbis.

With this in mind, we begin our statement of thanksgiving: We gratefully thank You, for it is You who are God (YUD-HEI-VAV-HEI) our Lord, and the Lord of our ancestors, the Lord of all flesh. Our Molder (TZUREINU) and the Molder of all Creation (B'REISHIT).

We are thanking God for total control of everything in existence, and we do this in concentric circles of realities. First, we mention the personal

connection to God as our Master. There is a direct connection to our God. Then we state that this connection is based upon the historical reality of God forging ties with our ancestors, through covenants and historical experiences. Next, we see the Jewish relationship with God as part of a greater Divine commitment to all living beings (KOL BASAR). Finally, there is an acknowledgement that the basis for this relationship is that God is the force behind the Big Bang (B'REISHIT) and all existence in the universe.

Now we declare a double acknowledgment (B'RACHOT and HODA'OT, 'blessings' and 'thanks') for a double bequest (SHE'HECHI'TANU and KIYAMTANU, that You have 'given us life' and 'sustained us'). Blessings are an expansion of existing situations, so I believe that B'RACHOT connects to KIYAMTANU. While 'thanks' are often for unexpected or new boons, and therefore I assume it relates to our birth and coming to life.

We now have the closest thing to a request in our short prayer: So, may You continue to give us life and sustain us; and gather our exiles to the courtyards of Your holy precincts, for the purpose of observing Your decrees, to do Your will, and to serve You wholeheartedly. This

'request', I believe, is really part of our declaration of appreciation of God's bounty on our behalf. We are committing ourselves to a purpose for existence. We truly cherish Your gifts, because they contribute to our better serving You. This is what we ultimately desire and value.

I like the sequence of descriptions of Mitzvot in this passage. They are first HUKKHA, Your CHUKIM or obscure decrees, beyond our ken. But we do them anyway. Then they are Your RATZON or Divine Will. We do them because we want to, in some ineffable way, please You. Then they become AVDECHA, Your Divine service which we do with a full heart. These initially enigmatic practices become our cherished behavior patterns, because of our love for You. We only understand Mitzvot by doing them.

As we near the end of our short prayer, we encounter a difficult phrase 'AL SHE'ANACHNU MODIM LACH. The Koren Siddur translates it: for it is for us to give You thanks. I think this means that we're doing what is right and proper to do by giving thanks to God. Okay. ArtScroll adds a couple of words in brackets to get: [We thank you] for inspiring us to us to thank You. Sounds a little sneaky on God's part. It's like God is


tricking us into giving these thanks.

My go-to psychologist has always been Rav Dr. Avraham Twerski zt"l, one of the finest human beings I have ever encountered. He explains that gratitude 'is indeed a uniquely human trait'. Sadly, often people react to favors with 'resentment instead of gratitude'. I remember hearing that Rav Aharon Lichtenstein once commented, when told that another Rav had publicly attacked him, 'Funny. I don't remember ever doing him a favor.' Rav Twerski teaches: One of the effects of our liturgy should be that we should become more familiar and comfortable with expressions of gratitude (Twerski On Spirituality, p. 140).

I think the compilers of our MODIM D'RABANAN paragraph built in a 'gratitude clause'. All this thanking is not only about thanking God, but teaching us how important thanking is. This led Rav Twerski to conclude: the first words we utter in the morning are MODEH ANI... the emphasis given to expressing gratitude indicates its overwhelming importance. The spiritual person is a grateful person (p. 143).

Our beautiful paragraph ends with a disagreement between the Bavli Talmud and Yerushalmi Talmud. Could it be any other way? Our

popular version ends like the Bavli: Blessed is the God of Thanksgiving. However, the Vilna Gaon concludes with the version of the Yerushalmi: BARUCH ATA HASHEM (Blessed are You, O Lord), God of Thanksgiving. Should there be a formal concluding blessing configuration?

I like the version of the Gaon, because it gives the whole piece a stronger format. And don't we want to make the gratitude agenda as powerful as possible? 

# **Walk thru Davening**

## *with Rabbi David Walk*

### **ACTIVE MEMORY**

#### **Shabbat Musaf**

This week, as we prepare for Tish'a b'Av, we focus on remembering the lost glory of Yerushalayim. There are so many customs to help us hold the memory of the destroyed Temple. We leave an unfinished square cubit in our homes, we break a glass at weddings, and, of course, all the mourning practices during these Three Weeks. However, I believe that no practice is more poignant than reciting Musaf.

I know that we also say that our daily Shmoneh Esrei prayers are in place of the daily offerings in the Beit HaMikdash, but I don't think we really feel it. Remember, we also say that we're following the lead of our Patriarchs when we pray three times a day. But Musaf! Well, that's clearly connected to the Temple offerings. Its heart is the recitation of the offering as rendered in Sefer Bamidbar (chapters 28-29).

In Shabbat Musaf, we declare: On the Shabbat day: two yearling lambs without blemish, together with two-tenths of a measure\* of choice flour with oil mixed in as a meal offering, and with the proper libation

- a burnt offering for every Shabbat, in addition to the regular burnt offering and its libation (Bamidbar 28:9-10).

However, before that recitation, we have a fascinating paragraph whose first 22 words start with the Hebrew Alphabet backwards. This is, of course, interesting because we have many prayers and Psalms which follow the Alef-Bet. So, why here in reverse? Although there are numerous attempts to fathom the poem, I like the explanation that instead of building up towards a goal, we are counting back to a bygone era, attempting to reconnect with our glorious past.

As with the Tish'a b'Av commemoration this week, we find ourselves yearning for that which we've lost. What's interesting to me is that in the Musaf of the Chagim we specifically mention 'because of our sins we were exiled from Land... and cannot perform our duties'. On Shabbat, however, we just petition God (May it be Your will... to lead us back in joy to our land). I think the reason for this discrepancy is that the major observance of Chag is the pilgrimage to Yerushalayim. While on Shabbat, even though there is an extra offering, the central observances are in the home with the family.

The Pachad Yitzchak suggests that the critical idea in this topsy-turvy paragraph is 'those who love its teachings have chosen greatness'. He says that this means we have chosen the essential (IKAR) over secondary (TAFEL) matters. This careful selection of the truly significant things in life allows us to experience the transcendent affairs of life. This prepares us for the next spiritual step, which is a return to the Temple service.

So, we anticipate the rebuilding of the Beit HaMikdash and we recite the verses describing the offering, then comes an unexpected statement: Those who observe Shabbat and call it a delight (ONEG) will rejoice (YISMACHU) in Your Kingship. This is a surprise, because in Jewish tradition we normally think of SIMCHA as a Yom Tov requirement, not a Shabbat one.

Rav Moshe Soloveitchik (father of the Rav) explained that the day on which we bring an offering becomes a time of joy. The SIMCHA is from bringing the MUSAF offering. This explains the normative Ashkenazic custom of only reciting this joyous passage during the MUSAF AMIDA. Since this prayer's purpose is to recreate the MUSAF offering we should feel the joy.


The final paragraph of this long middle blessing describes the sublime nature of Shabbat. It's a request for satisfaction, joy, purity and the comforting rest of Shabbat. This special day and its perks are the heritage of our people. It's a sign of our special relationship with God.

This paragraph ends with the blessing: Blessed are You, HaShem, Who sanctifies Shabbat. Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik explains that inherent in that statement are two concepts. The most obvious is the description of Shabbat from the Ten Commandments: Remember the Shabbat to keep it holy (Sh'mot 20:8). This 'means only abstention from the daily routine or separation from work'. The Rav goes on to explain that 'in the topical context, the term L'KAD'SHO does not refer to a charismatic quality inherent in the seventh day'. If we only knew about Shabbat from the Ten Commandments, it would only be a technical observance.

But we have another context of Shabbat 'which forms the main motto of the thematic HALACHA with regard to Shabbat would be, I believe, the mysterious passage in B'reishit which concludes the story of creation, 'And God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it'

**(VAYKADEiSH OTO, Breishit 2:4).**

**The Rav concludes: A twenty-four hour period was sanctified and hallowed. It has suddenly become a metaphysical entity upon which the Almighty has bestowed a unique endowment, namely, that of blessedness and sanctity (Out of the Whirlwind).**

**So, there are two identities to our beloved Shabbat. First, a legal one which contains all manner of positive and negative laws. But, more importantly, a magical, mystical, metaphysical one, which transports us to an enchanted 'island in time'. There we can experience things beyond the horizon of our normal, workaday lives. When we recite MUSAF, I believe that part of that adventure is a visit to the Holy Temple, where we rejoice in the service to our Creator and Parent in Heaven. .**

# **Walk thru Davening**

## *with Rabbi David Walk*

### **PARTNERS**

#### **Shabbat Shacharit Amida**

In my previous article about the Friday night silent devotion, I stressed that the liturgy for Shabbat is special because each service has a totally different text for the Amida. But I could not say about the Friday night service what I must say about the Shabbat morning iteration: This is totally unique and unprecedented!! Only on Shabbat morning do we begin the fourth blessing of our Amida without addressing God in the second person. Ever! Instead, we begin discussing Moshe Rabbeinu: Moshe rejoiced! What gladdened our national mentor, and why are we discussing him, not God?

The first question is the easier to address. Moshe is joyous because God granted him a special place in human history. God called him 'Faithful Servant'. Moshe was the organizer of the special relationship between God and the Jewish people. Should we call him the Shadchan? Why is this germane to our Shabbat morning? Well, because the great sign or symbol of this Covenant or BRIT is Shabbat.

Moshe descended the fiery Mountain

to bring us the Two Tablets of the Law, and we proclaim, 'He brought down the two tablets of stone in his hands; it was written upon them Sabbath observance.' Now, we know that there were nine other issues discussed on those Tablets, but we are going to emphasize Shabbat, because it's also written in the Torah: The Children of Yisrael must keep the Shabbat, observing the Shabbat in every generation as an eternal Covenant. It is an everlasting sign (OT) between Me and the Children of Yisrael (Sh'mot 31:16).

In other words, there are other ingredients to our special relationship with God, but Shabbat is the OT or tangible manifestation of the liaison. Shabbat, more than any other specific mitzva represents the unique association the Jews have with the Creator of all. Shabbat is the straw which mixes the drink we call Jewish Destiny.

That's the answer to the second part of the question about Moshe's prominence in this Amida. Moshe forged this bond, and that bond is the topic of this silent devotion. We are talking the Special Relationship begun by the Patriarchs, continued by us, but forged by Moshe.

On Friday night, when we were waxing poetic about the glory of

God's Creation, we clearly stated that our Shabbat observance mirrors, 'With the seventh day, God completed the work He had done; he ceased on the seventh day from all the work He had done (B'reishit 2:2). That description is very Universal; it applies equally to every creation of the Lord. However, now we're living in Shabbat morning and we're reliving the thrilling excitement of the Revelation at Sinai. There we stood alone.

So, it should come as no surprise that the next idea in our Amida is: You, O Lord, our God, did not give it to the other nations of the world, nor did You, our King, give it as a heritage (NACHALA) to those who worship idols. In its all-encompassing restfulness, the uncircumcised do not dwell.

The Shabbat of Creation belongs to all; the Shabbat of Sinai is a closed family function. It's not surprising that our Sages castigate non-Jews who attempt to observe Shabbat.

The author of this meditation then describes the glory of Shabbat observance. It's wonderful that God bestowed this gift with love. We can be described as the People Who Sanctify the Seventh Day. In our idyllic picture: All find satisfaction (fulfillment?) and delight (pleasure?)


in its observance. Actually, we still await the historic moment when all Jews will keep and treasure the Shabbat. In Kabbala, if that happens (perhaps twice) the Messianic Era would immediately commence.

Now comes, for me at least, the most important word in this prayer: CHEMDA. We say that Shabbat is CHEMDAT YAMIM. 'The most cherished of days'; 'Most coveted of days', 'Most beloved of days'. I think I would suggest 'most desirable of days'. This is the negative action in the tenth Commandment; LO TACHMOD, don't desire stuff that doesn't belong to you, but here it's in the positive. There are things you are supposed to desire, love and want so very badly that it's good.

I think this is the crucial idea of this Amida. On Friday night we say about Shabbat, 'You blessed it more than all other days; You sanctified it beyond all other times.' We define the exceptional essence of Shabbat in spiritual or, perhaps, heavenly terms; blessed, holy. But not on Shabbat morning. Then we describe the fabulous reality of Shabbat as something PEOPLE, HUMANS want, desire and cherish. This is very different from the ethereal Shabbat of Friday night.

Friday night is a light and fluffy

souffle. It almost floats away. Shabbat day is like a hearty, meaty cholent that you can sink your teeth into.

So, we've brought Shabbat down to Earth. Next week, we will find out where we must go next, when we attempt to dissect the Shabbat afternoon Amida. 

# **Walk thru Davening**

## *with Rabbi David Walk*

### **The Future is NOW!**

#### **Shabbat Mincha Amida**

As we continue through the silent devotion prayers of Shabbat, we finally arrive at Mincha. On Friday night we relived the original Shabbat of Creation, on Shabbat morning we again stood at Har Sinai for the Shabbat of the Revelation, and, now, as the day wanes, we are living the Shabbat yet to come. This is the Shabbat of GE'ULA SH'LEIMA, Redemption. We are celebrating the Shabbat of Y'MOT HaMASHIACH. How do we accomplish this feat? Please, pay close attention.

The fourth blessing of this Amida, immediately after the three standard opening blessings, begins by paraphrasing Zecharia: You are One, and Your name is One (Zecharia 14:9), also the last statement in the Aleinu prayer. According to Rav Soloveitchik this unity implies that, 'there is no contradiction in Him - all opposites are reconciled, all contradictions resolved, In Him, thesis and anti-thesis merge into one. There is mercy and strictness simultaneously; CHESED, loving-kindness, & G'VURA, power, coexist (Koren HaRav Siddur, p.651).

In our world we tend to see God as many things at many different times. I often find myself praying to a scary, vengeful God. Other times I find myself confiding in a sweet, compassionate, caring Deity. Of course, God didn't change; I did. In that future, we will be able to reconcile all these different manifestations of God, and experience them all in YUD-HEI-VAV-HEI, Tetragrammaton. Cool!

But perhaps even more remarkable, we state: Who is like Your people Yisrael, a nation unique on earth? In that future vision, the Jewish nation will fulfill its destiny (like Luke?) and become a unity as well. Unity amongst Jews may be a bigger miracle than envisioning unity in the Almighty. We are an ornery people. You know: two Jews, three opinions.

Then comes the most heartwarming image, perhaps, in all our liturgy: Avraham will rejoice; Yitzchak will sing for joy, Ya'akov and his children will find their tranquility within it (the future Shabbat). This moving statement is paraphrased in a beautiful song about the future redemption, famously sung by Mordechai ben David (written by Dina Storch, Kol HaKavod!):

Someday we will all be together

Someday we'll be sheltered and warm

Never will we have to express any fear

Our scars and our wounds will disappear

Avraham and Yitzchak will be there to greet us

Yaakov and his sons will stand by and smile

Moshe Rabbeinu will lead us once again

In Yerushalayim - B'Ezrat Hashem

I get choked up by those lyrics which I remember so lovingly from my NCSY days. But that's the sentiment of the Shabbat Mincha Amida. There are those who explain that the joy of Avraham and Yitzchak will be SHEPPING NACHAS from observing the prodigious progeny of Ya'akov observing the Shabbat.

The remainder of this powerful paragraph is about the MENUCHA of Shabbat. The term MENUCHA appears seven times, each time revealing a new level of the tranquility and restfulness of Shabbat. I can understand and, even identify with some of these levels, but eventually the list goes beyond my experience and ken, but I'll do my best to elucidate.

The first is MENUCHA UK-DUSHA.

We experienced that MENUCHA Friday evening as we entered Shabbat; we sanctified the day. Besides reciting the Kiddush, we chanted ATA KIDASHTA (You sanctified the seventh day for Your Name's sake, the TACHLIT or purpose of Creation) in the Friday night Amida. In other words, the first MENUCHA is about the difference between Shabbat and the six workdays. The simplest and most basic MENUCHA.

Then we have MENUCHAT AHAVA UN-DAVA (the rest of love and generosity or magnanimity). This, hopefully, is our Friday night of affection for spouse and family. We feel the love through our altruism for every member of our family. Friday night is about family and intimacy and love.

We wake up to the MENUCHA of EMET and EMUNA (truth and faith). That's because Shabbat AM is the recreation of the experience at Sinai. We recognize the 'Joy of Moshe through the conferring of his portion', namely the Torah. Shabbat day is about Torah study. I know this may come as a shock to many of our Charedi brethren, but historically most Jews learned little during the week, supporting a family was time consuming and arduous. Ahh, but on

Shabbat the MENUCHA including time to study Torah at one's leisure.

Next comes the MENUCHA of SHALOM (peace, a sense of being whole), SHALVA (serenity), HASHKET (serenity, quietude), and BETACH (security). This, I believe is our Shabbat afternoon snooze. Even in retirement, I only find the restfulness to nap on Shabbat. That rest is a delicious luxury.


At this point, we get ready for Mincha and the anticipation of GEULA. This ushers in, I believe, the MENUCHA SHLEIMA. We have a foretaste of that complete MENUCHA from all trouble and travail in the Y'MOT HaMASHIACH. That's a total restfulness beyond our experience, but we can imagine it.

The last two, 'that their MENUCHA truly emanates from You' and 'and through their MENUCHA they will sanctify Your Name', I'm not sure many of us really experience. Perhaps, some mystics who have an esoteric mystic experience at Seuda Sh'lishit begin to fathom how our MENUCHA cascades down to us from God in Heaven. Perhaps.

But that last one, 'and through their MENUCHA they will sanctify Your Name', I really don't know how to handle. There must be people on a

high enough spiritual plane to have some inkling of how our behavior, in this instance MENUCHA, has an impact on God, but, dear me, I'm not one. I remember getting an award and seeing my parents KVEL, after they recovered from their shock. And I imagine that it's a little similar with our Parent in Heaven, but I can't really get my head around it.

That's fine. I think it's okay if we don't grasp every concept. It's good to know there's still room for spiritual improvement and growth. BTW a lot of room, like Grand Canyon-size room.

So, that's the variety of the Shabbat Amidot. We move from Kedusha to Revelation to Redemption in our Shabbat of spiritual growth. But I've left out the final paragraph of these prayers, and, please God, I'll deal with that next week. 

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Plus, we expand the normally short blessing of sanctification of God's Name to include three ideas, and each of those three ideas get expressed with three nouns. First trepidation with the words for awe (YIR'A), dread (EIMA) and fear (PACHAD); then glory with the words for honor (KAVOD), praise (T'HILA), and hope (TIKVA); and, finally, joy with the words for happiness (SIMCHA), exultation (ALIZA) and mirth (RINA).

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We close with the dual blessing: Blessed are You, God, King over all the world, Who sanctifies Yisrael and this Day of Remembrance. Rav Steinzaltz zt"l, based on Chassidic thought, uses this dual idea to make a very profound point: The world which is created anew with the beginning of a new year, isn't an exact continuation from the previous year. There is a return to the primordial AYIN ('nothing')... There is

a need to rebuild anew the relationship between God and the nascent Cosmos... (Also) kingship only exists when the King has someone over whom to rule. It doesn't exist in a vacuum... This reality exists between God and Yisrael, as the Midrash points out on the verse, 'You are My witnesses and I am God (Yeshayahu 43:12)'... On Rosh HaShana, Yisrael is not merely observers on the sidelines, rather we have a role in the creation of the renewed world (The Life of a Year, p. 30, my translation).

The majestic blessing of MALCHIYOT is a declaration of those ideas, and our commitment to contribute to their implementation.

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ZICHRONOT feed that frenzy:

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Wow, talk about surveillance, and you were worried about the CCTV in your company's parking lot. Actually, it's easier for us to imagine that level of scrutiny than for our pre-modern forebears. But that doesn't make it any less daunting and creepy. Like signs outside public restrooms (WC's for my British brethren) warning that the premises are monitored. No one would want to see replays of our most embarrassing moments from the previous year, a highlight reel to be avoided. God is presented as Big Brother.

However, the final paragraph of this section is much more reassuring:

Our God and God of our forebears

remember us favorably before You and be mindful of us for deliverance and compassion from the Eternal High Heavens. Remember on our behalf, Eternal our God, the covenant, the kindness and the oath which You swore to our father Avraham on Mount Moriah, so may Your compassion suppress Your anger against us... And fulfill for us Eternal, our God, the promise You made in Your Torah, through Your servant, Moshe: 'I will remember for them the covenant with their forefathers whom I took out of the land of Egypt.' Blessed are You, O God, Who remembers the covenant.

Here we have a transition from PACHAD, fear or dread to KAVOD, respect and honor. We saw the triple list of emotions (fear, honor, joy) in the third blessing of KEDUSHA, last week. We've entered stage two, and feel much more comfortable with God's inability to forget.

Continuing that process forward, we come to the third leg of the middle B'RACHOT of Musaf: SHOFAROT. If MALCHİYOT brings PACHAD, fear, and ZICHRONOT delivers us to KAVOD, honor, then SHOFAROT must usher in SIMCHA, joy. And it does. The verses in this section are about the Shofar being sounded for redemption at Sinai, and to usher in

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Finally, it's crucial to the understanding of the day that we note that there are two categories of SHOFAR. We have regular, garden variety SHOFAROT, but we also have SHOFAR GADOL, industrial strength SHOFAR. The normal SHOFAR has been sounded throughout history. But the Great Horn will be sounded on that day (BAYOM HAHU, Y'shayahu 27:13). The joy or good vibes engendered by the SHOFAR, not only brings us back to the wonderful memories of Divine Revelation in a glorious past, but also imagines a future, better Revelation yet to come. The optimism overflows by the end of this B'RACHA, culminating in: Blessed are You, O Eternal, Who hears the sounding of the SHOFAR of His nation Yisrael in compassion.

This massive, magnificent Amida service is a rollercoaster ride of emotions and fervor. It brings us from the depths of despair over our guilt and shortcomings, to the heights of delight and elation in anticipation for the splendor yet to come. It's a long and intricate journey from our very beginnings to our Ultima Thule, but the sublime experience is definitely worth the price of admission, devoted davening. ❤️

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themes of Rosh HaShana. The Pachad Yitzchak suggests that we required a wind instrument for this role because Rosh HaShana is the anniversary of the creation of humanity. How was the first human created? 'And God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life' (B'reishit 2:7). It's no coincidence that the word for 'breath', NESHIMA, is almost identical to the word for 'soul', NESHAMA.

That heavy breathing or blowing into the Shofar is using the power granted through God's unique gift to humanity for the purpose of proclaiming the messages of the anniversary of that CPR event. The Shofar has its message but it also broadcasts the other themes of the day.

Finally, it's crucial to the understanding of the day that we note that there are two categories of SHOFAR. We have regular, garden variety SHOFAROT, but we also have SHOFAR GADOL, industrial strength SHOFAR. The normal SHOFAR has been sounded throughout history. But the Great Horn will be sounded on that day (BAYOM HAHU, Y'shayahu 27:13). The joy or good vibes engendered by the SHOFAR, not only brings us back to the wonderful memories of Divine Revelation in a glorious past, but also imagines a future, better Revelation yet to come. The optimism overflows

by the end of this B'RACHA, culminating in: Blessed are You, O Eternal, Who hears the sounding of the SHOFAR of His nation Yisrael in compassion.

This massive, magnificent Amida service is a rollercoaster ride of emotions and fervor. It brings us from the depths of despair over our guilt and shortcomings, to the heights of delight and elation in anticipation for the splendor yet to come. It's a long and intricate journey from our very beginnings to our Ultima Thule, but the sublime experience is definitely worth the price of admission, devoted davening. 

# **Walk thru Davening**

*with Rabbi David Walk*

## **THE SUBLIME LINK**

### **Kaddish, pt 1**

For the next couple of weeks, I will be discussing Kaddish, that awesome, yet a bit intimidating declaration famously recited by mourners, called Kaddish.

The origins of this doxology are shrouded in mystery. Generally, we believe its roots are in the Mishnaic period (100<sub>BCE</sub>-225<sub>CE</sub>), but our first full version of it doesn't appear until about the year 870. More confusingly, the first references to it are not about mourners. So, let's attempt to reconstruct the story of this most distinguished element of our prayer service.

I don't think it's hyperbole to state that without the recitation of Kaddish many, if not the majority, of weekday minyanim wouldn't exist. Probably many of my dear readers have been to a minyan where the vast majority of those present were saying Kaddish. In most Modern Orthodox minyanim, the bulk of participants began coming to shul regularly when they felt the obligation to recite Kaddish, and stayed, either out of camaraderie or a sense

of responsibility to make sure mourners would have a minyan.

Apparently, Kaddish began in Bavel (what the world today calls Iraq), and was recited after public lectures. This Rabbi's Kaddish transformed what might have been an inspiring intellectual activity into a spiritual experience. We love the mental rigor of a Torah lecture, but its ultimate purpose is transcendent.

Most historians believe that the transformation to a declaration of faith for mourners occurred in Northern Europe during the terrors of the Crusades. These supposedly religious, military excursions performed countless atrocities throughout their travels on the way to 'free' the Holy Land, and Jewish communities were often the victims. In the wake of these disasters, a number of prayers, liturgical poems and religious rites were initiated. The most famous of which was the transformation of this declaration of piety into a statement of belief and faith during these tragic times.

What was the goal of these bereaved people in making this declaration? There are a number of meaningful approaches to that question. Let's begin with the most famous: This recitation in some way benefits the deceased.

This belief is, of course, widespread. Many Jews have a deep desire for Kaddish to be recited for them after they have departed this worldly realm. My mother a"h, occasionally referred to me as her 'KADDISHEL'. Most Jews want Kaddish recited for them.

The famous source for this position is a story about Rabbi Akiva, amongst the most famous Rabbis of the Mishna. He died about 135<sup>CE</sup>, during the Hadrianic persecutions. The story is from Midrash Eliyahu Zuta, which didn't take its final form until the 900s.

In the story, R. Akiva encounters a man suffering the tortures of Gehenim. He finds out that the man had an illicit relationship on Yom Kippur. Rabbi Akiva asks him what can be done to relieve his suffering, and the man says that the son who was born of that union must say Kaddish for him. R. Akiva seeks out this young man, and, after many tribulations, teaches him to recite Kaddish. The father is then released from his torture to enter GAN EDEN, heaven.

This wonderful tale, perhaps, raises more questions than it answers. Who can benefit the deceased? It is generally acknowledged that a direct


descendant can, indeed, benefit the status of the deceased beyond the grave. There are authorities who are more liberal in their approach and claim that anyone can provide positive vibes for the departed. I don't know, but, assuming we accept the basic premise, that God, to Whom we daven, will be generous in the benefits accrued to the souls of those who have passed away, I would like to think that any Jew can help any other Jew in this endeavor.

However, Reb Shlomo Ganzfried, author of the Kitzur Shulchan Aruch makes a marvelous observation: Even though the saying of kaddish and prayers are helpful to the souls of the parents, yet they are not the main thing. The most important thing is that the children walk in the path of righteousness, because with that they gain Heavenly favor for their parents. Thus, it is written in the holy Zohar: A child honors his parent... alive. but after their death you might think he is exempt; this is not so. Even after their death it is his duty to honor them even more, for it is written, 'Honor your parent...' A person should, therefore, instruct his children to observe one certain mitzva with particular care. If they fulfill this mitzva it counts for more than saying the Kaddish (26:22).

The benefits of recited Kaddish for the departed are unclear, but the payoff for the survivor, to my thinking, is, indeed, very obvious and very great. In my experience as both personally as a child and professionally as a Rabbi, reciting Kaddish provides a plethora of good to the mourner. It is the first answer to the ubiquitous question, 'Rabbi, I'm so distraught, what can I do?' Well, for one thing: recite Kaddish for your loved one.

One last point this week, which presents a fascinating irony. Why do we recite the Kaddish in Aramaic, that archaic form of Jewish speech? Tosafot asks that question (B'rachot 3a), and provides two answers. The famous mystical answer is: Because the angels don't understand Aramaic, and therefore, won't get jealous over these beautiful devotions to God. Okay. Then he explains: Since they used to recite Kadish after Torah learning, and there were often unlettered individuals present, who did not all understand Hebrew. So, they instituted it in Aramaic, so that everybody should understand it, as it was their spoken tongue.

Of course, the irony is that nowadays the use and understanding of Hebrew is much more widespread than that of Aramaic. But, ya know, there is

something mystical about this recitation in this exotic tongue, and, today, the translation is right there on the page, anyway. When honoring our loved ones, it's cool to honor our past simultaneously. 

# Walk thru Davening

*with Rabbi David Walk*

## INCREASED POWER

### Kaddish, pt 2

Last week I gave a general introduction to Kaddish, amongst our most famous and important prayers. This week I will endeavor to explain the most basic unit of Kaddish, called CHATZI KADDISH, usually called Half Kaddish. This declaration of the SHALIACH TZIBUR or prayer leader is generally used as a separation between major segments of our services. A CHATZI KADDISH always signals something new and different is coming. For example, sometimes it indicates that an AMIDA prayer will be recited; other times it alerts us to the fact that the Sefer Torah will be taken out.

The declaration begins with YITGADEIL V'YITKADEISH, SH'MEI RABA. May the Great Name be magnified and sanctified. This is a paraphrase of a verse in Yechezkel, 'Thus will I manifest My greatness and My holiness' (38:23). That verse is discussing the aftermath of the horrific wars of Gog of Magog, which will usher in the age of recognition of the special status of Yisrael in the world. It is this awareness of the Jewish people which will enlarge and

hallow God's name.

When we refer to enlarging God's name, many commentaries assert that this refers to our wars with Amalek. After our first encounter with our national nemesis, the verse informs us, 'That his hand is against the Throne of KAH, the Eternal is at war with Amalek from generation to generation' (Sh'mot 17:16). The KAH mention of God's Name is the shortened YUD and HEI form of the Name. In other words, God's Name is presently incomplete. We are determined to enlarge it.

In many versions of Kaddish, there is now a mention of Mashiach, because the emergence of God's full Name and Presence will only happen at that point in human history. However, I will be emphasizing the Ashkenazic format of Kaddish where this doesn't appear.

This expansion of God's Name only pertains to this world. God's Name is always complete in heavenly spheres. It's in this world 'that He created according to His will (KIRUTEI)' that we long for the Name to be complete and the Divine rule to be manifest.

As in many public declarations, we then concern ourselves with, 'When do we want it?' But we don't scream 'NOW!' Instead, the CHAZAN or

mourner declares, 'in your lifetime, and in your days'. Then adds that we want this during the lifetime of all Jews. This request is equally meaningful for all our brethren.

The final phrase of this first statement introduces a Jewish concept of time. It states BA'AGALA, which literally means 'in the wheel of time'. Almost all translations go with 'swiftly'. It's very hard to explain complicated concepts in translations. We see time as cyclical, and are begging God to bring the Redemption in the next turn of the cycle. By which we mean 'spinning towards that event', and then we clearly state, B'ZMAN KARIV, 'at a time which is so close'.

The communal response to this declaration, is, arguably, the most important statement in the entire corpus of our liturgy: May His great Name be blessed forever and ever. The Talmud informs us that those who declare this with all their KO'ACH (strength, power) can annul all evil decrees (Shabbat 119a) or guarantee themselves a portion in the world to come (B'rachot 57a). This concept of KO'ACH is really important.

Many customs recite the verse: Now may the Lord's KO'ACH (strength) be displayed, just as you have declared

(Bamidbar 14:17), before reciting Kaddish. The numerical value (Gematria) of KO'ACH is 28, and there are 28 letters in the statement Y'HEI SH'MEI RABA. Also, there are 28 words from the beginning of this declaration until the end of the next paragraph, and, therefore, some people recite all 28 words at this point.

We are investing our energy into this declaration which begs to God to display the awesome Divine Power. As a show of enthusiasm many people clap while reciting this line. When we put our two hands together, we are also referencing 28. The Hebrew word for hand is YAD, whose Gematria is 14. Bringing the two hands together in a clap again gives us 28. Just like Moshe Rabbeinu so many centuries ago wanted to see God's full power at that very moment, so do we.

The second paragraph of the CHATZI KADDISH concentrates on praising God. The number of praises is also significant. There are two ways of counting them. The most popular approach is that we have 8 praises for God here: YITBARACH, blessed; YISHTABACH, lauded; YITPA'ER, glorified; YITROMAM, exalted; YIT-HADAR, honored; YITALEH, uplifted; and YIT-HALAL, praised. When we


add the two praises at the beginning (YITGADAL and YITKADASH) we get ten praises which correspond to the ten statements by which God created the universe.

Others, on the other hand, have a custom to leave out the last term (V'HIT-HALAL) in our list. This gives us seven in this list and that represents the seven levels of Heaven through which we want our prayers to pierce on their way to the Divine Throne.

When this list is completed, there are two customs over how to respond. Many say AMEIN! That's quite normal. Others (like me) declare B'RICH HU! I think that this is appropriate, because B'RACHA is not only mentioned in this short paragraph, but the critical declaration of the Kaddish is that 'the Great Name should be BARUCH'. By BARUCH, I believe that we mean expanded and increased in our earthly realm.

Our final plea in this section is that the Name of God should become higher than any BIRCHATA, blessing; SHIRATA, song or poem; TUSH-B'CHATA, praise; and NECHAMATA, consolation ever uttered B'ALMA. In other words, we desire and crave more and more SH'CHINA (Divine Presence) in our realm. Since, it's infinite we can always aspire to more.

What do we mean by B'ALMA? This word can mean 'the whole world' or 'for all time'. Here we mean both. We are beseeching God to expand the Divine Presence both everywhere and everywhen.

Well, that's it. My first installment on the explanation for the text of the Kaddish. Next week, I'll do my best to describe some of the variations on the text of the Kaddish for various occasions. Until then, please, put expanded effort into this most crucial of liturgical declarations. 

# **Walk thru Davening**

## *with Rabbi David Walk*

### **PRAYER & TORAH**

#### **Kaddish, pt 3**

There are five kinds of Kaddish. In this article we will discuss two of them, Kaddish d'Rabanan and Kaddish Shaleim. These are both extended versions of the Chatzi Kaddish, which we discussed in Part 2. That basic format of Kaddish is the configuration upon which all other Kaddish varieties are built. No matter what version of the Kaddish is being recited the critical declaration is always: May the Great Name be blessed forever and all eternity (Y'HEI SH'MEI RABA)! It is that testimony which can earn the reciter both forgiveness and eternity.

The first version of the Kaddish we will discuss is the one we believe to be the earliest version of the doxology, Kaddish d'Rabanan, the Rabbis' Kaddish. This prayer first appeared in Babylonia, present-day Iraq, in the period of the Geonim, 600-1000CE. The earliest text of this prayer appears in the Siddur of R' Amram Gaon, which appeared sometime before he died in 875.

This Kaddish was recited after public Torah lectures. The purpose was to

declare that our study isn't merely a way to pass time or an intellectual endeavor. No, indeed, we must declare proudly and loudly: This is a Divine Service to our Parent in Heaven.

This declaration asks for blessings of 'abundant peace, grace (CHINA), kindness (CHISDA), compassion (or empathy, RACHAMEI), long life, abundant food, and ultimate salvation (PURKANA) to be bestowed on this distinguished group. Who makes up this group? All Yisrael, the Rabbis (or teachers, RABANAN), their students, even their students' students, and, indeed, all those who engage in Torah study; in our community and every Jewish community.

This is a beautiful acknowledgment of the importance to Judaism of our Torah scholars. This importance is emphasized both across generations (students and students' students) and across the globe (here or anywhere else).

On a daily basis, many of us hear this Kaddish recited after the B'raita of Reb Yishmael Says, at the beginning of Shacharit, and after Pitum HaKetoret (about the incense of the Beit HaMikdash), at the end of the service. The first material emphasizes the power of the Sages to interpret and transmit Torah. The

second, movingly, concludes by informing us that, 'Torah Scholars increase peace in the world.' This paragraph derives this idea from a verse in Yeshayahu, 'And all your children shall be taught by the Lord; great shall be the peace of you children' (54:13). We should praise these Torah instructors, because of what they bestow upon Jewish society. Beautifully, the Ben Ish Chai informs us that this Kaddish should be recited out of a profound sense of joy. Torah study makes us happy and fulfilled.

Next, let's turn our attention to what most of us call Kaddish Shaleim (Whole) or Kaddish Titkabel. This recitation, like the Chetzi Kaddish, is done by the SHALI'ACH TZIBUR (Chazan, communal representative). There is one Kaddish Titkabel for every Amida (Shmoneh Esrei) davened in the presence of a minyan. Therefore, a regular weekday gets three. When there is a Musaf service, a fourth is recited, and on Yom Kippur, there are five.

This statement begins, TITKABEL, receive, accept or accede to our prayers. Then we describe our davening as TZ'LO-T'HON U'VA-U-T'HON. These two expressions are often treated as synonyms for prayer. So, usually the first is


translated as prayers and the second as pleas or supplications. But we generally frown on the idea that our liturgy uses synonyms, each term adds a unique dimension of meaning.

This tandem of terms seems to have first appeared in the translation of Onkelos to this verse included in Yaakov Avinu's blessing to Yosef, his son: And now, I assign to you one portion more than to your brothers, which I wrested from the Amorites with my sword and bow (B'resheit 48:22). Since we have no record of Yaakov fighting to conquer Eretz Yisrael, Onkelos informs us that we must assume that the swords and arrows are metaphors for prayer. The Talmud already agreed with Onkelos (Bava Batra 123a).

But what are the two kinds of prayers? Rav Kook suggested that the sword-style of prayer refers to slashing and cutting away the extraneous thoughts that try to creep into our consciousness when we pray. Good prayers require a mental pruning process. And what's Yaakov's 'bow'? Prayer which is based on this lofty yearning is saturated with pure inspiration. It scores its mark like the bow and arrow of a champion archer. The 'swords' eliminates the negative; the 'bow' accentuates the positive.

Rav Soloveitchik, on the other hand, sees both terms as contributing to the worship technique. The sword is for close contact efforts. These are the prayers for immediate personal needs, such as wisdom, health, and sustenance. While the bow refers to long term aspirations like Jewish destiny and the ultimate Redemption. In the Kaddish Titkabel, we beg God to accept both categories of prayer.

This short entreaty ends with one of the most basic, yet profound, concepts in our prayer service: in the presence of our Parent in Heaven. I know most think in terms of God as Father, but I can't escape the sense that God is both Father and Mother. Anyway, it is crucial that we think of our prayers as having the potential to reach all the way to the Divine Throne in the Celestial Palace. These requests we present to God, for ourselves and for our nation, for the present and for the future, must be considered capable of piercing the immense gulf between where we stand and where the heavenly domain exists.

Next week we conclude this survey of kaddish with our final plea, when we beseech God for the vessel which can contain all these requests and appeals: Universal Peace! 

# **Walk thru Davening**

## *with Rabbi David Walk*

### **CREATE PEACE**

**Kaddish, pt 4 (final part)**

So, we have arrived at the final installment of our articles on the Kaddish, perhaps Judaism's best-known prayer. All that's left are the two, apparently, redundant declarations about SHALOM, usually rendered 'peace'. Throughout this piece I will use the word SHALOM, rather than any regular translation, because this powerful term means so much more than any single English word I could choose. Wikipedia comes through for us on this occasion and describes SHALOM as 'Peace, harmony, wholeness, completeness, prosperity, welfare, and tranquility, and it can be used idiomatically to both hello and goodbye'. That's helpful, and begins to introduce all of the power of this beloved term.

The penultimate statement in all the longer versions of Kaddish (4 out of 5 versions, all except Chatzi Kaddish) is: May there be abundant SHALOM from Heaven and life upon us and upon all Yisrael, and let us say: Amein! That's the standard Ashkenaz version. The S'fardic (usually Chassidic) rite adds 'good life'.

The true S'fardic (Eidot HaMizrach) text adds a beautiful list of requests: Satisfaction, help, comfort, refuge, healing, redemption, forgiveness, atonement, relief and salvation. As much as I love hearing this version and occasionally get to recite it when visiting a S'fardic minyan on a Yahrzeit. I don't believe it is the correct version, because this moving list of requests goes far beyond the spiritual nature of the Kaddish format. Viscerally, I adore it; intellectually, not so much. These requests are too earthly.

This line is in Aramaic, which maintains the format of the rest of Kaddish. However, the final statement of Kaddish is in pure Hebrew: The Maker of SHALOM in His exalted heights; may He make SHALOM upon us and upon all Yisrael, and let us say: Amein!

This final statement corresponds to the same declaration in Birkat HaMazon and the end of the AMIDA prayer. I have a strong sense that this sentence was borrowed from the end of the AMIDA, because that usage has a much earlier source for its place in our liturgy than does the recitation of Kaddish. In the Talmud, it says: One who has prayed must take three steps back and extend Shalom. He must pause there, like a

student taking leave of his Rebbe as turning away immediately would be considered an insult. He extends Shalom to the right, then left, if he fails to do so, it would have been better had he not prayed at all (Yoma 53:).

Over time it became the norm to make the OSEH SHALOM declaration also a part of Kaddish. We don't know if this was the original version, but accept it as authentic. I believe strongly that at some point during the time of the Geonim (600-1000 CE). This parallel statement to the last line of Kaddish was added to that recitation. This would give a SHALI'ACH TZIBOR a chance to step back the three steps at the end of Kaddish Shaleim (recited after a communal prayer), which he would have missed after finishing a repetition of the AMIDA (for Shacharit, Mincha and Musaf).

Okay, so we have become used to stating this powerful line twice, once in Aramaic and once in Hebrew, in every Kaddish. But why? What is its importance? Rav Soloveitchik pointed out that in heaven God has mysteriously reconciled the forces of DIN (justice) and CHESED (kindness) and caused them to merge and dwell together in tranquility. This idea is mystically expressed by describing

the angels Gavriel and Micha'el getting along even though the former represents DIN and fire, while the latter embodies CHESED and water.

We want that same kind of peaceful resolution to earthly dichotomies and paradoxes. As time goes on, we see increased strife here on Earth, not just between nations but even within nations. Both of my homelands have never been as polarized and disconnected as they are today. These days people not only harbor different viewpoints and worldviews; they also seem to hold on to different sets of realities and facts. In this declaration, we recognize that bringing true SHALOM requires Divine intervention.

The Rav also pointed out that this declaration contains the request for SHALOM 'upon us' as well as 'upon Yisrael'. There, therefore, seems to be a desire for SHALOM both personally as well as nationally. He then explains that each one of us individually has a distinct personality with particular needs and desires. These differences are the seeds not only of conflicts in our world, but also struggles within families and even within our own psyches.

This is why we recite: May God bring this SHALOM to us and to all Yisrael! We recognize that this dissidence

isn't limited to politics, business, and society, but enters our homes and poisons our families. It also causes great consternation and confusion within the psyches of many individuals. We plead for peace of mind, tranquility of soul, and an end to the inner conflicts from which so many in our world suffer.

I think that peace and harmony look more distant today than, perhaps, anytime within our collective memory. I grew up in a period of civil disobedience (anybody out there remember the 60s?). Today, I'm living in a time when serious people are talking about Civil War, which is a very uncivil phenomenon, indeed. The disassociations get greater; the hopes for reconciliation grow dimmer.

So, when we are ending our Amida or our Kaddish, we do it with this most urgent plea: Please, please, please bring a little of that Divine Shalom, which is truly altruistic, unifying, and miraculous, down here!! We really need it! ❤️

# **Walk thru Davening**

## *with Rabbi David Walk*

### **Imminent Redemption**

#### **UVA L'TZIYON - part 1**

This week we turn our attention in this series of articles about Jewish prayers to the collection of verses called UVA L'TZIYON. This prominent prayer breaks down, rather neatly, into five parts. We don't really know when this prayer was composed, but we assume it is the prayer referred to in a famous Talmudic statement about the importance of prayer: Every day's curse (from the destruction of the Beit HaMikdash) is worse than the previous day's... If the curse keeps increasing this way, what sustains the world? The Kedusha said in the prayer KEDUSHA D'SIDRA, and AMEN Y'HEI SH'MEI RABA... said in Kadish, sustain the world (Sota 49a).

The KEDUSHA D'SIDRA referred to in that statement is what we call U'VA L'TZIYON. So, what is the importance of this prayer, which is built around the third recitation of the doxology, declaration of God's KEDUSHA, holiness? There are actually three answers to this question.

First, there's a theory that the Romans prohibited the declaration of KEDUSHA, and it therefore became a

custom to recite it after the services when the Roman spies were already gone. Second, it's there for anyone who came to shul too late for the first two recitations of the KEDUSHA, one in BIRCHOT K'RIT'AT SH'MA and one in the repetition of the Amida. The third reason suggested is that because this statement includes the term KADOSH, holy, three times, there is an obligation to recite this statement of God's sanctity three times every day.

But before we declare 'Holy, Holy, Holy', we have two verses from the end of the book of Yeshayahu. Why are these verses here? The most popular answer is that there was once a custom to learn NACH (the Bible books after the Chumash) before leaving shul daily for work. So, today we recite and, hopefully try to understand these dramatic verses.

The initial verse, from which the common name of this prayer derives, 'And the Redeemer (GO'EL or Mashiach) shall come to Tzyion, and to those that repent from sin in Yaakov', says the Lord (Yeshayahu 59:20), states two powerful ideas. First, it reassures a frightened nation that redemption is inevitable. Then, it explains that this salvation is reserved for those who repent. This is, of course, important, because in

the order of our morning service these verses are stated only a few minutes after we've put our head on our arm and said TACHANUN, our prayer of repentance

The second verse, 'As for Me, this is My BRIT (covenant) with them, says the Lord: My Spirit, which is upon you, and My words which I have put in your mouth shall not depart out of your mouth, or out of the mouths of your children, or out of the mouths of your children's children, says the Lord, from henceforth and forever (verse 21). This amazing verse actually makes three crucial announcements.

First, the BRIT made by our Patriarchs (renewed at Sinai and upon our arrival in Eretz Yisrael) is eternal. It is just as operative today as it was 3800 years ago. Second, we are all endowed with the RU'ACH or spirit of God. An essence of God inhabits us all.

Third, we have an obligation to keep the study of God's words, our Torah, alive. We do this by having them in our mouths, in other words talking about them. We talk words of Torah to our children and grandchildren. Wow, is this important, and we can never be content or complacent until we hear grandchildren expressing Torah ideas. The greatest NACHAS

(for us and God): Hearing grandchildren deliver DIVREI TORAH!

The next section of UVA L'TZIYON is the most famous: We again recite the doxology. We mentioned above why we're doing this again, but we shouldn't ignore the pedagogic fact that repetition is effective as a teaching model. However, please, pay attention to the fact that this time around is very different. We not only declare these important verses, but we also read the Aramaic translation of them. Notice, I didn't say 'recite' but 'read'. The custom is very strong that the Aramaic should be read silently.

Just before we repeat the doxology, we have inserted a verse from Psalms: But You are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel (T'hilim 22:4). We are going to again declare our belief in the holiness of God, but we also recognize that our praises for God constitute the Divine Throne, at least in this world.

So, what do we learn from the Aramaic translations of the statements in the doxology? First of all, when we proclaim: Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory (Yeshayahu 6:4), we are describing the framework for this KEDUSHA, His Sanctity. This holiness exists in the highest heaven; it also

exists in this earthly realm, which God created; plus, it exists in every temporal context or time frame. It was, it is, and it will be.

Then we quote the famous observation of Yechezkel: Blessed is the Glory of the Lord from His abode (3:12). In this case, the Aramaic translation is less innovative, but it does teach us that glory or KAVOD of God is Y'KARA. This term means 'precious'. It is the most valuable commodity available. And the term M'KOMO, 'His place', translates as BEIT SH'CHINTEI or 'House of His Presence'. What does that mean? I believe that it refers to the dual nature of the Beit HaMikdash, which exists in heaven, and will also be present in this realm, please soon.

Finally, we quote from the Song of the Sea (AZ YASHIR): God shall reign forever (Sh'mot 15:18). In the Aramaic translation we change the verb 'reign' to the noun 'kingdom'. When describing the eternal nature of Divine rule, we are asked to view it as a real tangible thing, rather than an invisible force. It's a kingdom with a King! The idea of an omnipotent king is a little lost on many of us moderns, especially those of us living in democracies, but the Aramaic translation comes from a period of authoritarian rule.

Rabbi Sacks z"l was wont to translate the famous Aramaic phrase, L'ALAM U'LALMEI ALMAYA, as both 'for all time and for all place'. He felt strongly that this statement described both time and space.

So, that's the first two parts of this five-part prayer. I believe strongly that the beginning section of this prayer is a wrap up to our morning service. The later parts will prepare the congregants for reentering the greater world beyond the walls of the synagogue. Remember, there are dangers out there. ❤️

# **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. **

# **Walk thru Davening**

*with Rabbi David Walk*

## **DEPARTING ASSURANCES**

### **UVA L'TZIYON - part 3 (final part)**

This is the third and final installment of my modest survey of the famous prayer called by our Sages Kidusha D'Sidra and by most shul goers Uva L'Tziyon. We've already seen that this prayer contains Tanach study, a reprise of the doxology (KADOSH, KADOSH...) and a discussion of the benefits of Torah study. Now, we conclude with a sort of blessing for Torah study and a prayer for those preparing to depart from the sanctuary of the synagogue for the dangers of the wide world outside.

Part four of the prayer begins: Blessed is our God Who has created us for His glory, separated us from those who are mistaken (or 'gone astray'), given us the Torah of truth, and has implanted within us eternal life.

I believe that these four endowments represent four stages in the development of the Jewish nation's relationship with God. Our creation was part of the general Creation process at the beginning of B'reishit. The separation

of us from those who err (worship idolatry) was accomplished through the BRIT AVOT, the cumulative covenants with our Patriarchs, and confirmed during the Exodus. Next, we were given the Torah at Har Sinai. Finally, the boon of eternal life was granted in the Covenant of the Thirteen Attributes, when we were forgiven for the Sin of Golden Calf and received the second Tablets of the Law.

We move on to describe the specific aspirations we desire to fulfill through our Torah study, which also number four. We begin by asking God to open our hearts to this endeavor. So that, there should be implanted in our hearts the love and awe of God. This should bring us to perform the acts of His Will, Mitzvot, Finally, we arrive at the goal of worshipping God with the complete energy and emotion of our hearts.

Then we conclude this section by informing God that we desire all this so that we will 'never toil in vain, nor produce futility (chaos, confusion)'. What can vain efforts be compared to? It's been suggested it is similar to a barren couple who produce no offspring. What are futile exertions? That is having children who either don't survive or reject our path. So, the two Torah study failures are not

accomplishing anything and, frustratingly, achieving success in the study but ultimately rejecting the life style, going OTD (off the DERECH).

The fifth and final section of our prayer is actually a prayer for specific Divine help and guidance. It begins with the traditional rabbinic prayer opening: May it be Your will, O Lord, our God and God of our ancestors that you should... Familiar? Well, it should be.

What's the initial ask? 'That we should

1. observe Your decrees in this world,
2. merit, live, see and inherit goodness (live a fulfilling life of honor and respect),
3. have blessing into the years of the Messianic Era, and
4. into the World to Come.

I know that I forced this phrase into 4 categories, because I want it to line up with the 'fours' of the previous paragraph. I believe that this is important because the redemption process from Egypt had four steps, hence the four languages of Redemption, representing four stages until total freedom (work stoppage, departure from Egypt, crossing the Sea, receiving the Torah). Plus, four is my lucky number, having been born

on the Fourth of July.

We also add the famous reason for wanting a long life and enter into the realm of eternal life: That my soul may sing of Your Glory and never be silent. O Lord my God, I will acknowledge You forever (T'hilim 30:13).

The almost final section of this long prayer, according to Rav Soloveitchik prepares us to venture out of the holy precincts of our prayers into the cruel world beyond. Many people remove their Tefillin before reciting this section, because we 're announcing our reliance on God without holy props. There are three verses discussing the term BITACHON (reliance or trust) in God. This trio fits the Ba'al Shem Tov's description of the BITACHON process. There must be an individual with the trust or faith, there must a Power deserving of our faith, and a cause or purpose worthy of our effort.

The first verse is one of my favorites because we all learned to sing it to the secular tune Crocodile Rock back in the day (consider yourselves lucky that you're reading this and I'm not attempting to sing it to you). 'Blessed is the person who trusts in God, and God will become their security (or Rav Sacks - whose trust is in the Lord

alone, Yirmiyahu 17:7). This describes the BOTE'ACH, one with trust.

Next, we discuss the Power (MAVTE'ACH) in whom we have this trust (like on the back of US dollars). 'So, trust the Lord always, because in the Lord God you have a place of safety forever' (Yeshayahu 26:4). In Hebrew, that 'place of safety' is TZUR, massive rock or 'immoveable object'.

At last, we refer to the cause in which we are placing our great effort (MIVTACH). 'And those who know Your Name trust in You because You have never abandoned those who seek You, O Lord (Tehilim 9:10). What is the worthy cause? The seeking of God in this world. How do we do that? We go about our business with faith, honesty and integrity. The best way to find God in the great, wide world is to add a little bit of Godliness and goodness into the environment. Always search, seek and eternally hunt for God, and, Lo and Behold, you'll discover God all over the place, because God enters every place that desires the Divine Presence.

We close this prayer with the most famous verse about Torah study. It's the one which ends every chapter of Pirkei Avot and recited by Torah learners to introduce a Kaddish D'Rabanan. The Lord is well pleased

(desirous) for His righteousness' sake; He will magnify the law and make it honorable (glorious or grand, Yeshayahu 42:21). God wants the increase of Torah study and even of Torah content (D'Rabanan). It's one area where inflation is always desirable.

This is a fitting close to this prayer which ends our prayer service and contains both Torah ideas and hopes for success in the world beyond the four walls of prayer and study. We're announcing to the world, and ourselves, that it's okay to venture beyond the walls of shul and study hall, but only under the eternal watchfulness of the Eternal. ❤️

# **Walk thru Davening**

## *with Rabbi David Walk*

### **Our Solemn Obligation**

#### **ALEINU - part 1**

Amongst the best-known Jewish prayers is ALEINU, whose title means 'it is incumbent upon us'. We recite this declaration at the end of all of our prayer services. Many of us remember singing it as a sort of reminder (celebration?) that services were drawing to a close. It's a little sad that more people can sing it than explain it. So, in my totally non-musical way, let's get to know this prayer.

There is a famous tradition, dating to the Middle Ages, that this prayer was written by Yehoshua bin Nun, either when he crossed the Jordan into Eretz Yisrael or when he conquered Yericho. Most probably, it was composed by Talmudic Sages, perhaps Rav, in the early centuries of the Common Era. Rav Ezra Bick explains that, even though not historically accurate, the idea that Yehoshua recited it is 'indicative of how the prayer should be understood', because one recites it 'when one leaves the secluded confines of the synagogue and goes out into the world, in which he will encounter

idolatry and impurity, he should impress on his soul the true worship of God and recommit himself to the service of God.' Rav Bick concludes, 'It is the introduction to the world outside of prayer and not the conclusion of the world of prayer.'

The original liturgical appearance of this prayer came in the Rosh Hashana Musaf as an introduction to the section about the Kingship of God (MALCHİYOT). But sometime in the eleventh century, it began its role as the last prayer recited before encountering the theological dangers of the greater world beyond the synagogue walls.

So, after we declare that we have a solemn obligation to 'praise the Master of all, and to ascribe greatness to the Shaper of Creation', we then make an effort to differentiate between us and everyone else who lack our connection to God. This effort to characterize the dissimilarity between us and 'them' notes four areas of distinction.

The first two are, 'We are not like the nations (GOYIM) of the lands and God has not emplaced us like the families (MISHPACHOT) of the earth.' Nations, here, are relatively loose conglomerations of people who share certain general factors in common, especially geography. 'Families' refer

to closer groups of people who share tight connections like genes and shared history. These are two types of physical factors.

The second two are that our 'portions' (CHELKEINU) and 'fate' or 'destiny' (GORALEINU) aren't the same. These two shared factors are more philosophical and conceptual. We are discussing issues which can be described as cultural and, perhaps, even spiritual.

The upshot of these differences, both physical and philosophical, lead to a major dichotomy in religious practice: They bow to vanity and emptiness, and pray to a god who cannot save. In other words, because of these differences in their makeup and background, they never found the Real God, and express the human need for spiritual outlet by worshipping phony deities.

This line in the Aleinu prayer has been very contentious over the centuries. The Christians believed that the reference to 'empty' deities was an insult to their object of worship - namely, that Jew born in Beit Lechem a couple of millennia ago. We often call this gentleman YESHU, while the word for 'empty' is VARIK. They share the same numerical value or Gematria of 316. QED we must be referring to him. However, in reality

this quote comes from a verse in Yeshayahu, 45:20.

Anyway, many European Jews with Christian control over their lives and printing presses deleted this line. It remained in Sephardic versions, and has been, generally, returned to its proper place here in Medinat Yisrael.

In contradistinction to bowing to meaningless, false gods, we Jews bend our knees in acknowledgment to the King, who rules over kings of kings. This triple expression for God's monarchy reflects the fact that Persian and Babylonian kings called themselves king of kings. So, we added another level of God ruling them.

This first passage of Aleinu ends with two parallel statements of God's unique character in the world. The first begins by describing God as the One Who stretches (spreads or expands) the extent of the heavens above and establishes the earth's foundations below. It continues by describing God as the One Who sets the earth's foundation below. This God of Heaven above and earth below, the Power behind all of the physical universe is our God.


We conclude this description of our God of the entire Cosmos by stating EIN OD, 'There is no other.' God is

unique in Creation.

This very same God is 'truly our God, and there is no other besides the One'. This idea is written in the Torah: Know, recognize, understand therefore this day and turn your mind and heart to it that the Lord is God in the heavens above and upon the earth beneath; there is no other (D'varim 4:39). Powerfully, we repeat those two monosyllabic words EIN OD!

Just as we described our unique status earlier in the paragraph as a duality; we are uniquely different both physically and philosophically - so, too, God's singular Being is unique both in Heaven above and upon the earth below. Just like there is no plethora of gods; there is no duality of Divine beings, one ruling here and another in some celestial sphere.

So, we have described the first passage of the Aleinu prayer as a paeon to both the unique character of God and of the Jewish people, His Divine servants.

Next week we will turn our attention to the final passage of Aleinu in which we turn from a seemingly ethnocentric theme to a truly universal motif. 

# **Walk thru Davening**

*with Rabbi David Walk*

## **Bright, Shiny Future**

### **ALEINU - part 2**

Last week we discussed the first half of the Aleinu prayer, amongst the best-known prayers of our liturgical canon. The major point of this opening paragraph is the unique nature of the Jewish people. We simultaneously praise the Jewish discovery of the One True God and dismiss the non-Jewish worship of HEVEL and REIK, 'vanity' and 'emptiness'. This daily declaration, based on the MALCHIYUT section of Rosh HaShana Musaf service, is generally viewed as preparation for leaving the confines of shul and davening, to emerge and encounter the brutal world outside. Then we begin the second paragraph which proclaims that we can't wait for the time when the rest of the world will join. We jump very quickly from ethnocentric to universal.

We actually begin this turn around by stating 'therefore we place our hope in You'. How is this a 'therefore' or logical next-step situation. Well, because the 'Author of Creation' always had desired the loyalty of the whole world. God gave Adam, No'ach

and the generation of the Tower of Babel the option to accept ethical monotheism and the Torah. It's only when the world turned to idolatry three times that God went for Plan B: Give the Torah to one people who will preserve it until the rest of the world is ready to opt in.

We call this expectation a TIKVA or 'hope'. However, Reb David Zvi Hoffman (1835-1921) explained in a famous lecture from 1895 that TIKVA best translates as 'to be strong', and in our case means 'to be strong in the expectation of the coming of God's salvation'. This implies not just the expectation but the assured knowledge of the expected outcome, as outlined in Yeshayahu (chapter 2) and Zecharia (chapter 14).

We fully expect to 'quickly see the grandeur (TIFERET) of God's power and strength (OZ). What makes this 'power' so 'glorious' is that, unlike human conquerors, God won't destroy the other team, but make them members of our team. God will not destroy the sinners and idolators but remove idols and abominations from the world, as in Psalms 104:35 where many commentaries translate the verse, 'May sins disappear from the earth, and evil be no more.' There's it's homiletic; here it's P'SHAT (literal).

Now we encounter my favorite phrase in all of our prayers: Then the world will be perfected ('fixed', L'TAKEIN) under the sovereignty of the Almighty (SHA-DAI). Rav Hoffman, in that famous lecture, explained that TIKUN means to 'straighten the warped', and SHA-DAI is best translated as 'Provider'. God provides all that is needed to make this world paradise, but we must do our part.

In the next couple of lines, we express our expectation that all 'children of the flesh' will accept God's hegemony over our realm. This will, first of all, remove all 'evil of the land'. This will be accomplished through a remarkable education program which begins with recognizing (YAKIRU) the One True God, but continues with intimate knowledge (V'YEI-D'U) of God and the Divine largesse for our realm.

As Rav Hoffman expressed it: Before You Lord, our God - will all render their YAKAR (value and worth). The recognition of the one true God will bring about the reality that everything of worth in our deeds as well as our wealth will be dedicated to God. It will recreate the single mindedness of the Generation of the Tower, but the focus won't be ourselves and our handicraft, but God. All egotism will depart; altruism will reign.

At this time, all humanity will 'bend their knee' and every tongue swear 'before You, O Lord, our God'. The ultimate goal is God's rule accomplished through total, voluntary acceptance. This vision is, of course, presented in the famous concluding verse: And the Lord shall be King over all the earth: in that day there shall be one Lord, and His Name shall be one (Zecharia 14:9). Zecharia envisions the true Messianic vision of universal recognition of that which Jews declare twice daily: Hear, O Yisrael, the Lord our God is one God (D'varim 6:4).

Accepting the yoke of heaven will be universal. It's significant that when we close our eyes while reciting SHMA, we are, at least for a moment, negating all existence outside of God. At that moment we readily accept the yoke, burden, responsibility of God's rule. That will be the norm in this future age. All will accept responsibility, not just for reward and payment, but as a sincere acceptance of God as our Sovereign.

This whole development of universal monotheism and worship of God is, of course, our fervent hope and expectation every day of our lives and is an appropriate way to end our synagogue services and prepare us to emerge into the wide, and often

cruel, world outside the walls of our sanctuary. But this idea is also relevant as we commemorate Chanuka, because that war against Hellenism was a Kulturkampf (war of civilizations) as well as a physical battle.

The essence of Greek culture was nostalgia, a sense that the best was and never will be again. I remember the movie *Zorba the Greek* from my youth (1960), in which a woman of ill repute tells a tourist, 'No society ever reached the heights that were attained by ancient Greece! It was the cradle of culture. It was a happy country.' But never again. Even the ancient Greeks thought that the best had already happened. Already in days of Socrates and Sophocles (4th century BCE), a play was written about Dionysus, god of theater, going to Hades to find great truths and plays. The future could never equal the past.

Not so Judaism. We revere the past, but don't worship it. We look back nostalgically on past greatness, but ultimately expect that, 'the glory of the future house will be greater than the glory of the former one, declares God, Lord of Hosts' (Chagai 2:9). May both the House and the Glory arrive speedily in our days.

Shabbat Shalom, Chodesh Tov and Chanuka Same'ach! ❤️

# **Walk thru Davening**

## *with Rabbi David Walk*

### **Prelude to Praise**

#### **BARUCH SHE'AMAR - part 1**

According to a D'RASHA of Rav Simlai, 'A person should always present praises to God before actually praying' (B'rachot 32a). He bases this observation on the behavior of Moshe Rabeinu. Before begging to be allowed into Eretz Yisrael, we are told that Moshe said, 'Please, Lord God! You have only begun to show your servant your greatness and your mighty hand. What deity in heaven or on earth can act as you do or can perform your deeds and powerful acts?' (D'varim 3:24). Only then did he ask to be allowed into the promised Land. Well, I guess we also learn that you don't always get what you ask for.

Based on this precedent, our Sages organized a litany of selected Psalms to be recited daily before actually standing before God with our morning prayer, the Shmoneh Esrei or Amida. We call this section of our prayer service P'SUKEI D'ZIMRA, 'verses of praise'. Actually, the word ZIMRA (related to Z'MIRA, song) probably originally comes from the agricultural term for 'pruning'. So,

what we've included is just the choicest material appropriate for the occasion. In other words, it could have been longer.

Once our Sages have instituted a practice, it is common to then require a blessing over this prescribed performance. With P'SUKEI D'ZIMRA, we have a blessing at the beginning and another at the end. This week we will endeavor to elucidate the first half of the opening blessing for P'SUKEI D'ZIMRA, which is called BARUCH SHE'AMAR (Blessed is the One Who Spoke), based on the opening words of the prayer.

This prayer breaks easily into two quite equal parts. The second, which we'll take a look at next week, is a quite normal blessing format, and was probably written by the Men of the Great Assembly, perhaps around 400BCE. However, the first half is a poem. Probably, it was first recited responsively. The Cantor would recite a line and the congregation would respond, BARUCH HU! (Blessed is He). There is evidence that this poem was first used in the ceremony to install the Exilarch, ruler of the Jewish community in Bavel (modern Iraq) during the period of the Geonim (600-1000CE).

There is a tradition from the late Middle Ages that the entire prayer

was composed by the Men of the Great Assembly based on a PITKA, the note, which fell from heaven. The text had 87 words, which is the Gematriya of PAZ, pure gold. There are many problems with this tale; we'll mention two. First, the Talmud and Midrash have no record of such an event so clearly worthy of note (please, pardon the pun). Plus, there exist versions, from the Geonic Period, of the blessing without the introductory poem.

Finally, it's time to look at the content of this beautiful poem. We are, clearly, praising God, Who is the Creator of everything. The beginning of the poem emphasizes the creative powers of God, 'the One Who spoke and everything came into being'. Then the poem seems to get repetitive. This same God 'made the Creation or beginning' and then 'spoke and did'. Aren't both of those ideas included in the original statement? Not according to the Eitz Yosef commentary on the prayer-book. He avers that the first statement declares God's unique capacity to create EX NIHILO, something out of nothing. However, these miraculous creations aren't necessarily permanent, and, indeed, there are Midrashim which claim that God did create and destroy worlds before this one.

We are blessing God for making this B'REISHIT, beginning, permanent. Then the statement OMER V'OSEH, Who states and does, is making another statement entirely. God is to be trusted to fulfill everything ever stated by God. This is also extremely significant for us as we study Torah. Every statement attributed to God will eventually happen. There's omnipotence and authenticity. We can have total trust in God, because of the Divine absolute power, but also that God's signet seal is truth.

After that intro, I'm going to present two approaches to understanding the structure of the poem. The first was given by Rav David Zvi Hoffman in a famous series of lectures about TEFILA in Berlin from 1895, which has been recently translated into Hebrew by Mossad Harav Kook (Yehoshua Anvel, 2017). Rav Hoffman claims that we can understand seven aspects of God from this poem, and all relate specifically to the Tetragramaton (famous four-letter name which we never pronounce). Art Scroll (Complete Art Scroll Siddur, p. 58-9) summarizes them as follows:

- (1) God is the Creator Who brought all into creation and maintains it.
- (2) God fulfills all promises made.
- (3) The Name refers to God's infinite

compassion.

(4) God rewards all good deeds.

(5) God exists forever, the very Name refers to eternity.

(6) God redeems and rescues, both physically and spiritually.

(7) This is God's personal and exact Name. It is the Name by which the angels address God.

On this last point there is some controversy. Art Scroll says, 'it in no way expresses His true essence... He allows us to glimpse some of His properties and express them in a Name.' Okay, but that's not what Rav Hoffman says. He declares that this is God's name, period. It's fine for anyone to disagree with any given opinion, but I wish Art Scroll would acknowledge that it misrepresented Rav Hoffman.

I love this exposition, and I think it helps us in our prayer endeavors, but I don't think it's the literal meaning of the poem. I believe strongly that seven is not a crucial number in this poem, which has BARUCH eleven times. I think that there's an introduction with 'BARUCH is the One Who spoke and the world came into being, BARUCH is He'. Then there are nine lines which I believe strongly express three ideas, which

are fundamental to our prayers:

(1) God is the Creator,

(2) God is full of love and compassion,

and (3) God will always be there to guide history and bring about the Final Redemption.

To make these three fundamental ideas we state them each in three ways or from three slightly different approaches. We like the number three for emphasis. Furthermore, these three ideas are fundamental to our belief system, and are the basis for the three blessings which surround the recitations of SH'MA, which P'SUKEI D'ZIMRA introduce. In those blessings God's love is expressed through the gifting of the Torah to Yisrael, and God's promise to redeem is exemplified by the Exodus from Egypt.

Our Sages have taught that we must praise God before we stand in prayer and begin to ask for stuff. That's fine. Here we are beginning to see how those same Sages directed that we carry out this praising policy. The poem which begins the blessing over this recitation of praise, I believe, helps tremendously in this effort. ❤️

# **Walk thru Davening**

*with Rabbi David Walk*

## **Blessing of Praise**

### **BARUCH SHE'AMAR - part 2**

In our previous article, I discussed the two-part format of the BARUCH SHE'AMAR prayer. The first half is a poem about 'blessing God'. In this piece, I'll examine the second half, which, I believe strongly, is the original prayer. This section of our prayer was probably written by the Men of the Great Assembly, in the centuries before the Common Era. That's because it follows the formal structure of Blessings written by this august group.

This section begins with six-word formula of blessings easily recognized by all traditional Jews: BARUCH ATA HASHEM ELOKEINU MELECH HA'OLAM, Blessed are You, O Eternal, our God, King of the Universe. This famous format always raises the question: How do we have the CHUTZPA to bless God? Well, it's common to sidestep this problem by explaining that we're not blessing God, per se, we are declaring that God is the source of all blessing in the cosmos. An alternative is to claim that we are utilizing the normative meaning of the BARUCH, which is to

increase. In other words, it's a request addressed to God begging that the Divine Presence be increased in this realm.

So, let's render this phrase: O Eternal, Who is our God, increase Your Presence in this realm over which You are the King.

The middle section of our long blessing, which ends with another BARUCH ATA HASHEM, has three parts. Here is my translation of the first one: The God who is our compassionate Parent is LAUDED by His PEOPLE, is ACCLAIMED and GLORIFIED by His PIOUS ONES and SERVANTS.

There seems to be a lot of repetition in that sentence, but allow me to clarify. There are three different groups of people proclaiming three different types of praise. Let's begin with the verbs of acclaim, which are in UPPERCASE in the previous paragraph. According to the Etz Yosef, laud or HALLEL is listing the specific items we're praising God for, like this morning's sunrise or our health. The acclaim or SHEVACH are expressions of appreciation and love for God because of the incredible things performed. Finally, the glorification or P'IER expresses our understanding of the significance of the wonders performed.

These praises are proclaimed by three different groups of individuals, which are also in UPPERCASE The first group, AMI, are those who recognize the national or ethnic connection between all Jews. Next, we have the pious ones or CHASIDIM, not to be confused with the modern religious group, are those who are committed to perform every Halachic point comprehensively. Finally, we have the servants of God, AVODAV, who are always aware of their subservient connection to God our Monarch. Every group does their best to adulate our Lord.

However, undoubtedly, many of us feel inadequate to the task. What do I do if I can't find the words? Well, the paragraph provides the answer: Quote the poetry of King David. Indeed, the main content of the P'SUKEI D'ZIMRA are the Psalms of King David. Hopefully, we recite these poems with an eye toward discovering our own thoughts on the greatness of God.

Rav Soloveitchik in his explanation of this paragraph said, 'In Psalms we say, 'Who can express the mighty acts of HASHEM? Who can declare all His praise?' (T'hilim 106:2)... The question then is, how can mortal man with his limited vocabulary even attempt to engage in such praise?

How are we allowed to praise Him in our prayers? The answer is implicit in these words of our text. By invoking King David, we rely on his precedent through his composition... we are then permitted to use his words to praise God ourselves. (Rav, Rosh HaShanah Machzor, p.200-201)

The second section of this blessing's body is our commitment to fulfill the task begun by the individuals mentioned previously. It's all well and fine that there are groups praising God, but now we personally assume that responsibility as well. Every Jew is required to individually express their awe before the Infinite, the Omnipotent. By reciting these various forms of praise, we are, simultaneously declaring that God is our Sovereign.

The final section of the body of this blessing makes the bold proclamation that God is Unique, the One and only God in the Cosmos. Now, assuming that this blessing was indeed written in the couple of centuries before the Common Era, then this declaration was truly significant because polytheism continued to thrive in the countries where the Jews resided. But what does it signify for us who have generally never met a pagan? It is still extremely important to declare that

the central force and focus in our lives remains God. We may work hard or have other forces at play in our lives, but God remains the core of our being, our sense of spiritual self.

The BARUCH SHE'AMAR blessing is called a B'RACHA ARUCHA, a 'long blessing', because it has another BARUCH ATA HASHEM at the end. Here we recite MELECH M'HULAL BA'TISHBACHOT, King, Who is lauded (M'HULAL) with acclaim (TISHBACHOT). Well, of course we praise with praises, don't we? What's the point exactly? God is praised without our saying a word. The ever creating, all powerful God is objectively being praised by the Divine handiwork itself. The greatness of God is manifest without us opening our mouths. 'The heavens declare the honor of God, and the expanse of the heavens tells of His handiwork' (T'hilim 19:2).

The existential reality is that 'God is lauded' always, but that in no way relieves us of the duty to proclaim the Divine greatness, always and strenuously. We have the need to add our feeble efforts to those of the Universe itself. We are duty bound to contribute TISHBACHOT, acclaim.

This remarkable and beautiful blessing begins the daily endeavor to laud our Lord and Maker. This effort

is completed by another blessing which closes this section of our daily prayers. That blessing is called YISHTABACH, and we shall turn our attention to that prayer next. ❤️

# **Walk thru Davening**

## *with Rabbi David Walk*

### **HYMN of the SOUL**

#### **NISHMAT - part 1**

There are many great prayers in our Siddur, but most of the truly exceptional ones come from the book of Psalms. However, our Sages did write one outstanding prayer, which truly moves and inspires the supplicant, and it's called NISHMAT KOL CHAI, 'the soul of every living thing'. Rabbi Avraham Twerski zt"l wrote, 'It's almost criminal to comment on the Nishmat prayer.' I don't know if it's a crime, but it is a bit of a CHUTZPA. The prayer is so perfect, so well-constructed, that it's very hard for any of us to add to its impact. But I'll try.

Well, Rav Twerski went first and continued: It is the 'prayer of prayers', complete with every aspect of prayer: praise of God, expression of faith, trust and hope; man's humility together with his greatness... To comment on Nishmat is like trying to improve on a breathtaking sunset or a majestic waterfall... The reconciliation of self-esteem and humility could not be better done (From Bondage to Freedom p. 188).

With that recommendation from a

Torah scholar and acclaimed psychiatrist, let's take a look at the prayer itself. The prayer contains three parts. The first section, which I will attempt to explain in this article was written during the period of the Tana'im (Rabbis of the Mishna, 100BCE-220CE), and is first mentioned in the Talmud as the BIRKAT HA'SHIR ('blessing of song') to be said after the recital of Hallel at the Pesach Seder. The full prayer was eventually completed and included into the SHABBAT and Yom Tov services by the period of the Geonim (600-1000CE).

We begin by declaring that all living things bless (T'VAREICH), glorify (TIFA'EIR) and exalt (T'ROMEIM) God, our King all the time. We separate those with N'SHAMA, Divine soul, from those with mere life force. The soulful group are, of course, humans, but we can also feel or intuit that all of life is expressing God's greatness. It's been asked how come we only recite this prayer on Shabbat and holidays. The easy answer is that we have more time to devote to our prayers, but many believe that the true reason is that only on these special days, imbued with holiness, do we have extra spirituality (N'SHAMA Y'TEIRA) to do this prayer justice.

Next, we describe God's uniqueness. God is the infinite power (EIL) for all

eternity, MIN HA'OLAM V'AD HA'OLAM. Some suggest that phrase means both in this realm and the World to Come. Without our God, there is no Deity.

We then list the unique activities of God. This list could fill an entire article, but I'll present the basic translation of these heavenly activities: Redeemer (GO'EIL, change of one's spiritual status), Savior (MOSHI'AH, rescue spiritually), Deliverer (PODEH, change one's technical status), Rescuer (MATZIL, save from physical harm), Provider (M'FARNEIS), Empathizer (M'RACHEIM, often 'shows compassion').

God performs all these roles through every type of difficulty we may encounter. The prayer specifies two kinds of danger: TZARA and TZUKA. The first is usually translated 'trouble' and, of course, gives us the Yiddish TZOROS. It really means to be constricted within tight places, 'between a rock and a hard place'. The second is usually rendered 'distress', but really comes from the word for a precipice and describes most of Jewish history: a real 'cliff hanger'.

We continue: You are our only Deity, and this was equally true for our ancestors (HARISHONIM) as it is for us now (HA'ACHRONIM). You, God,

are the sovereign for all living things and control all events. You direct our world with kindness (CHESED) and compassion (RACHAMIM). You have been the Master (ADON) throughout all the generations, and, therefore, You are to be extolled with all manner of praises.

Then comes a weird description or, perhaps, request: Please, don't sleep or slumber on your watch. Really? We're afraid that God, Who has no physical needs, might doze off on the job! The famous approach to this conundrum is to explain that we are begging God not to turn away from us (HESTER PANIM). But I think that we must look at this phrase in the context of the next phrase: Who arouses the sleeping and awakens those in deep slumber.

God, You never stop paying attention to this world and us. Please, teach us to have a similar standard of focus. Here's our dual problem: first we get physically tired and, then, we get mentally distracted. We want to remain alert to our responsibility to worship You through our words and deeds. All too often, we tire of the task or lose our concentration. We beg You, Who never sleeps, help us stay on task!

Now, there is a list of specific gifts bestowed upon humanity by God:

gives speech to the mute (many authorities believe that means to grant humanity, because humans are the beasts who speak), releases the bound, supports the fallen (or 'the falling', better to get there before reaching rock bottom), and raises up those who are bowed (posture tells us a lot about a person's situation). This fascinating list is, perhaps, a wish list for conferring human dignity.

As we end this first third of our prayer, we introduce a new concept: thanksgiving. Up until this point we've talked about lavishing laudations, which is great. Now, we add MODIM, thanksgiving. To give thanks requires an admission of debt. This creates a bond much stronger than praise. Since the destruction of the first First Beit HaMikdash, we have been Yehudim, which implies more than the importance of the tribe of Yehuda. It means we admit our debt and connection to God.

Rabbi Norman Lamm zt"l, described the message of this prayer in his commentary on the Hagada: Gratitude is a state of mind, a psychological attunement to God, a climate of conscience, a cast of character, a matter not so much of having something as of being someone. Ultimately, the ability to achieve this

higher form of gratitude is an integral aspect of character (The Royal Table, p. 122).

And it is the definition of being a YEHUDI. This is a great place to end our exploration of the first third of this amazing prayer. ❤️

# **Walk thru Davening**

## *with Rabbi David Walk*

### **MISSION IMPOSSIBLE**

#### **NISHMAT - part 2**

In our first article about the prayer Nishmat Kol Chai, we talked about the amazing praise due to God. In the second section of this most eloquent paean to God, we express our inadequacy to the task. After we have acknowledged the obligation or spiritual need to praise God, it's equally important to recognize the difficulty, if not impossibility of the task. To a certain extent we end up being very much like the United States Navy Seabees Construction Battalions of World War II, whose famous motto was: The difficult we do immediately, the impossible takes a little longer. But before embarking upon the mission, we must first acknowledge the level of difficulty.

The second part of the NISHMAT prayer is first referred to by Rebbi Yochanan as the thanksgiving prayer that we present to God when rains finally come to end a drought. Our praises are in some way echoing the works of nature to give glory to God. But we recognize that our powers to praise are weak indeed, compared to the glory of natural phenomena, to

glorify God. This section of the prayer emphasizes the difficulty our puny skills face in the effort to laud the Lord.

This part of the prayer begins with six body parts necessary to the praising process, and each with a level of difficulty qualifier:

1. Our mouth would need to contain as much praise as the sea contains water,
2. Our tongue would need to sing joyously as the legion of waves upon the ocean,
3. Our lips would need to be as full of acclaim as the expanse of the sky,
4. Our eyes would need to be as bright as the Sun and Moon,
5. Our arms would need to stretch like the wing span of the griffon vulture,
6. Our legs would need to be as swift as a deer.

Phew! We'd basically need to have super powers to sufficiently honor and acclaim our God. The first three items in our list make a fascinating assumption. All noises made by nature are praises to God. According to the Midrash, praise of God began on the second day of Creation, when the oceans made the first audible

noise in the universe. Fascinating.

In 1979, I had the honor of meeting Arno Penzias. For those not going ooohh!, let me explain. Dr. Penzias escaped Nazi Germany in 1939 at the age of six. He became a research physicist at Bell Labs in New Jersey and in 1964 (together with Robert Wilson) discovered the background radiation created by the Big Bang, for which they won the Nobel Prize in 1978. As a result of this proof of the Big Bang or Creation of the Universe, he became a believing Jew (but not Orthodox, a daughter later became a Conservative rabbi). In the short talk he gave, he called that cosmic 'noise' the Hymn of Creation. All nature lauds Him!

Closer to P'SHAT, the literal meaning, I believe that these terms are a form of hyperbole, emphasizing the skills and power required to do justice to the splendor of our Creator. It's as if to do justice to God's grandeur we must emulate the power of natural phenomena.

The last two items on the list, 'outstretched arms' and 'fast feet' appear to reflect earlier Jewish customs, when Jews would prayer with arms extended to heaven. Also, it appears that Jews did jump around during davening at some point. In a Tosefta, it is told that Rabbi Akiva

would start davening in one corner of the room and find himself finishing his prayers in the opposite corner. This may be the source for our swaying or 'shukling' during davening, more on this phenomenon in the next article.

However, even if we could emulate or recreate these natural phenomena, we would still not be able to fulfill satisfactorily our need to L'HODOT, give thanks and recognition to God. This term MASPIKIM means to be sufficient to the task. It appears quite often in the negative in Rabbinic texts to describe an inadequacy or an insufficiency.

How come we can't do God's greatness justice? Simply because God's TOVOT (good deeds, favors), NISIM (miracles, open or hidden) and NIFLA'OT (amazing wonders) are so abundant, perhaps, infinite. To express the innumerable gifts of God, the Rabbis pulled out their numeric stops. They used the terms ALFEI ALAFIM and RIBEI RIVAVOT. These terms translate as 'thousands of thousands' and 'myriads of myriads'. A 'myriad' is the Greek word for 10,000. In the ancient world these were the biggest numbers they had available. Today, we'd have to say billions of billions, and sound like the late Carl Sagan in his television series

Cosmos. Maybe, we should go for trillion of trillions, like in America's Gross Domestic Product or debt.

These amazing acts of supernatural power were exhibited both for us and for our ancestors. We have a huge accumulation of amazing stuff to praise, and, unfortunately, limited resources at our disposal to do them justice. We have a duty to thank God for miracles performed for us in our lifetimes and for miracles we know about that God performed for our ancestors (Shulchan Oruch, Orech Chayim 219). And that doesn't even include the miracles attested to by the Torah and our Sages.

That's the dilemma presented by the second section of the Nishmat prayer. We are like a family in debt without the assets to repay the obligations. Will God repossess the wonders performed in the world on our behalf? We owe God so much, and we allocate so few assets to servicing this debt. What are we to do?

So, that's actually where the second section of Nishmat ends. We acknowledge the problem, but have not yet offered any remedy to deal with the predicament. I guess we'll just have to wait for the next article, and see how our Sages moved forward with this plight.

As Jews we have accepted the assignment to glorify God, but seem unable to fulfill the pledge. Next, we'll deal with what we must do in the face of the impossible. ❤️

# **Walk thru Davening**

## *with Rabbi David Walk*

### **THE IMPERATIVE**

#### **NISHMAT - part 3**

A couple of articles ago I started writing about the prayer NISHMAT KOL CHAI, in my opinion the best prayer ever written by our Sages. We're now up to section three. The first part is about the duty of every living thing to extol God, our Maker. This leads to the second topic, which is: But it's impossible! We just don't possess the skills required to satisfactorily praise our Creator. Theoretically, we could just have ended the prayer there and gone home, secure in the knowledge that we're clearly not up to the task. But not us! We carry on. The third part of the prayer explains why we can't just walk away from the effort.

This segment of the prayer, which was probably written by the Jewish scholars of Bavel (modern Iraq) called Geonim about a millennium after the first section and, perhaps, five centuries after part two, begins:

You redeemed (GA'AL) us from Egypt and liberated (PADA) us from our status as slaves. These were two different aspects of the Exodus. The first was more spiritual and involved

leaving Egypt for the Land Overflowing with Milk and Honey, where we get to fulfill our national destiny. The second feature is more technical and involved the change of status in society, from slave to free members of a community. PIDYON, whether of an animal or a first-born child, always involves a shift of position or status relative to the world around.

The next acknowledgment of Divine largesse is: In famine You nourished us, and in plenty you sustained us. Throughout most of history, humanity lived on the brink of starvation. Societies lived on a season by season fight with famine. So, whenever we have emerged from our latest bout with hunger; we acknowledge God's role in this escape from death.

However, when we have experienced a period of plenty, we also must remember to acknowledge God's magnanimity. This second obligation is often harder than the first. Our Sages have taught us that the test of wealth is a greater challenge than that of poverty. When things are tough it's all 'Please, please, God help!!', but when things are going well, it's all 'My strength and the power of my hand accomplished all this.'

Plus, 'From the sword you saved us; from plague you let us escape; and

from severe and enduring diseases you spared us.' God, you have been there throughout history when bad guys have tried to annihilate us. Not only that, but You have been there to help us through invisible enemies, like disease.

We divide diseases into two categories: DEVER and CHALAYIM RA'IM V'NE'EMANIM. The first is regular outbreaks of diseases, perhaps even plague. Don't confuse it with the fifth plague of Egypt which only afflicted livestock, perhaps anthrax. Here we are talking about a serious outbreak of an epidemic.

The second phrase is very difficult to translate and comes from the TOCHACHA, the curses found in KI TAVO (D'varim 28:59). The ArtScroll Sidur renders it: from severe and enduring diseases You spared us. The problem is the word NE'EMANIM, which literally means faithful. What's 'faithful' about disease? Rashi suggests that the disease does exactly what God wanted it to do. There are those who suggest these diseases follow a set course and the sufferer recovers or doesn't, according to this plan. Rebbe Nachman believes that these are diseases which occur because the person had a blemish in their EMUNA, faith.

This brings us to the next statement

in this third section of our prayer. Here we declare: Until now Your mercy has helped us, and Your kindness has not forsaken us. Do not abandon us, Hashem our God, forever. In other words, here (spatially), and now (temporally), we are always depending on You, and You have always come through. This relationship based on Your benevolence has worked for the Jewish people from the time of the Exodus until today. We know that we could never continue without Your support.

The words 'mercy' and 'kindness' in Hebrew are RACHAMIM and CHESED. The first is really compassion and empathy. It derives from the word for 'womb', RECHEM, and means that God 'mothers' us. The term CHESED denotes generosity and benevolence, and always implies going beyond all expectations.

The terms for 'forsake' and 'abandon' are AZOV and NATASH. The first describes creating a physical space between us and God, while the second is more akin to withholding moral and psychological support. God is always there for us throughout our long history, both with substantive help and emotional assistance.

This brings us to the passionate and poignant climax of our prayer: Therefore, the organs that You set

within us and the spirit and soul that You breathed into our nostrils, and the tongue that You placed in our mouth - all of them shall thank and bless and praise and glorify, exalt and revere, be devoted, sanctify and declare the sovereignty of Your Name, our King.

AL KEIN, therefore, we must praise You. We can't stop ourselves from this endeavor. Our physical body and all its constituent parts (EIVARIM), together with our life force (RU'ACH) and immortal soul (NESHAMA) instruct our communicative tools (LASHON, tongue) to just go for it, and declare how awesome You are. We couldn't stop ourselves from this enterprise even if we wanted to. Yes, we have explained that we clearly understand that we're not really up to the task, but neither can we desist from it.

So, these body parts and communication organs let 'er rip, and we express seven forms of praise (YODU, VIVAR'CHU, VISHAB'CHU, VIFA'ARU, VIROM'MU, V'YA'ARITZU, V'YAK-DISHU). These terms aren't exactly synonyms, each contains its own nuance. Each one rising to a higher rung in the spiritual ladder reaching to the heavens. Then, when our spirit alights from this stairway to Heaven, our spirit enters the Celestial Throne

Room and we coronate our God, King and Sovereign. We do it, because our whole self can't escape this categorical imperative.

We've acknowledged all the difficulties, but we introduce the final part of this wonderful prayer by admitting that we have no choice, we must do what our soul demands, and that is to praise our Maker. Just as Paul Watzlawick explained that humans 'cannot not communicate', we Jews cannot not praise God.

Our next article will address the final section of the prayer. We will explore this beautiful prayer's methods and advice for fulfilling this mandate, this Mission Impossible. It's a difficult task, but we do the best we can, because we must. ❤️

# **Walk thru Davening**

## *with Rabbi David Walk*

### **FOCUS**

#### **NISHMAT - part 4**

We finally get to the climax of the Nishmat prayer. This wonderful declaration of our love and devotion for God concludes the Psalms of Praise (P'SUKEI D'ZIMRA) on Shabbat and Chag, and introduces the YISHTABACH blessing over the recitation of all these Biblical tributes to God. We add this remarkable preface to Yishtabach only on those days when we have more time and spiritual awareness to do this beautiful prayer justice, but not at those weekday minyanim which can be a bit rushed. This prayer must be savored.

In our survey of this work, we've reached the line: For every mouth shall offer thanks to You; every tongue shall vow allegiance to You; every knee shall bend to You; every erect spine shall prostrate itself before You.

This is the first of four 'foursomes' which we will encounter. Each quartet will be an ascending grouping of allegiance to God. We begin this grouping with the mouth which represents our presentation to the outside world. Our mouth expresses

gratitude and acknowledgment to God. It's states a simple 'thanks'. Next, we discuss the tongue, which in polite society stays safely and politely tucked inside the mouth. With this more inward vehicle for expression, we vow or commit to loyally serving God.

Next, we describe our obedience to God rendered by bending the knee. This act acknowledges servitude to a Greater Power. Then we speak of the entire spinal column bowing in deference and humility to God. This act represents total submission and obedience, which comes from a place of respect and reverence, rather than from fear or fawning.

After this tetrad, we mention two other acts of homage to God: all hearts shall revere You; and all innermost (Hebrew: K'LAYOT, kidneys) feelings and thoughts shall sing praises to Your name. This duet is fascinating because we observe how the authors viewed human organs symbolically. The awe and reverence came from the seat of reason and thought, namely the LEV, heart. The singing comes from place of emotion, KEREV and K'LAYOT, our innards and kidneys. To the ancients, the heart was the thinking organ, while emotions were in the kidneys. (Should one send kidney shaped boxes of candy?)

Now comes, for me, the high point of our prayer. We quote from King David and declare: Every bone in my body will shout: 'No one is like the Lord!' You protect the helpless from those in power; you save the poor and needy from those who hurt them (T'hilim 35:10). Our total being waxes poetic over the power and benevolence of God. There is no greater expression of benevolent power than the protection of those who can't fend for themselves.

This powerful declaration is the major source for SHOKLING, swaying back and forth as we pray. We attempt to get our whole body into this effort to glorify our God. But it is an argument, of course. There are those who insist that we are not required to be physically animated during prayer, but as Rebbe Nachman said: When we pray with such fervor that we put all our strength into the letters of the prayers, the words of the prayer are themselves the words of the Holy One, blessed-be-He... One prays with all his strength, and his whole mind and very essence are concentrated on his devotion. This is true prayer (Likutei Eitzot).

We, therefore, declare, 'Who is like unto you? Who is equal to You? Who can be compared to You?' Nothing in existence can be placed in the same category as God, who is a set of One.

Now we arrive at the second group of four: We will (1) praise, (2) extol, (3) glorify, and (4) bless your holy Name. These verbs describe an ascending process of ways to show our sincere love and honor for our Creator. The first, HALLEL is a visceral cry of 'wow'; SHEVACH is a well thought out series of praises; PE'ER is an attempt to influence others to see the wonder of God, and BEIRACH is an effort to increase the Presence of God and Divine action in the realm.

Originally, in synagogues, the prayer leader or CHAZAN rose to lead the service at the beginning of Nishmat. Some of you may remember that Shlomo Carlebach did that in more recent times. However, nowadays the CHAZAN rises at SHOCHEIN AD on Shabbat, at HA'KEL on Chagim, and at HAMELECH on the Yamim Nora'im. These practices apparently began during the period of the RISHONIM (after the year 1000CE). Many authorities believe that this practice started with HAMELECH on Rosh HaShana and Yom Kippur, because the theme of those august days is the Kingship of God.

This grouping of phrases, of course, is our third foursome: The (1) God in the awesomeness of Your power, the (2) Great One in the glory of Your Name, the (3) Mighty One in Your

infinite existence, and the (4) Awesome One in Your unfathomable deeds. All those realities, in their ever-ascending greatness, results in us declaring: You are the high and lofty King sitting upon a throne.

This address to God results in our declaring to our newly crowned Sovereign: Who dwells forever exalted and holy is His Name. Then we, again, quote from King David: Sing joyously to God, O righteous ones; the praise of the upright is exquisite (33:1). Now, based on that verse, our Sages present the last group of four. This grouping, however, results in a bit of a controversy.

I will present the Ashkenazic format, because I believe it best presents the format of ascending praise. The first letters of the four personality types praising God spell out the name YITZCHAK. That great tzadik went through all of these spiritual levels. However, let it be known that our Sephardic brothers tweak the order so that the verbs describing the praise are no longer in ascending order, so that the first letter of each verbs' root spells out RIVKA, our Patriarch's beloved wife. Cool, but I don't think that effort helps the meaning. Here goes:

By the mouth of the (1) Upright, You

are praised; by the words of the (2) Righteous, You are blessed; by the tongue of the (3) Pious (CHASIDIM), You are exalted; by the inner reality of the (4) Holy Ones, You are sanctified.

There are authorities who understand that the Holy Ones (KEDOSHIM) are those who are no longer of this physical realm. However, most traditional thinkers believe that the blind can be considered to have already passed on. Yitzchak, of course, spent his last days in total darkness, so he qualified as Holy even here on Earth.

This, finally, brings us to the last section before we actually recite YISHTABACH blessing. We begin by stating 'And in our congregations'. There are those who say this refers to the fact that throughout much of Jewish history most people only could attend a minyan on Shabbat and Chag, during the business week, many Jews davened alone.

Finally, we announce, through the use of nine verbs, that our praises of God are all based on the ethereal poetry of King David ben Yishai, the Sweet Singer of Yisrael. The number nine refers to the extra nine Psalms we add to P'sukei D'zimra on Shabbat and Chag. Fortified with the works of our anointed king, we're ready to stand in prayer before our God. ❤️

# **Walk thru Davening**

## *with Rabbi David Walk*

# **CREATOR of EVERYTHING**

## **BIRCHOT K'RI'AT SH'MA - part 1**

During my childhood years, the most significant event every AM was my father z"l forcing me awake against every fiber of my will. The idea of rising with the Sun seemed ludicrous. 'Just a few more minutes, Dad!' Well, of course, I'd have slept till noon, if he'd just left the room.

Our traditional morning prayers take a slightly different perspective. Sunrise is glorious! It daily reminds of the Creation and demands that we adulate the Creator. Now, in my eighth decade, I'm finally beginning to get it. I must admit that davening outside helps, with sunrise, birds and clouds increasing my KAVANA, connection to T'fila.

There seems to have been a very old custom to build the earliest shuls facing west (Bava Batra 25). This was so that the rising sun could shine into the interior of the building from the east, just like in the Beit HaMikdash. As we all know, this early custom was eventually overruled by the need to keep the Beit HaMikdash firmly in our

thoughts and prayers. However, this earlier custom was very cool and in keeping with the first B'RACHA of BIRCHOT K'RI'AT SH'MA, which keeps us focused on the rising sun of the new day.

We start to get this orientation (like in Orient, east) with the opening blessing of this preparation for reciting SH'MA. We declare: Blessed are You, O Eternal, our God, King of the Universe, Who has formed light and created darkness, made SHALOM and created everything. Light and dark are big in our consciousness as we pray. This blessing, composed by the Men of the Great Assembly a couple of centuries before the Common Era, is a paraphrase of a verse in Yeshayahu (45:7). In the original quote Yeshayahu credits God for created evil (RA), but that's such a bummer, that our Sages went for 'everything' and let those who know the truth keep it to themselves.

So, we're praising God for the light and dark dichotomy of our world. Of course, this was all before light pollution and streetlights stopped our nights from getting really dark. Then, we start to focus on the light and the rising sun, because the custom of the early pious ones (VATIKIN) was to daven with the sunrise, instead of the dictates of our

smart phones. Isn't the sunrise a better reminder to praise God than an alarm ringing (even a cute, personalized ring)?

At this point, we're going to focus on the extended Shabbat version of this blessing. Immediately after we say that God created HAKOL (everything), we maintain that theme and begin a list of four HAKOL's. HAKOL (1) thank You (I prefer 'acknowledge'), (2) praise You, (3) say that there's nothing else like You, and (4) exalt You. SELAH! (which denotes emphasis).

Now comes the reference to the shul door opening towards the east: The God Who daily opens wide the eastern doors and throws broad the windows of the firmament. Like God raises the TRISIM (shutters) on the world to let in the light after a dark and scary night. Don't you just want that blinding light at your back illuminating everything around you?

It's God alone Who daily brings the sun out from its place (M'KOMAH) of hiding, and the moon from its abode. Davening is supposed to be connected to the amazing natural phenomena all around us. That's why the custom is to have 12 (the Tribes, months?) light-giving windows in our shuls (Orach Chayim 90:4). Just as Daniel prayed at an open window

(6:11). It's really sad that so many minyanim in Israel are reduced to davening in a MIKLAT (bomb shelter).

We praise God for providing this life-giving light to all inhabitants of our world. We view that as an act of RACHAMIM from God. Then we quote from the weekday version of this prayer, but I'll save that for a couple of weeks.

We now identify God: The King Who alone has been exalted from days of old, is the Eternal God. Who has in Your great compassion shown empathy for us. You are the (1) Master of our strength, (2) Rock of our refuge, (3) Shield of our salvation, and (4) Stronghold for our safety.

From the original four parts of the verse in Yeshayahu (45:7), we've never let go of this motif of four. I'd like to think that the power of four comes from the image Yechezkel had of the Divine Chariot/Throne of God. In chapter one of his book, there are fourteen variations on the number four to describe this vehicle for God's presence and power in the cosmos. And the best of the fours is coming next.

(1) None can be compared to You;  
(2) there is none beside You;  
(3) Nothing exists without You;  
(4) Who is comparable to You?

That formidable foursome gets repeated by placing those four descriptive praises of God into four separate time frames: (1) In this world; (2) in the World to Come; (3) in the days of the MASHIACH; and (4) at the time of the resurrection of the dead.

The Vilna Gaon remarks that this prayer takes the side of Rambam in his debate with the Ramban about the differing visions of Jewish eschatology (a fancy term for the 'study of the end of things'). We state here the view that OLAM HABA is a different time frame than the resurrection of the dead.

Now we can end by discussing why this extended version of the first blessing for SH'MA is only recited in Shabbat, and not on CHAG, unlike the NISHMAT prayer, which we recite whenever work is prohibited. Two points must be made. First, this prayer is about God as the Creator of the Cosmos. That's really a Shabbat issue. Jewish holidays are about God guiding Jewish history, and that's going to be the topic of the third of the SH'MA blessings (GA'AL YISRAEL).

Plus, we finish this introductory prayer with a short discussion of the very special wonders to transpire at

the end of Time. That's also a Shabbat concern. We say that Shabbat is a little piece of the World to Come (MEI'EIN OLAM HABA). So, this beautiful extension of the blessing is unique to Shabbat.

Next week, we will continue this discussion with the wonderful PIYUT (liturgical poem), KEIL ADON. ❤️

# **Walk thru Davening**

## *with Rabbi David Walk*

## **CREATIONS PRAISE THE ARTIST**

### **BIRCHOT K'RI'AT SH'MA - part 2**

One of my favorite Jewish rituals is Kiddush L'vana, the blessing or sanctifying of the newly visible moon. This is just such a friendly prayer. Everyone wishes one another SHALOM ALEICHEM and gets the response ALEICHEM SHALOM. On another occasion, we'll more deeply explore that phenomenon. But my main affection for this blessing is the little dance we do at the end. Before Covid this was the only prayer service we regularly did outside, and at the end of that modest song and dance, we would then point at the sliver of moon with solemn joy. This connection between liturgy and nature was and remains cool. It's that poem which was poached for that ritual which I'd like to discuss.

The lyrics, of course, come from the Shabbat morning PIYUT (liturgical poem) KEIL ADON (God, Master). This beautiful poem was written around the end of the Talmudic Period and beginning of the Geonic Period, maybe the 6th or 7th centuries of the

Common Era. But it's the style which is significant. The prayer includes elements known as MERKAVA Kabbalah. The term MERKAVA is included in the text, but there is also the continued use of the number four, which is characteristic of this format because the source of this mystical thinking, the first chapter of Yechezkel, constantly cites variations of the number four. This style may also have influenced the format of the Haggada and Pesach Seder where the number four is prominent.

In our poem, lines 3 through 20 all have four words, and, until the last two lines, the poem groups the lines in sections of four. It is probable that the number four relates to the four corners of the world or points of the compass. Therefore, four implies universal realities.

Our prayer begins by declaring that God, Master of all creation is praised by everything in existence. In this first part, the universe is amazed by the sheer enormity of the knowledge required to create. These first two lines have five words each. That is, perhaps, a reference to the Ten Commandments, which is the distillation of God's gift of Torah and Divine wisdom to humanity.

The two terms used for intelligence are DA'AT and T'VUNA. They are

usually rendered 'knowledge' and 'understanding'. The Vilna Gaon makes an astute observation. He claims that DA'AT means the ability to use knowledge and apply it for useful ends. However, T'VUNA is even greater. This term implies not only the brainpower to use this knowledge, but, also, the clarity to teach it and pass the capacity on to others. The ability to teach a skill is the true sign of mastery of that knowledge.

Now, we begin a top to bottom survey of the creations which venerate God. The highest angels are called CHAYOT. They are only encountered at the apex of the four-sided MERKAVA or mobile Throne upon which God sits to supervise the Cosmos. To reach this level where CHESED (lovingkindness) and RACHAMIM (compassion, empathy) reign, high above God's Throne of DIN (justice), the petitioner must embody Z'CHUT (merit for Torah performance) and MISHOR (upright, moral acts).

Now, we begin the three four-verse stanzas which many of us sing after KIDDUSH L'VANA, accompanied by our little circle dance. This material describes the praise for God by the celestial bodies. It has long been claimed, by Pythagoras to Keppler,

that the movement of the stars, planets, comets, etc. is accompanied by sublime music. This music of the spheres assumes an intertwined relationship between music and the movement of the denizens of the night sky.

These ME'OROT (light giving bodies) are TOVIM (good), because they provide light. The first KI TOV in Breishit was for the creation of light. Their light giving course through the heavens seems to designate them as rulers over all they transverse.

We say that they are filled with ZIV (splendor?) and radiate NOGA (glow?). Again, the Vilna Gaon comes to our rescue to help us fathom these mysterious terms. He explains that a simple flame on a candle has three parts: the closest to the wick is called CHASHMAL (again, a term from the first chapter of YECHEZKEL, which was borrowed to give us the modern Hebrew word for electricity), the next section our is called ZIV, and the outermost shell, which is usually yellow, is called NOGA. All of these phenomena are swirling around in the heavens above us.

These heavenly bodies go about their assignments with great joy. They emerge from their hiding places on the other side of planet Earth with SIMCHA. This joy is increased as they

traverse the sky above and they are even happier (SASIM) as they complete the journey. They do all this with great awe for the Creator and Cosmic Director.

In the penultimate stanza, we eventually focus on the lowest or closest of the heavenly wanderers, the Moon. The Sun was called upon to shine with great light. Then the Moon was carefully fashioned to reflect that light in a complicated series of shifting shapes, which still fascinate observers of the night sky; crescent, gibbous, full and then back to absence. We Jews identify with this pattern of growth and loss. We set our calendar upon those movements. It should be no surprise that our most joyous occasions coincide with the full moon (Pesach, Purim, Sukkot, Tu B'Av, Tu B'Shvat).

It's this line 'God looked and fashioned the form of the Moon', which is the crescendo of our little ceremony upon blessing the reappearance of the moon. Many of us point our fingers towards our trusty companion in space when we recite the final words: TZURAT HAL'VANA.

We end this PIYUT with two lines of six words each. Why the switch? I would guess that these twelve words represent the 12 months or 12

constellations. It's still a surprise when entering certain ancient synagogues in Israel to see the mosaic floor depicting the Zodiac signs, but our ancestors followed the seasons by following those symbols. These ideas still resonate in much Kabbalistic thought. This beautiful poem is sung joyously in most synagogues. However, Rav Soloveitchik said that it is a greater praise for God to recite it responsively with the CHAZAN. What can you do? Most of his students sing it anyway, and we did at YU.

This work truly represents the greatest effort of Shabbat: ZEICHER L'MA'ASEI V'REISHIT (a reminder of the awesome act of Creation). Next time we'll continue that thought with the following prayer: LAKEIL ASHER SHAVAT. ❤️

# **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. ❤️

# **Walk thru Davening**

## *with Rabbi David Walk*

### **BEYOND THIS REALM**

#### **BIRCHOT K'RI'AT SH'MA - part 4**

As we continue our survey of Birchot Kri'at Sh'ma, we come to a conundrum. Whether on Shabbat or on weekdays, we begin our first blessing with praise for God with great acclaim for the wonders of nature. We appreciate the rising sun and continue: How manifest are Your works, O Lord... the universe is full of Your creations (T'hilim 104:24). Our universe is just marvelous. These praises are going along swimmingly until we seem to totally change the subject: May your Name be praised forever, our King, Creator of the M'SHARATIM (ministering angels). We swiftly shift from appreciation of our wonderful world to the glory of heaven. Good Heavens, what happened?

Many authorities and historians assume that this new material about the celestial sphere, which contains the first declaration of the KEDUSHA (doxology or declaration of God's holiness) of the three which appear in our morning services, was added on to the original shorter blessing. Prof. Ismar Elbogen is sure that this

section was inserted in the early Geonic period by Merkava Mystics. These Kabbalists were totally intrigued by the visions of the prophets Yeshayahu and Yechezkel. Who am I to disagree with these respected scholars? So, I'll let Rav Soloveitchik do it:

Historians failed to find consistency in this change of motifs and concluded that the mystical motif is a later addendum, which goes back to the fifth century. The original text of the first blessing, according to this view, consisted exclusively of the first theme, dealing with the cosmic events of sunrise and sunset... In view of our analysis, the whole structure of BIRKAT YOTZEIR OHR appears in a different light... The prayer connects the cosmic order with an ethical category... In short, the first motif is committed to the unity of the Divine will as a cosmic potency and ethical potency... Yet, the Divine will itself appears in both, in the cosmic drama, inscrutable, remote and hidden... and in the transcendental world... That is why the second section is devoted to angels who personify the pure Will... Both the stars... and the angels... are agents of the absolute ethico-cosmic will (Worship of the Heart, p.130-132).

Our prayer now gets very dramatic by recreating the daily heavenly scene in

which: All of them (the angels) open their mouths in holiness and purity, in song and music, they bless, praise, extol, sanctify and coronate - The Name of God, the great King...

At this juncture, we attempt to recreate the heavenly scene first witnessed by Yeshayahu. He glimpsed the angels giving each other permission to proclaim: KADOSH, KADOSH, KADOSH the Lord of Hosts, Who fills the entire world with His glory (Yeshayahu 6:3). Then we move to the scene witnessed by Yechezkel: Blessed is the glory of God from His place (Yechezkel 3:12).

What's the difference between the scene witnessed by Yeshayahu and that of Yechezkel? Yeshayahu lived in Yerushalayim while the Beit HaMikdash adorned the Temple Mount. On the other hand, Yechezkel was on the banks of the River K'var in the Babylonian exile after the destruction of the Holy Temple.

Yeshayahu had a much clearer and closer view of the daily ceremony inside God's holy abode. He witnessed through prophetic vision the angels declaring that God is thrice holy. Holy means transcendent, beyond all physical reality. Nevertheless, God's glory permeates the entire physical universe. What is

the significance of the triple holiness? It could mean that there are three categories of holiness, perhaps time, space and humans. But when we repeat this declaration for the third time each morning, in the UVA L'TZIYON prayer, we also recite the explanatory translation of Yonatan ben Uziel: Holy in the highest and exalted heavens is the house of His Shechinah, holy upon the Earth is the work of His might, holy forever, world without end, is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of the brightness of His glory.


This powerful statement contains a bit of a paradox. How can God be triple KADOSH, holy or transcendent, while simultaneously filling the whole world with Divine Presence? Which is it? Is God immanent (nearby) or remote (ineffably distant)? I'd like to go with yes and yes.

This mystery was central to the last Torah readings of Sefer Sh'mot. How could the Jews house God? How could the nation fulfill the command: Make for Me a sanctuary and I will dwell in your midst (Sh'mot 25:8)? Put another way, we can ask: How is it possible to build a structure to house God Who is described as, 'Your God is an all consuming fire' (D'varim 4:24), especially when the main building materials are wood and cloth?

So, again Rav Soloveitchik comes to our rescue by pointing out: We cannot help but notice the the intent of the Torah to 'arrest' divinity within concrete bounds. The Sinaitic revelation demonstrated the unapproachability of God... (However,) immediately thereafter, God God commands Moses (about the Mishkan)... There is a definite tendency to imprison the infinite, transcendental Deity within the bounds of our concrete universe. The source of this concept is Yechezkel's famous epiphany: BARUCH K'VOD HASHEM MIMKOM (3:12) - God has a MAKOM, a place. God imposes voluntary imprisonment upon Himself, by His own free will arrests Himself within the confines of a cosmic order in general and within the hallowed abode in particular (The Emergence of Ethical Man, p. 50-51).

This double declaration which we have incorporated into this blessing for Sh'ma initially helps us in our effort to declare the greatness of God who created and rules this world. However, beyond this we also must learn to live our own lives in the space between freedom and confinement. We live our lives in the space between growth and expansion on the one hand and stationary moorings on the other. God's miraculous example of infinite size

shrunk into physical confines through the process called TZIMTZUM (contraction), teaches us to reach spiritual heights while still living within our physical realm.

The blessing of YOTZEIR OHR goes beyond the glorious praises of God to also teach amazing philosophic and mystical ideas which not only prepare us to recite SH'MA, but also prepare us to live in the amazing world which God has bestowed upon us. In our next piece, we will finish the first blessing of KRI'AT SH'MA. 

# Walk thru Davening

*with Rabbi David Walk*

## A NEW DAWN

### BIRCHOT K'RI'AT SH'MA - part 5

The first blessing of K'ri'at Sh'ma, called The Former of Lights (YOTZEIR HAM'OROT), goes through a major shift in focus after the first paragraph. Initially, the blessing praises God for the rising Sun and expands that to all of Creation. However, there is then an abrupt shift from our daily human acclaim for God to a description of the angels' adulation for God as witnessed by the prophets Yeshayahu and Yechezkel. Now the authors want to wrap up this blessing with a closing paragraph which will culminate in the CHATIMA, the sealing blessing. That paragraph is our topic today.

The paragraph begins L'KEL BARUCH N'IMOT YITEINU. In both the ArtScroll and Koren siddurim this is translated: To the blessed God, they offer (sweet, ArtScroll) melodies. I think not. This translation assumes that our final section of the blessing is a continuation of the middle section, where the subject is the angels. I prefer to see this closing paragraph as a wrapup of the entire blessing, and therefore, those

offering NE'IMOT to God are both the angels and us. So, I would translate this: We offer.

But what are we offering? Again, the most popular English translations render N'IMOT as pleasant musical pieces. Again, I think not. The term N'IMOT apparently comes from the last phrase in T'hilim 16: N'IMOT B'MINCHA NETZACH (usually translated: In Your right hand are eternal pleasures, perhaps 'bliss'). So, we're offering 'pleasant things' to God, perhaps, 'pleasantries'. It's not necessarily the music that's blissful; it's the ideas, thoughts and wishes. Then we offer Z'MIROT (songs) and TISHBACHOT (praises).

This threesome (N'IMOT, Z'MIROT and TISHBACHOT) is the first of three sets of three ideas focused on the greatness of God. The first troika is our good wishes. The next group are praises for God's power as the Performer of mighty deeds (G'VUROT), Producer of novel things (CHADASHOT), and Master of battle (MILCHAMOT). These three praises are the first examples of the pleasantries that we are offering up to God, as the amazing physical Power in the Cosmos.

The third and final trio consists of spiritual endowments: plants righteousness (TZADAKOT), grows salva-

tion (Y'SHU'OT), and creates cures or therapies (R'FU'OT). Notice the physical powers (mighty deeds, war and novel items) are more the topic of this blessing. As we move into spiritual spheres, we are a prelude to the topics of the next two blessings. This structure based upon the number three should come as no surprise. There are, of course, three blessings surrounding the recitation of the SH'MA, each one based upon the triple declaration of God in the opening verse of SH'MA: Hear, O Yisrael, the Eternal is our God, the Eternal is one.

Our God, Who is praised, and is the Lord of wonders is being addressed with this awe and reverence because God is 'the One Who renews in Divine Goodness the Act of Creation every day'. In other words, our daily morning praise for bringing the Sun back is being recognized as a reenactment of the primordial Creation.

As someone who assumes that the sun rising this AM was part of the continual progress of the celestial entities through their routes in the galaxy. So, I see this description of God renewing the actual B'RI'A as a wonderful metaphor describing my elation at the sunlight piercing the gloom of night.

However, there are many Jews more mystical than I. These observers see the scene of sunrise as a true reprise of the actual acts of the first day of Creation back in B'reishit. They see the world as eternally dependent upon the injection of power from God. They believe that if God (God forbid) didn't continually input Divine energy and guidance the entire structure of the universe would collapse. This is in contradistinction to an amazing Clockwork God setting up a system so marvelous that it runs on its own unless God periodically decides to tinker.

On the topic of tinkering, we close this paragraph with a future vision of God upgrading the celestial arrangement with a new and improved lighting system which will begin in TZIYON (Yerushalayim) and spread from there to the rest of Creation.

There are, of course, those who believe that this new lighting system reflects a return to the original status or, at least, original plan. We reference that opinion in our monthly blessing over the return of the Moon: May it be Your will... to make good the deficiency of the Moon, so it is no longer in its diminished state. May the light of the Moon be like the light of the Sun and be like the light as it was in the seven days of Creation.

Then we quote from the prophet Hoshei'a: They shall seek the Lord their God, and David their King (3:5). This comparison to the future stable and complete picture of the Moon reflects a similar hope for our own people who, similar to the Moon, go through phases of waning and waxing all the time. So, we see the eventual coming of the Mashiach as an end to our painful cycles, and see a similar fate for the Moon.

Rav Kook connects to this mystical view, and explains: The M'OROT, the two luminaries in our blessing refer to the Sun and Moon. The Sun represents the true reality. The Moon, which has no light of its own but merely reflects the light of the Sun, represents our diminished reality... We are longing for the revelation of a new light... then all of us - even those of us, who, bereft of Divine inspiration apprehend Divinity only indirectly through the worlds - will merit to see the Light (Koren Rav Kook Siddur, p. 150-151).

Then we conclude our long and complex blessing: Blessed are You, O Eternal, Who has created the M'OROT (lights).

God has created all the lights, past, present, future, visible and invisible for now. All light, all enlightenment

comes through the Creation of God. We adulate God for creating them, the Cosmos and us. After this acclaim for God our Creator, we are ready for the next blessing of SH'MA; blessing God our Lover. ❤️

# **Walk thru Davening**

*with Rabbi David Walk*

## **LOVE & LEARNING**

### **BIRCHOT K'RI'AT SH'MA - part 6**

The first blessing of the three surrounding the recitation of the SH'MA is about God the Creator, Who continues to relate to and care for the Cosmos. Now the Sages turn our attention to God's relationship to us, the Jewish people. Rav Sacks z"l refers to this as 'moving from cosmic grandeur to spiritual intimacy'. So, the second blessing which precedes the SH'MA is about both God's love for the Jewish people and the token of that love, the Torah.

In these articles, I've mostly avoided the discrepancies between the Ashkenazic and Sefardic rites, but here I can't avoid the glaring difference. Both Nusach Sefard and Eidot HaMizrach begin this blessing, both morning and night, with the phrase AHAVAT OLAM (Eternal or Universal Love), while the Ashkenaz version begins this paragraph in the daytime with AHAVA RABA (Immense Love).

This debate is based on a Talmudic discussion (B'rachot 11b). There is an argument over how to begin this blessing. Rabi Yehuda and Rabi Elazar

suggest AHAVA RABA (which is supported by a B'RAITA), while the Rabanan state that it should be AHAVAT OLAM. The Ashkenazic rite included them both, while the Sephardic rite opted for just the concluding statement. That's a shame.

I really like declaring that my love for God is both extensive (OLAM, everywhere and everywhen) and intensive (RABA, great, deep and profound). Plus, I appreciate that, perhaps, our love for God is clearer in the daylight, representing redemption, than it is in the darkness, a symbol of exile. Things do go 'bump' in the night.

Either way, we declare that God's love for us is very great, and furthermore God has shown great CHEMLA, 'mercy', 'compassion', 'concern'. The Vilna Gaon explains that the first phrase is three stages: 1. AHAVA; love for the Patriarchs; 2. RABA, love shown at the Exodus; 3. AHAVTANU, the love at Har Sinai. Then God displayed CHEMLA, which our Divine Parent CHAMALTA. The Gaon asserts that happened in the two pardons granted to our ancestors; first after the Sin of the Golden Calf and then at the sin of the Spies.

Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik com-

ments on this powerful beginning to our blessing by declaring: Anyone who says that Judaism commands the individual to love God, but does not promise him reciprocal love is a heretic. Wow! That is an uncharacteristically harsh statement, which shows the Rav's passion for the subject. As proof, the Rav quotes half a dozen verses, and concludes with the words of the CHAG Amida: ATA V'CHARTANU... You have chosen us from all the nations; You have loved us and have desired us.

We then turn to God with a request: Our Parent, our Monarch, for the sake of our ancestors who had faith and trust in You, and to whom You taught rules (CHUKIM) of life, be gracious to us and teach us.

The Abudraham explains this request by explaining that the BITACHON (faith and trust) displayed by our ancestors is a reference to the verse: I remember your devotion when you were young, as a bride - when you went after Me in the wilderness, an unplanted land (Yirmiyahu 2:2). Then the 'rules of life' are described by the Abudraham as the Torah which has in it CHUKIM (laws we don't know the reasons for) and Mitzvot, concerning which it is said: For they are life to those who find them (Mishlei 4:22).

Again, we turn in supplication to God

and say, 'Our Parent, our compassionate Parent, the ever compassionate, have compassion upon us'. That's a lot of compassion! First, we emphasized AHAVA (by repeating it), then CHEMLA, and now RACHAMIM (compassion and empathy). Please, remember that this Hebrew term for feelings for another derives from the word RECHEM, womb. We recognized God's love and concern for us at the opening of the blessing, now we beg for God's parental concern for our wellbeing.

This appeal for parental care is an introduction to the main topic of this paragraph, namely Torah study. In other words, we preface our long call for assistance in acquiring Torah with a reference to parental concern, because we turn to our parents for our most basic needs. It's as if we're saying that Torah is to the Jewish People as mother's milk is to the rest of humanity. Next week when we discuss the end of this blessing, we will talk about Jewish survival and return to Eretz Yisrael. In other words, we make clear that Torah is our only hope to attain the future we fervently pray for.

So, we begin the multi-step quest for Torah:

Instill into our hearts the ability to understand and elucidate; to hear, to

learn and to teach; to observe, to perform, and to fulfill all the words (precepts, ideas) of Your Torah with love.

I believe strongly that this insistence, almost a demand, for God to help us in the quest for Torah divides into three parts. The first section is about what's going on in our heart. Remember, please, that in antiquity the heart was considered the seat of intellect. We are supplicating our Divine Parent for the inner strength, character and ability to take on the challenge of Torah study.

I once interviewed a candidate for conversion who began life as a Methodist, and eventually became a Catholic priest. He seemed a stable, reasonable individual, so I asked, 'Why?' He answered, 'My Methodist teachings seemed like a placid pond. Then I encountered Catholic theology and sensed a raging river. Finally, I was introduced to Torah and found an infinite ocean. I want to sail that surging sea.'

We begin to beseech God for the fortitude to face the challenge of Torah study. We need intellect (LEV), analytical skills (HAVANA) and, eventually, the ability to see how the pieces fit (HASKELE) into a bigger picture.

Then we understand that the process is not a lone voyage. We need to pay attention, observe, and understand those whose shoes we wish to fill (LISHMO'A). Next we must apprentice to a mentor to truly understand their path (LILMOD). Finally, the test of learning is to communicate it to others (LILAMED). Reb Chaim of Brisk said that if you can't explain it, you haven't really learned it.

So, what do we do with all this accumulated wisdom? Apply it! We guard ourselves (LISHMOR) from transgressing any negative precept. We also perform all the positive Mitzvot. By working hard at both avoiding the negative and performing the positive we achieve a stable structure (L'KAYEIM). We need all these steps to make our Torah edifice last the ravages of eternity.

Next week we will discuss the fruits of these efforts. ❤️

# **Walk thru Davening**

## *with Rabbi David Walk*

### **EDUCATED EYES**

#### **BIRCHOT K'RI'AT SH'MA - part 7**

As we proceed through the blessings leading up to the recitation of SH'MA, there is a clear progression. We began with the Creation which is universal. Then we moved to the loving relationship between God and B'nei Yisrael, particular. And in the middle of this second blessing, AHAVA RABA, we begin discussing fulfillment. We want to find meaning in our existence, and here we're being told that the quest for meaning should lead us to Torah.

The midpoint of the blessing declares: V'HA'EIR EINEINU (and enlighten our eyes). This demand is asking for more than sight. It's a plea for meaning: attach our hearts (LIBEINU)... unify our spiritual core (L'VAVEINU). Rav Soloveitchik describes this petition as a need for 'the most sublime kind of worship, a way of meeting God, of breaking through the barrier separating the Absolute from the contingent and relative.' I would have said the Absolute from the 'mundane', but what do I know?

The Rav suggests that serious Torah

study is 'a great religious experience, an activity bordering on the miraculous'. That endeavor which many of us would, perhaps, describe as intellectual activity or cerebral enterprise is so much more to the Rav. For him that engagement, that others might find in prayer or Kabbala, is to be found in TALMUD TORAH.

A person who studies Torah on this level of commitment is transported from many earthly impediments. Curiously, the blessing only mentions one: BUSHA, embarrassment. If a person commits to Judaism without a strong engagement with Torah, one may find the experience leads to shame. Without that powerful commitment, the slings and arrows of outsiders might lead us to feel outcast, alone, and degraded in this vast world over 99.9% gentile. Torah gives life meaning, and therefore insulates the practitioner from shame.

And since 'we have this great BITACHON (faith, security, confidence) in Your great Name, we are sure that we will rejoice in Your Salvation.' It's Torah study which gives us a sense of security and confidence about the final act of human destiny.

As the blessing begins to wind down,

we state the ingredients of this awaited Y'SHUA, salvation. The first is the ingathering of the Exile: And bring us Home in peace from the four corners of the world, lead us KOM'MIYUT to our Land. This term KOM'MIYUT is fascinating, usually translated 'upright'. It comes from the blessings at the end of Vayikra (26:13), and describes how we left Egypt. Rav Aryeh Kaplan translated it 'with heads held high'. I think it's the opposite of BUSHA. It's with self-confidence and pride, with a sense of purpose.

It's how we should feel on Yom Ha'ATZMAUT! It's how we should feel this week, in spite of whatever problems may face our beloved Medina. We came here with pride, hope and faith. And we pray that this is the beginning of the full Y'SHUA and GE'ULA. May it come speedily.

The Rav, in discussing the BUSHA mentioned in our blessing, said: We live in anticipation, but also face the fear that we might fail. I think there are many in our present situation who feel that concern. It seems like everyone is unhappy and protesting the situation in our country. Our blessing is reminding us that through Torah study we can remember the Promise, and dispel the doubt.

The blessing continues: For You are

the powerful God, Who enacts Y'SHU'OT (victories, salvation, deliverance). We remind ourselves of the infinite power and capability to achieve whatever purpose is in God's plan. After we reference the power, we revisit the central theme of our blessing: And You have chosen us from amongst all nations and tongues.

The central theme of the first blessing of K'RI'AT SH'MA is God's infinite power. The central theme of this next blessing is the chosen status of B'nei Yisrael. But for one fleeting mention we combine those themes to show our BITACHON in the eventual Y'SHUA. Actually, we should always combine those ideas. Our peace of mind is based on God's amazing love and power combo.

Finally, we are getting ready to make the ultimate declaration of our faith: The perfect unity of God. We prepare for the affirmation by stating: And You have brought us close to Your great Name, powerfully and in truth. This is acknowledging that we couldn't have fully reached the recognition of God's perfect unity and power without being enveloped in God's Presence at Mt. Sinai. Full understanding of this transcendent idea requires God's embrace. Avraham started the process, but we

couldn't grasp it fully until Moshe's leadership at Revelation at Sinai.

The last phrase before the CHATIMA (sealing blessing), I believe is mistranslated in many texts. We say L'HODOT L'CHA. ArtScroll renders that 'to offer praiseful thanks'. I'm not sure that this HODA'A is 'thanks'. I think that the declaration we're about to make is more of an acknowledgment or recognition of God. Remember the root of L'HODOT means to admit or acknowledge. In legal proceedings it means an admission of guilt or responsibility. I think it is that sense which is in play here.

When we state L'HODOT L'CHA ULYACHEDCHA. It's about acknowledgment of God and the perfect Unity of Divinity. It is a proclamation of a reality which we believe beyond any shadow of a doubt.

Then we seal the blessing: Blessed are You O Eternal, Who has chosen His nation in love. The theme of blessing number two: the Universal God has chosen to have a unique and loving relationship with us, exclusively.

Now, we are ready to focus all our spiritual power and blast out the central theme of our service: Hear O Yisrael, the Eternal, is our God, the Eternal is a Singularity! ❤️

# **Walk thru Davening**

## *with Rabbi David Walk*

### **THE DECLARATION**

#### **SH'MA & HER B'RACHOT - part 8**

Finally, we have arrived at the actual recitation of the Sh'ma. After seven articles about the two blessings before we recite Sh'ma every morning, we get to survey the actual verses from the Torah which are mandated to be read every morning and, again, every night. We will try to explain the content of these three paragraphs, with the emphasis on why it's so crucial that they be recited twice daily.

This process begins with: SH'MA (listen attentively or, perhaps, understand) the Eternal is our God, the Eternal is unique (D'varim 6:4). But a custom developed to recite EIL MELECH NE'EMAN (God is a faithful King) before declaring the statement, specifically, when praying alone. Most authorities explain that the addition of these three words brings the total of words in the three passages to 248, equal to the positive Mitzvot in the Torah. A fine custom, but not universal, and not mine personally.

These six words of the Sh'ma pronouncement have become associ-

ated with the very essence of Judaism. It is belted out with gusto by most shul regulars, while covering our eyes for added concentration. But what are we declaring? Initially, I think that most early Jews were differentiating between themselves and the rest of the world who were polytheists. The Ibn Ezra avers that it is sufficient just to know our ancestors recited it and that it is a mitzva. Over time many ideas were added to the cholent.

The Vilna Gaon suggests that it means the Eternal always was, our God is ruling now, and the Eternal will always be in charge. The Ohr HaChayim adds: 1. Only one Being deserves the appellation God, 2) This Being is God to the Jews, and 3) This Being is a unique phenomenon in the Cosmos.

Rav Soloveitchik describes our daily recitation as 'a dialogue between the ages, the continual restaging of the historic meeting of Yaakov and sons, pregnant with paradoxical destiny. Full of import... In reading the Sh'ma we enter the presence of those persons who walked with Him, we stand in their shadow; we converse with men who, though they die a biological death, have been reincarnated time and again in our historical experience... The great drama of

destiny, begun by the Patriarchs is reenacted, again (Worship of the Heart, p. 112).

The Rav is, of course, referring to the famous Midrashic story: When Ya'akov gathered his 12 sons to bless them. He was concerned because Avraham and Yitzchak had sons who left the Covenant. The twelve tribes upon hearing this concern recited Sh'ma. Ya'akov responded: Blessed is the Name of Glory, His Kingship is forever. And this has become the whispered follow up to the Sh'ma declaration.

The Vilna Gaon suggests that the silent recitation of BARUCH SHEIM KAVOD fulfills the verse: It is the glory of God to conceal a matter; but the glory of kings is to reveal a matter (Mishlei 25:2). Our acceptance of the yoke of Divine rule of God our King is stated loudly, while our declaration concerning our glory to God is spoken in hidden style, silently.

Now we begin to describe the components of our total acceptance of God's rule over us, and we state: You shall love the Eternal, your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might (D'varim 6 5). What is this love? The Rambam in the tenth chapter of his Laws of Repentance: One who serves out of

love occupies himself in the Torah and the mitzvot and walks in the paths of wisdom for no ulterior motive: not because of fear that evil will occur, nor in order to acquire benefit. Rather, he does what is true because it is true, and ultimately, good will come because of it. This is a very high level which is not merited by every wise man. It is the level of our Patriarch, Avraham, whom God described as, "he who loved Me", for his service was only motivated by love (law 2). In other words, the love we're discussing is cognitive. The love of God is knowledge of God and motivates all our actions.

The Rav explains it a bit differently: I love because I feel that in this (love) is my very existence warranted, worthwhile and relevant; I love insofar as my existence is attached to and integrated into another existence (p. 135). Complete love is total absorption in the relationship.

The verse then describes that our total being has three components: LEIV (heart, here the seat of all thought and emotion, double heart L'VOV), NEFESH, life force, and ME'OD.

What is this M'ODECHA? Obviously, there are many approaches to this issue, but the most famous is MAMONECHA, financial resources. I

like: In every measure and measure that God has apportioned to you. In other words, my love for God is powerful no matter my circumstances. There can be no situation in which my love for God would diminish.

Because my love for God is constant in every life circumstance. I find meaning in everything that life throws my way. To the Greeks, tragedy is associated with the absurd. We live a life of mitzvot, holy actions, with a meaningful response to every situation. Purposiveness and meaning are imparted to even tragedy and suffering.

This brings us to the last concept we'll explore in this piece: These words which I command you today shall be on your heart, Teach them diligently to your children, when you repose at home, and when you travel on the way, when you lie down and when rise up (verses 6 & 7). From these two verses, we learn both the mitzva of Torah study and the obligation of reciting the Sh'ma, morning and night.

Very heavy obligations have been placed upon every Jew in the preceding verses. How can one approach these responsibilities cogently and effectively? Only through intense Torah study; Torah

study which accompanies every facet and circumstance of one's life. If one gets to Carnegie Hall through practice, then one arrives at the status of observant Jew only through a dedication to Torah study. And just like, as the Rav explained, the declaration of Sh'ma is a continuation of a 'dialogue between the ages', so, too, Torah study gains its fullest meaning for Jewish life when it becomes our legacy to our progeny and students.

We have explored the ideas, responsibilities and ramifications of our commitment to the pledge of SH'MA YISRAEL. Next week, we'll continue on in the recitation of Sh'ma to see the consequences of these pledges, both good and bad. ❤️

# **Walk thru Davening**

## *with Rabbi David Walk*

### **Accepting the Yoke**

#### **SH'MA & HER B'RACHOT - part 9**

In my article last week, I wrote about the first paragraph of Sh'ma, and I discussed this declaration of belief and love of God, our Sovereign. Many authorities refer to this as KABALAT OL MALCHUT SHAMAYIM, accepting the yoke of the kingship of heaven. I prefer to call this 'acceptance of the Eternal as our God' rather than accepting the 'yoke', because I think that 'yoke' implies there's a potential downside to this acceptance. The first paragraph of Sh'ma has no such 'downside', unlike paragraph two. The declaration SH'MA YISRAEL is a wonderful commitment, but contains no negative implications, unlike paragraph two, as we shall see.

The first paragraph, after instructing us to study Torah everywhere ('while sitting in your home and traveling on the road') and everwhen ('when you lie down and when you rise up') concludes with two other protective institutions. First, we have TEFILLIN. These boxes containing excerpts from the Torah are placed upon our arms and heads. We see these objects as a sort of guidance system

for our thoughts and actions. We almost program our hands and heads every weekday morning to behave appropriately. Notice that the TEFILLIN on our arm is one solid box, while the one placed upon our head has four compartments. Clearly, we desire unified actions but accept variations in our thoughts and opinions.

We finish this first paragraph by telling ourselves to put similar boxes on our doors and gates. This is also, I believe, to protect us from negative forces lurking beyond the threshold of our home. The Vilna Gaon observes that placing this reminder on entry ways into our house reminds us of the warning God gave to KAYIN, 'Sin crouches at the doorway' (B'reishit 4:7).

Now that we have been fortified with Torah study, TEFILLIN and MEZUZOT, we begin the second section of Sh'ma. We're quickly informed that good things will happen if we heed God's Mitzvot. But here we're also informed that bad things will happen if we don't. This warning is called accepting the OL MITZVOT, accepting the 'yoke' of Mitzvot. Here I appreciate the use of the term 'yoke' because we're clearly being warned of negative consequences for non-compliance.

How do these 'consequences' work? If we heed the system of Mitzvot, then: I will grant the rain for your land in season, the early (YOREH, powerful) rain and the late (MALKOSH, soft) rain. You shall gather in your new grain and wine and oil. I will also provide grass in the fields for your cattle, and thus you shall eat your fill (D'varim 11:14 & 15).

However, if we are enticed to stray from this path to serve another way of life, then God will display Divine temper (CHARA AF, visible anger). Rav Steinzaltz discusses this straying from the path (what we call OTD, off the DERECH). He explains that the language of YIFTEH (seduction) and SARTEM (straying) is based on the fact that the onset of sin isn't a result of evil and malice. People don't wake up bad one morning, on the contrary, sin comes as a result of negligence and lack of focus. We didn't stray because of malevolence; it's a result of inadvertent behavior. Clearly, we must keep the focus, more on that in the third paragraph of Sh'ma.

The result of this Divine displeasure which our bad behavior caused will be: shutting up the skies so that there will be no rain and the ground will not yield its produce; and you will soon perish from the good land that the Eternal is assigning to you (verse 17).

The literal meaning is clear. Adherence to the commitment brings success in the normative path of the Covenant, life in Eretz Yisrael. Dereliction of this responsibility brings disaster, failure to the eternal enterprise of the Jewish people.

But not everyone understands the deal literally. The Vilna Gaon suggests that the YOREH refers to prophecy and the MALKOSH is Divine inspiration (RU'ACH HAKODESH). In other words, in the historical time frame of the first Temple, the blessings and curses appeared literally, but in later times, the punishments and rewards are all about connection to God. We crave close connections to God; sin severs them.

Rav Soloveitchik also understands the weather conditions metaphorically: Rain in the Land of Israel is not only a necessity for life but also symbolic of the closeness of God to His people. Conversely, the withholding of rain is not only a great danger to the physical survival of the population, but also demonstrates that God has removed His Providence... Due to the strain in the relationship between God and Israel, fasts were proclaimed to reestablish our connection to God when rain did not fall in Israel. In contrast, lack of

rain outside of Israel is nothing more than another manifestation of nature.

Then comes the worst scenario our ancestors could ever imagine: VAAVADTEM M'HEIRA (and you will swiftly be lost, perhaps disappear) from the Land that God has given you. Our forebears couldn't imagine anything worse than losing the Land. Then we lost the Land, and many came to believe living in exile had become the norm. Tragic.

Then our second paragraph of Sh'ma ends, basically the same way the first paragraph ended, with advice about protective practices to prevent us from losing our way. We're told: Therefore impress these My words upon your very heart: bind them as a sign on your hand and let them serve as a symbol on your forehead, and teach them to your children, reciting them when you stay at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you get up; and inscribe them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates (verses 18-20).

To succeed we must keep to the path, but that requires vigilance. Only with constant focus on the path and its route, can we remain on it. That focus requires Torah study, and placing key sections of Torah on our bodies and our passageways. Next

we discuss our eternal covenant with God, and that's passage three, to be discussed in my next article. ❤️

# **Walk thru Davening**

## *with Rabbi David Walk*

### **THE DAILY DOSE**

#### **SH'MA & HER B'RACHOT - part 10**

In reality, we have already concluded our description of the recitation of the Sh'ma by explaining the first two passages. What we usually call the third passage of Sh'ma, really isn't. The obligation of daily recitation both morning and evening is clearly stated only in the first two passages, both declare 'when you lie down and when you arise'. Also, both of the first passages declare our obligation to 'listen', again missing in passage three. So, what is the nature and purpose of this enigmatic 'third passage'?

Well, the most important aspect of this passage, which was appended to the Sh'ma, is to fulfill the Mitzva of 'remembering the Exodus' every day and night. This was the famous conclusion of Rebbe Elazar ben Azaria (with a little help from his friend, Ben Zoma) in the Haggada, that we must remember and recite that God redeemed us from Egypt every day and every night. But that requirement is mentioned in other verses, like Shmot 13:3 and D'varim 16:3. So, why utilize this passage?

Good question. I think that the answer to that query is that this passage complements the first two, in a number of ways. Of which I will describe two.

I believe that the first reason is that this material fits in nicely with the obligations laid out in passages one and two. Just like in that material, we have a rationale for total Mitzva observance. In the first passage we discuss mitzvot as a physical protection which envelopes the individual. In the second passage we have the idea of reward and punishment as an incentive for Mitzvot. Here, in passage three, we're told that Mitzvot are to be the filter or prism through which we observe the world.

How is that accomplished? Through wearing TZITZIT! By means of a famous GEMATRIA, our TZITZIT remind us of the totality of the Mitzvah universe. The letters of the word TZITZIT have the numerical value of 400. Then add the eight strands which hang down, plus the five knots, and VOILA the sum is 613, the traditionally accepted number of Biblical Mitzvot.

Fine. But I believe there is an added attraction in these verses. While the first two passages begin with the

obligation to 'HEAR' the words, teachings and message of the Torah, this passage demands that we 'LOOK' (UR-I-TEM). Just as we must control what we take in through our ears, we must have a similar filter or regulator on our 'eyes'. These are the two main venues of education, listening and observing, and we must be the masters of the content we allow in.

This visual control will allow us to never 'stray' (LO TATURU) into dangerous areas of the heart or the eyes. The use of this term, TATURU, is, of course, significant. Two chapters earlier than the passage of TZITZIT we have the story of the 'scouts' or 'spies' who misled the Jewish nation. Their job was LATUR (observe) the land. They allowed their eyes to deceive them, because they focused on the wrong items to observe. God, through Moshe, required them to report on the nature of the land and its inhabitants. After a short report, they immediately departed from their instructions and delivered opinions and conclusions about their observations.

They were supposed to report and let the people decide. If we analyzed our chances of survival based on the observable facts of our history, we would have concluded that we must have perished thousands of years ago. The wonder of Jewish survival is:

We accept God's analysis and predictions about our fate. Otherwise, we'd have thrown in the towel ages ago.

We observe through the filter of God's Torah and our traditions. Those keep us going. To a certain extent the first two passages are about self-regulating what we hear, and the third passage is about continuing that regulation to what we see. So that we are not seduced by heart and eyes to stray from what God has told and showed us. So, that's how we stay on the road (DERECH) to spiritual success.

Finally, we conclude the Sh'ma with the seemingly redundant verse: I am the Eternal your God, Who took you out from the land of Egypt to be your God, I am the Eternal your God (Bamidbar 15:41). Why the repetition? Some say that it is not repetitive: I am God who took you out of Egypt to be your God (Rabbeinu Bechaye). But Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev explains that we repeat these words as a special safeguard, 'if we keep constantly aware that we are under continuous Divine supervision, this is the greatest safeguard against our deviating from the right path'.

Rav Soloveitchik saw these words as a very special declaration that our relationship with God isn't based on

the reality that the Eternal is in fact the one and only God. Others can (and do) have that relationship. Our connection to the one and only God is the historical reality that God took us out of Egypt to be our God, and we, therefore, have a covenantal connection forged by the redemption. There is the universal connection to God and then there is our historical relationship with God, which is as unique as the Eternal is.

We cap off this Sh'ma process by declaring that this entire process is EMET, the whole truth. But even that declaration gets repeated in a three-word recap to make the total number of words recited 248, equal to the number of positive Mitzvot in the Torah. Again, Rav Soloveitchik adds that the addition of this word and its repetition emphasizes the profound reality that 'the point being made here is not that God is the God of truth, but that God is truth itself. He is truthful because His thought is identical to reality' (the Emergence of Ethical Man, p. 140).

Reality is the result of God's thoughts and intentions. This point must be powerfully emphasized. Thus we end the Sh'ma, having strongly declared our belief in God and dedication to the Torah's system of Mitzvot.

Next we will turn our attention to the third of the blessings surrounding the declaration of Sh'ma. This section will discuss the special relationship of the Jewish nation to God throughout history. ❤️

# **Walk thru Davening**

## *with Rabbi David Walk*

### **TRUE & UNEQUIVOCAL**

#### **SH'MA & HER B'RACHOT - part 11**

After we finish reciting the three passages of Sh'ma every morning, we begin a passage that sounds very sure of itself: EMET V'YATZIV... true and firm, certain and enduring, upright and faithful, beloved and cherished, desired and pleasant, awesome and mighty, correct and acceptable, good and beautiful is this affirmation. This declaration was already written in the times of the Mishna; it is one of our oldest prayers. But what are we declaring and what is its place in the progression of ideas which we call the Sh'ma and its blessings?

Before we attempt to answer those questions, a quick digression. In that list of superlatives describing the sublime nature of this 'affirmation' or this declaration that is our recitation of Sh'ma and its accompanying descriptive blessings, there are fifteen terms. That number has significance in Jewish tradition. It is the numeric value (Gematria) of the shortest holy name for God (YUD-HEI). It is also the number of SHIR HAMA'ALOT poems in the Book of

Psalms (T'hilim 120-134). Perhaps, most importantly, it is the number of steps built into the Beit HaMikdash, separating the outer courtyard from the inner precinct of the Mikdash. It was upon this flight of stairs that the Leviyim sang their praises to God. The number fifteen seems to represent the distance between the holy and the mundane.

Now back to the real issue: What new spiritual topic is being introduced in this third and final blessing of the Sh'ma service? Rav Sacks z"l in his introduction to the Koren Siddur writes: The movement from Creation to Revelation to Redemption is one of the great structural motifs of prayer. One example is the three blessings in the morning service surrounding the Sh'ma and leading up to the Amida... The three passages of the Sh'ma display the same pattern... The weekday service as a whole is constructed on this principle. First come the Verses of Praise (Creation)... Then follows the Sh'ma (revelation)... leading to the Amida (Shmoneh Esrei, prayer) in which we come to the line 'a redeemer will come to Zion' (page xxix).

Rabbi Sacks sees this process as a logical and, perhaps, inevitable progression from God creating heaven and earth. This led to a

Creator-Creature relationship with the life forms God made. Then, God decided to communicate with us, and we called it Revelation. Finally, God reached into the flow of human civilization and redeemed the Jewish people, maintaining a covenantal relationship with the descendants of Avraham Avinu.

Rav Soloveitchik didn't see these three processes as a linear progression. He sees instead a philosophic conundrum, which embodies a three step process to reach a logical, but certainly not inevitable conclusion. He sees a thesis: God is the Creator. This established a Creator and creature relationship, sort of like a scientist in a lab and a molecule in a test tube. Not much room for relational growth here.

Then comes the antithesis: God deigns to communicate with these creations. In Kabbala, this Divine humbling of infinite distance is called TZIMTZUM (retraction or, perhaps, shrinking). In actuality, this creates a paradox. The Infinite Transcendent One becomes immanent or intimate with the lowly, finite creations, namely, us. This is what we mean when we say: Holy, holy, holy is the Eternal, Lord of Hosts, Who fills the entire universe with His glory (Yeshayahu 6:3).

Only God can reconcile such contradictions, like infinite and finite. The Rav often said that a Jew is required to somehow live in harmony with paradoxes. This historic development of the Infinite God of Creation (thesis) somehow accommodating humans with intimate communication or what we call prophecy, as at the epiphany at Mt. Sinai (antithesis) leads to an amazing conclusion: God maintains a covenantal relationship with the Jewish people (synthesis).

This third blessing of Sh'ma called GA'AL YISRAEL (Who has redeemed Yisrael) describes this historic reality. Rav Soloveitchik describes this dichotomy: Indeed, the chosen clan itself is heterogeneous: charismatic-historical and natural-orgiastic (Emergence of Ethical Man, p. 181). We, the Jewish nation, live this impossible duality. We are regular flesh and blood humans who also live a historical and spiritual existence which transcends our mortality.

How do we accomplish this? Let's go back to the text of our blessing. After we have declared our faith in the promises of the Sh'ma, we state: True is the eternal God, our King, Rock of Ya'akov, Shield of our salvation, from generation to generation He exists.

That's how we accomplish this Mission Impossible: We teach the next generation to pick up the challenge. That transgenerational assignment is described in the next statement: His DAVAR (word, idea, assignment) lives and persists, they are faithful and desirable for ever and all time. So they were for our ancestors, so they are for us, and so they will be for our children and all generations and future generations of the progeny of Yisrael, Your servants.


As all life passes on their DNA, we pass on our assignment. To be Jewish is to accept this duty and charge: Keep the Covenant alive! This is the commission accepted by Avraham and described by Moshe, and we are entrusted with its maintenance.

There is one very significant word which appears four times in this first third of our blessing, and it is KAYAM. This means: exist, live, be fulfilled. We keep the Covenant alive. That's our role.

At the end of the list of fifteen terms for the stable and sublime nature of the material in the Sh'ma, there is the word haDAVAR, the 'thing' or 'word'. I translated it back in the first passage as 'the affirmation', following Koren.

ArtScroll goes for 'faith'. I think the best translation is 'the job'.

In the continuation of this blessing we describe God's intervention into human history to save the Jews. We call that process GEULA or redemption, like G'ULAT MITZRAYIM, the redemption from Egypt. But it's more than God coming to the rescue when we're in trouble it is also us keeping the Covenant alive, so that we're worth saving. Yes, God does the heavy lifting like miracles and keeping the cosmos going. But, we as the junior partners in the enterprise have to keep our side of the bargain: Transmit the Torah and its Covenant to future generations.

In the next two sections of this blessing we will discuss and describe how God has intervened on our behalf throughout history. We end this declaration by referencing the paradigm for Divine intervention, the Exodus from Egypt. We will explain all this after a five week lull in the action. Keep the Covenant! 

# **Walk thru Davening**

## *with Rabbi David Walk*

## **THE ETERNAL RELATIONSHIP**

### **SH'MA & ITS B'RACHOT - part 12**

Every morning we end SH'MA with a resounding declaration of EMET, 'It's TRUE!' This first section of the third and final blessing of Kri'at Sh'ma details our eternal confidence in the statements made in the SH'MA. We emphasize that we will pass on this devotion throughout the generations. It's a powerful affirmation of our faith. But then this prayer which began, 'It's TRUE and constant, and stable...' shifts gears and describes our relationship with God throughout these millennia: You have been the Helper (Supporter) of our ancestors... in every generation. The text is transitioning from declaring our steadfast fealty to the truths stated in the SH'MA to a preparation for our SHMONEH ESREI prayer of requests to God for our needs. It's a tricky shift.

The entirety of the blessings surrounding the SH'MA and the SH'MA itself are about what God bestows upon us and the world. The new paragraph which begins with, 'You have been the Helper', is for the

first time recognizing our role in this relationship. God is helping us. This means, unlike the Exodus experience of, 'Stand by and witness the deliverance of the Eternal!' (Sh'mot 14:13), we have to participate. God will support our efforts; but we must make an effort!

We then describe God as dwelling B'RUM OLAM (in the highest realm of Creation). This could explain how God is able to tinker with the physical reality of our Cosmos, because He essentially exists outside of it. Nevertheless, His justice and kindness extends to the very ends of this reality, and we Jews are able to access that Divine largesse.

Indeed, one who observes God's Mitzvot, Torah and Word is truly fortunate (ASHREI, which can mean 'happy', but more probably describes one who is contented, at peace). This state of bliss derives from the fact that God is the Lord and Master of our people, and is our powerful Sovereign who fights on our behalf. God is first and last, and is the only truly unique presence in Creation. He is the King, Who redeems and saves.

At this point, we return to the final idea in the third paragraph of SH'MA, namely that God redeemed us from Egypt. We prepare to pray and supplicate before God by connecting

the concept of Redemption, specifically from Egypt, to our SHMONEH ESREI prayer. Many authorities see this as reminding us that we should be praying for the final GEULA, redemption.

However, Rav Soloveitchik sees it differently. He asks: Why do our Sages demand linking GEULA to TEFILA? And he answers: Because silence at a time of need signifies a lack of complete understanding of the need. This lack of awareness is identified with slavery (the opposite of GEULA). The fact that we can enunciate need in prayer means that we are free!

Freedom is a state of mind! We are free because God redeemed us from Egypt. It is that freedom which still provides us with the mental state to address God with our needs.

Then we make a clear differentiation between us and those who had oppressed us. The Tur demands that we make the following four part declaration: All their firstborns You killed; Your firstborn You redeemed... The arrogant you drowned; Your beloved ones were brought across. We must have a clear delineation in our minds between those who commit to the Covenant and those who would trample it. The continued existence of the Jews and the

extinction of our tormentors may look like the random work of natural historic processes, but that is not true! It's the hand of God.

We now enter the last preparation for standing before God in supplication. 'For this reason the beloved ones praised God; the cherished ones sang praises... He humbles the haughty, raises the lowly... and ANSWERS HIS PEOPLE WHEN THEY CRY OUT TO HIM!

With that sure knowledge that God is available to our prayers percolating through our heads and hearts, we can now daven. But like a great symphony, we can't quite let go of this awesome theme: We pray to You because You have been there for us throughout all time.

So, we have a symphonic coda, recapitulating the great themes of Jewish prayer, before we enter into God's ineffable Presence to supplicate for our requirements. So, what is the greatest prayerful theme in Jewish History? SHIRAT HAYAM, The Song of the Sea. we reprise: Who is like unto You, among the mighty? Who is comparable to You, majestic in holiness? Awesome in praises, performing wonders?

Then we intone the most quoted verse in all of our liturgy: The Eternal

shall reign forever and ever! Rav Sacks famously explained that the phrase L'OLAM VA'ED really means 'forever' both in time and space, everywhere and everywhen.


Now we ready ourselves to step forward into the Divine Presence, and remind ourselves that God is the Rock of Israel; the immovable foundation of our people. We then beg: Arise to the help of Israel. Redeem us as you assured the various incarnations of our people; Yisrael and Yehuda. That's both the entire nation and that remnant who remained loyal. Redeem us, O Eternal, Lord of Hosts is his name (it's true: God is the Ruler of all the Heavenly Hosts, but we know God as) the Holy One of Israel.

What do we mean by K'DOSH YISRAEL? Rav Soloveitchik wrote: KEDUSHA, under a Halachic aspect, is man-made; more accurately, it is a historical category. A soil is sanctified by historical deeds performed by a sacred people, never by any primordial superiority... KEDUSHA is identical with man's association with nature (The Emergence of Ethical Man, p. 150).

God is K'DOSH YISRAEL in that the Eternal imbued the nation of Israel with power to produce holiness. We have this power of KEDUSHA through

our eternal association with God.

Finally, this remarkable prayer ends with the blessing: Blessed are You, O Eternal, Who has redeemed (GA'AL) Yisrael. Yes, we can DAVEN because God made us free by redeeming us from Egypt. That is the power of redemption.

It is because of this enduring relationship that we can pray our Shemoneh Esrei in which we can then declare in the present: Blessed are You, O Eternal, Who continues to redeem (GO'EIL) Yisrael. The relationship endures; dialogue persists. 

# **Walk thru Davening**

## *with Rabbi David Walk*

### **Evening the Evening**

#### **MAARIV - part 1**

Night is scary! It's no coincidence that Elie Wiesel called the memoir of his Holocaust experiences Night.

B.E. (Before Edison) people found nighttime so intimidating that few people ventured out after sunset. In reality, many cities had already been illuminated with gas lights before we had lightbulbs, starting around 1800, but people continued to fear the night. 'It was a dark and stormy night' is the prototypical beginning for purple prose. Jack the Ripper was called the Terror of the Night. So, it makes sense that people would want to pray at night for God to protect them, right? But not so fast, the Talmud concludes that prayer at night is optional (B'rachot 27b).

Most of us would consider that voluntary nature of Ma'ariv to be a demotion to the stature of the evening prayer, but not Rav Kook: On the other hand, precisely its optional character gives the evening prayer an advantage over the other two prayers. Essentially, prayer must flow spontaneously from the walls of the heart. Obligation threatens sponta-

neity. Prayer that is free of all imposition is referred to as a PEGI'A, a 'happening' (an 'encounter'). The verse which recounts how Ya'akov Avinu initiated the evening prayer states, VAYIFGA BAMA KOM (he happened upon the place, MAKOM can also mean God, B'reishit 28:11). Our Sages taught, 'Don't make prayer KAVUA (a set or fixed thing, Pirkei Avot 2:18).

Evening davening can, therefore, be a more spiritual experience, because it's a free will activity. However, over the centuries our Sages decided that MA'ARIV has become obligatory. Rambam understood that on a technical level, prayer emanates from the service in the Beit HaMikdash, therefore the only reason prayer at night is a reasonable option is because the remains of the daily offerings were continuing to burn ('They also instituted a prayer to be recited at night, since the limbs of the daily afternoon offering could be burnt the whole night', Mishne Torah, Laws of Prayer 1:6). Then he says that the Jewish nation has accepted this obligation.

So, here we are watching the sky above us darken and we turn to God in prayer. The Torah does mandate a nightly recitation of the SH'MA, 'when you arise and when you lie

down', as a result our Sages incorporated their prayer service to accompany the SH'MA. Just like in the morning, we will have Rabbinic blessings surrounding the recitation of Sh'ma. In my next few articles I will examine those blessings.

In the morning, the first B'RACHA is a relatively long celebration of Creation and God's powerful continued control over it. In the evening, the corresponding blessing is more modest in scope: Who by His fiat brings on the evenings.

We will mention daytime in another line, but we must emphasize that the God Who rules by day is the very same God holding sway in the darkness. The time of our Sages was filled with the philosophy of 'dualism'. There's a god of good/day and another god of night/bad. We totally deny any such concept: the Eternal, our God controls everything!

God, through CHOCHMA (wisdom, science) controls the entire Cosmos, which includes those phenomena through which we keep track of time. Initially, we employ a fascinating metaphor that God controls SHE'ARIM (gates) through which the appropriate celestial participants make their entrances and departures.

We then make an interesting reference to the system by which our

ancestors knew the nightly watches (MISHMAROT): He orders the stars (and constellations) in their nightly watches according to His will. In other words, a smart soldier or officer knew when to take up their post based on the rotation of the stars (and well-known MAZALOT, constellations) through the night sky, revolving around Polaris, the North Star.

Now we declare that God creates day and night, and our Director of Heavenly events rolls out (GOLEIL) the light to replace the darkness, and then rolls out darkness to replace the light. What a marvelous metaphor! Then God distinguishes between the day and the night. The Eternal is micromanaging all Creation.

I love the image of God spreading this carpet of darkness across the sky. Especially now that I'm davening outside, I love the onset of night. Personally, I believe that many authorities made a mistake when they ordained that ARVIT should only be when the sky is totally dark (TZEIT HAKOCHAVIM). Historic habit and the prayer's actual wording are about 'as the darkness mixes' (EREV comes from the word for mixing).


The best time to start davening in the AM is before the sun has risen, only arriving at Shmoneh Esrei with

sunrise. I think that the very terminology MA'ARIV and ARVIT hints at an early period than LAYLA (full night), and historically people were afraid to walk around when it was totally dark. Let's daven (except MOTZA'EI SHABBAT, when there is a Mitzva to add time to Shabbat) while the sky's light continues to linger.

This management persona of God in our blessing is referred to as the God of TZ'VA'OT, usually translated 'Hosts'. Hosts means a massive assembly of something. There are those that say this 'host' is the Jewish people, while others believe that the reference is to celestial beings, either stars or angels. Rav Kook suggested that it means 'God of all particles'. God's armies even include the subatomic particles throughout the Cosmos. God controls them all and can recombine in any way to accomplish the Divine Will.

So, we conclude this blessing: May the living and enduring God continuously reign over us for all eternity. God just controls it all. In Psalm 19 we recite that 'Day to day there is talking; night to night profound knowledge is revealed (verse 3). This really means that it is night when we truly solve problems and discover the truth. In the recesses of the darkness there often

reside the clarity which harsh light can obscure.

Often when we have a problem, someone will say, 'Why don't you sleep on it?' When God spreads the cloak of night over us, we can often find what we have been searched for. Embrace the night; appreciate this Divine gift, and bless God, Who evenings the evenings (MA'ARIV ARAVIM) for this boon. 

# **Walk thru Davening**

## *with Rabbi David Walk*

### **ETERNAL LOVE**

#### **MAARIV - part 2**

Throughout history, love is a major topic for poets and princes, realists and idealists. Sadly, many people whose knowledge of Judaism is superficial, think of our religion as one of Law, and the competition, down the street peddle love. They're wrong. Judaism majors in love. We just observe that love, like all profound concepts, is complicated. There is no better starting place to observe the intricate nature of love than by comparing the two versions of the second blessing before the SH'MA, one from the morning and the other from the evening.

Now, I must insert a caveat: Many who daven the variations of our liturgy called Sephardic, don't have the phrase AHAVA RABA, which is critical to my analysis of this issue. Although there are many aspects of Nusach Sefard which I find beautiful and moving, that they don't use this phrase in their morning service I find regrettable, because the Talmud (B'rachot 11b) introduces the phrase, AHAVA RABA.

So, what's the difference between

these two phrases? AHAVA RABA describes deep, intense love. AHAVAT OLAM describes constant, consistent love. As divorce rates testify, it is often easier to have short ardent loves than to maintain a consistently powerful love which endures.

During the period of the day when the sun's rays grow and warm the earth, we feel this intense love for God, Who provides the times of great light and glory. Sunrise represents GEULA, redemption. On the other hand, as we discussed in my previous article (HAMA'ARIV ARAVIM) night epitomized GALUT (exile and disgrace). Nevertheless, we express our deep and abiding love for God even in the depths of darkness, at least before the spread of light pollution.

According to the Koren Hebrew Siddur, the morning blessing is a thanksgiving for the bounty with which God has blessed us. While the evening blessing is more a prayer for Divine kindnesses yet to come. This phrase has been compared to the declaration V'HI SHE'AMDA (and that which has endured) from the Haggada. No matter how dark the Diaspora, we continue to proclaim our faith in the eternal nature of our Covenant with God.

We continue this blessing with the

source of our confidence in God's eternal love, namely bestowing Torah upon us. This theme permeates both the AM and PM versions of the blessing. This also parallels the second passage of SH'MA, where we discuss the acceptance of the yoke of Torah and Mitzvot.

The Vilna Gaon explained the phrase which introduces this theme: Torah and Mitzvot, Statutes (CHUKIM) and Ordinances (MISHPATIM), by noting that the general term Torah introduces the three facets of its teaching: Mitzvot, Chukim and Mishpatim. These three categories in turn represent (in order) Heaven, Earth, and Humanity. These three correspond to the Mishneh: Upon three principles the world exists: Torah, Divine service (AVODA) and acts of loving kindness (G'MILAT CHASADIM (Pirkei Avot 1:3). In conclusion the Gaon explains: AVODA represents our relationship with God, G'MILAT CHASADIM corresponds to our relationship with our fellow man, and Torah describes how one relates to himself, and grows spiritually.

Since we appreciate this great Divine gift of the Torah, we declare: Therefore O Eternal, our God, upon retiring and upon arising we will NASI-ACH (discuss, meditate, concentrate) Your decrees, and we

will rejoice over the words of your Torah and Mitzvot forever.

Since we recognize the infinite value of this gift, we will do our best to study and understand it. We commit to this endeavor both day and night. Plus, we experience a spiritual joy in this commitment. Many authorities assume that SIMCHA is an ethereal joy. Simcha is an enjoyment of the soul; bodily joy is described by words like GILA or RINA.

Once we have committed to this Divine quest to understand as much Torah as we can, we then declare: For they are our lives and the length of our days. The Vilna Gaon explains that Torah study is the purpose and goal of our physical life in this realm, but its effect also goes deep inside our being until it reaches our eternal souls. Torah study gives meaning to this life, but also prepares our innermost soul for the eternal life which exists beyond the grave for those who merit it.

We then declare the next level of our commitment to Torah study: and upon them we will NEHGEH (reflect, cogitate, deliberate) both day and night. Rav Soloveitchik emphasizes the importance of both daytime study and nighttime study. In terms of volume of material, the Rav assumes that daytime study will have


a larger share, but in terms of depth, the night prevails.

The Rav reminisced about his youthful days in Khaslavitch, the small town where his father, Reb Moshe, was the Rav. There his father imparted to him the keys of LOMDUT (analysis) to truly understand any Torah issue, to struggle over a Medieval commentary or the very depth of a laconic comment in a Tosefot. The Rambam said that ROV CHOCHMA (majority of Torah scholarship) came from nighttime study. The Rav understood that to mean: ROV CHOCHMA is not measured by the number of Talmudic tractates studied, but rather by the depth of one's Talmudic analysis (Derashot HaRav, pp209-212).

We conclude the body of this blessing by declaring: May You never remove Your love from us. This phrase can be understood in two distinct ways, both are meaningful, but, as you will see, I prefer the second. One could say that this is a prayer or request for Divine love to always accompany the Jewish people throughout eternity. A worthy request.

However, a number of authorities see this concluding phrase as a declaration of our abiding faith in God's assurances to the Jewish people that

the Divine Presence will always accompany us through all time, and that there will be a Complete Redemption at the proper time. We are confident, even during the despair of the dark night, that You O Lord will never forsake us. We are not saying, 'Please, Don't remove Your Presence. Instead, we proclaim, 'We firmly believe that the Divine Presence will never depart from its place right beside the Jewish Nation!'

Fortified by this firm belief, we can say: Blessed are You, O Eternal, Who loves the Jewish people!' And always will, because love is the bedrock of our relationship with God. 

# **Walk thru Davening**

## *with Rabbi David Walk*

### **TRUTH & FAITH**

#### **MAARIV - part 3**

In the morning, after the recitation of Sh'ma we declare: It's true! We follow that exclamation of clarity about God's power wielded on our behalf, with 14 more terms of confidence and clarity. In the evenings, on the hand, we recite: It's true and I believe it (EMET VE'EMUNA). In the AM, it's all 'WOW!.' In the dusk, it's more, 'Hmm, let me think about that.' And there's a lot to think about.

The first thing to consider is EMUNA. EMUNA is a big deal. We are often referred to as MA'AMINIM B'NEI MA'AMINIM, believers and offspring of believers. EMUNA is more than a psychological or cognitive idea; it is also a behavior pattern. According to the Talmud, the first question one is asked post-death is: Did you conduct business with EMUNA (Shabbat 31a). For us EMUNA is a lifestyle decision. It is how we must live the meaningful life.

The term itself demands analysis. The root is the same as AMANUT, art or skill. EMUNA is not just a decision; it is a commitment which requires hard work to master. EMUNA, according to

the Beit HaLevi (the first Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik) explains that EMUNA is different from knowledge. Knowledge, information can be taught and given over to another; EMUNA is belief and faith. It must be generated and cultivated by each individual. It can be encouraged, but not transmitted. The Beit HaLevi taught that if someone loses faith we can't regenerate it for them. He suggested to pray for them.

So, to a great extent, night time is alone time. Rav Kook taught that daytime is societal time; night time is when every individual is alone and separate, under his own roof. Historically, people didn't go out at night. Each individual is alone with their very personal and intimate thoughts. I really believe that's why we don't have repetition of the Shmoneh Esrei at night. In the dark, we are individuals, not a TZIBUR, community.

After we make this crucial declaration that we have EMUNA in the fact that God is eternal and unique, we make the other part of the critical announcement: We are His exclusive nation. The first part of this affirmation could be made by any monotheist, which includes half the human race. It's the second part which makes us unique: We alone are God's nation!

This brings us to the real message of this third BRACHA surrounding the Sh'ma (and this is true both morning and night): We have a special, national, historical relationship with God which began with the Exodus and continues until the ultimate GEULA (and beyond).

What most people call World History, we think of as the unfolding of God's Covenant with the Jewish people. I majored in history, which, let's be honest, isn't all that practical, because I believe that we find God in the unfolding of the human saga. Some people find God in the heavens, others in the microscope; I find God in the History of the World, parts 1 through infinity.

The main difference between the description of the never-ending story of our love affair and partnership with God when recited in the evening is the emphasis on bad guys. We have a lot of words here for those who are out to get us: kings, ARITZIM (perhaps, evil tyrants, think (Nevuchadnetzar, Titus, Hitler... it's a long list), MITZAREINU (our oppressors), OYVEINU (our enemies, 2X), SONEINU (those who hate us, 2X).

History has taught us that God: redeems us, delivers us, doesn't allow us to stumble, leads us to the high places (probably cultic sites) of our enemies, and, eventually, raises our

KEREN (glory, pride, from the word for 'horn') over those who hate us. It sometimes takes a while, but eventually, we're the last one standing. This first part of the BRACHA emphasizes the protection God has given the Jews throughout history. In the morning counterpart to this section, we mostly discuss Torah, mitzvot and the permanent relationship between Yisrael and God. The evening version is definitely darker.

The second half of this paragraph repeats the model from its AM counterpart, and glorifies God for the Exodus. It goes through the chronological steps to the redemption from Egypt: 1. Miracles and revenge on Pharaoh, 2. Killing of the firstborns of Egypt, 3. The actual departure, and 4. Splitting Yam Suf. It's possible that this is an attempt to explain the four terms for redemption in Shmot 6:6,7.

The final piece of this B'RACHA which we are looking at in this article emphasizes that our ancestors were eyewitnesses to all these wonders and we are recipients of their testimony. We also declare that our ancestors at that moment had perfect faith in God: And His Kingship was accepted upon themselves willingly... and unanimously.


There may have been numerous

backslidings in the Wilderness, but at that moment of the Exodus, our great grandparents were all on the same page, and that page read: We accept the Eternal as our God and Sovereign, unconditionally and eternally.

We then have highlights from the Song of the Sea, but I will leave that for my next piece.

Before I close this piece, I want to add another thought about EMUNA. At the beginning of this article, I made it sound like EMUNA is relatively easy. Just put in some serious thought, and it becomes obvious and clear. I probably gave that impression, because that is the tenor of this blessing, but it is clearly not true. EMUNA is hard. It's attainable, but requires constant hard work. I am going to end this piece with a noteworthy quote from one of the deepest and most serious thinkers I ever encountered, Rav Aharon Lichtenstein z"l:

The motto I inscribed in my college notebook was King David's plea: TUV TA'AM VADA'AT LAMDENI, KI B'MITZVOTECHA HE'EMANTI [Teach me good discernment and knowledge, for I have believed in Your commandments" - T'hilim 119:66]. Answers, I of course continued - and continue - to seek, and have found many. But it is an arduous search.

We eternally seek answers, because the questions just keep on coming! It's not enough to write it in your notebook; it's a thought which must accompany us, always. 

# **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.

