YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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**The Structure of and Meaning of the Daily Prayer**

**By Rav Ezra Bick**

This shiur is available in the archives at:

[www.vbm-torah.org/archive/siddur/09siddur.htm](http://www.vbm-torah.org/archive/siddur/09siddur.htm)

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Sponsored by Aaron and Tzipora Ross and family in honor of the *yahrtzeits* of our esteemed grandparents: Neil Fredman (Shmuel Nachamu ben Shlomo Moshe HaKohen, 10 Tevet), Clara Fredman (Chaya bat Yitzchak Dovid, 15 Tevet), and Walter Rosenthal (Shimon ben Moshe, 16 Tevet).

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Dedicated in loving memory of Richard J. Silvera A”H   
by his children Hillel (’91), Albert, and Michelle

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Dedicated by the Wise and Etshalom families in memory of   
Rebbetzin Miriam Wise, ז״ל, Miriam bat Yitzhak and Rivkah,   
whose first *yahrtzeit* is on 9 Tevet.   
 Yehi zikhra barukh.

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**Shiur #09: *Kaddish* and *Barkhu***

The subject of last week's discussion, *Pesukei De-Zimra*, is framed by two blessings, *Barukh She-Amar* at the beginning and *Yishtabach* at the conclusion. The next unit is *Shema* with its blessings. The Rambam records the order of the prayers at this point as follows:

It is already the custom to read verses before them [the chapters from Psalms] and after them, and they enacted a blessing before the hymns, which is *Barukh She-Amar*, and a blessing after them, which is *Yishtabach*, and afterwards he recites the blessing on *Kriat Shema* and recites *Kriat Shema*.

In reality, however, there are two short elements between *Yishtabach* and the blessings of *Kriat Shema*. First, the *chazzan* recites the *Kaddish*, which is then followed by the call of *“Barkhu.*” Our task in this *shiur* is to understand these two recitations.

Both *Kaddish* and *Barkhu* belong to the halakhic category of *devarim she-bi-kedusha* (matters of holiness), of which the most notable feature is the rule that they can only be recited in a *minyan*. It is more difficult to determine what the common theme of the members of this group is. It might be expected that they all deal with the sanctity of God, which is surely true of the third well-known example, the prayer we call *Kedusha*. However, while the *Kaddish* also mentions the sanctity of God, although not in a particularly prominent way, *Barkhu* has no mention of it at all. It consists only of a call to "bless God," as well as a response, "Blessed is God the blessed for all eternity." In fact, the central line of the *Kaddish* is also basically a call to bless God – “*Yehei shmei rabba mevorakh le-olam u-le-olmei olmaya*” – "May the great name of God be blessed forever and for all eternity."

In the *shiur* of R. Soloveitchik about *Pesukei De-Zimra* that we discussed last week, he also addressed the role of *Kaddish* and *Barkhu* before *Kriat Shema*. The Rav explained that we are now beginning a section of prayer that has a public component. Although one can – and is obligated to – recite the *Shema* and the *Shemoneh Esrei* in private, there is an added aspect of reciting them in public, *be-tzibbur*. This is perhaps more obvious regarding the *Shemoneh Esrei*, where the concept of *tefila be-tzibbur* is familiar, but it is also true concerning *Shema*. The *mishna* in *Megilla* (23b) lists among those things which require a *minyan* “*porsin al shema*.” (The exact meaning of this term is subject to debate, but for our purposes it is sufficient to note that it indicates that there is a public component to the recitation of the *shema*).

How is the *tzibbur* created? The Rav’s assumption is that *tefila be-tzibbur* is not merely praying **together** with nine other people, but is the prayer of an organic unit called the *tzibbur*. The individual is submerged and it is the community who is praying. What turns ten disparate individuals into a *tzibbur*, molding them into a unified body greater than the sum of its parts? The Rav explained that the *davar she-be-kedusha* recited at the beginning accomplishes this, because unlike the *Shema* or the *Shemoneh Esrei* themselves, it **cannot** be recited without a *tzibbur*, for "one cannot have a *davar she-be-kedusha* with less than ten." The **necessity** of *minyan* for the *Kaddish* is what forges the *minyan* when the *Kaddish* is recited. By reciting a prayer that can only be recited by the organic unit of *tzibbur*, a *tzibbur* comes into reality.

This may appear to be a circular argument, but it is actually an example of a great principle of life (and *mussar*) – necessity is often the father of reality. The challenge of the moment is the catalyst for the realization of potential. I leave it to the reader to contemplate the depths and promise of this idea.

This still leaves unanswered why there are **two** instances of *davar she-be-kedusha* at this point in the prayer. Why do we recite *Kaddish* and then *Barkhu*? If the only purpose is to create the unity of *tzibbur*, one should suffice. The Rav answered that one (*Barkhu*) is directed to the creating the *tzibbur* for *Kriat Shema*; the other (the *Kaddish*) is meant to create the *tzibbur* for *tefilla*, the *Shemoneh Esrei*. Logically, then, the *Kaddish* should have been placed right before *Shemoneh Esrei*, after the *Shema*. In fact, that is what is done during *Ma’ariv*, when *Barkhu* is recited at the beginning and *Kaddish* is recited before *Shemoneh Esrei*. However, during *Shacharit*, there is an independent requirement to connect the final blessing after the *Shema* (“*geula*”) with the *Shemoneh Esrei*, which prohibits any interruption at that point. (This requirement of *semikhut geula l'tefila* will be the subject of a shiur in this series in a few weeks). Therefore, the *Kaddish* is promoted to its position before *Barkhu*. In reality, however, it is not introducing the section of the *Shema*, but rather the *Shemoneh Esrei.*

This implies that the *tzibbur* of *Shema* and the *tzibbur* of *Shemoneh Esrei* are not the same; each one requires the forming of a *tzibbur* independently. Once again, I leave it to each of you to develop the full implications of this distinction.

To return to the question left unanswered before, what is the thematic content of the category of *davar she-be-kedusha*? I addressed this question in a *shiur* I gave several years ago in the VBM series on "The Meaning of the *Shemoneh Esrei*" (<http://etzion.org.il/en/shiur-06-kedusha>), which I recommend you reread now. I will here briefly summarize the conclusion I reached then.

A *davar she-be-kedusha* does not declare the sanctity of God, but rather increases it. It is an act of sanctification. This is accomplished because of the principle of "*ein melekh belo am"* – there is no king without a people. God's presence in the world is dependent on a people who accept Him, who sanctify His name, who provide a seat for the glory of His kingdom. The opening line of the *Kaddish* expresses this well – "May His great name be **magnified and sanctified** in the world He has created." The basis for the kingship of God in the world is a people who glorify His name. The Jewish People bear God's name, and by glorifying that name, they increase and magnify the sanctity of God's name in the world. Hence, the simple statement, "Blessed Is God the blessed for all eternity" can serve as a *davar she-be-kedusha* if it is recited by a *tzibbur* as a public declaration of glorification, as it publicizes and hence magnifies God's name in the world.

This provides the key to understanding the distinctive quality of *tefila be-tzibbur*. What makes public prayer special? The Rambam (*Hilkhot Tefilla* 8:1) states that "the prayer of the *tzibbur* is always heard [accepted]." It is possible to explain this as being a matter of covenant – simply that God has made a covenant with the Jewish People to be their God and therefore has obligated Himself to listen to them in a manner that does not apply to the individual. Another explanation can be based on a theory of the Ran, who (*Derashot* 1) advances the theory that the *tzibbur* gains from the different strengths and merits of each individual, which complement each other and help overcome the deficiencies of each. Every individual has, by definition, a mixed record and bears responsibility for his faults, whereas the *tzibbur* is the blend of the qualities of all its parts. The deficiency of one person is covered by the strength of another. (This theory makes it clear that we must view the *tzibbur* corporately and not only as a sum; otherwise, just as the strengths add up, so would the deficiencies. Only by viewing the *tzibbur* as a unit, a team, so to speak, can we claim that the whole benefits from the combined strengths of each component, which compensates for the individual deficiencies).

What I am suggesting is a further step. The *tzibbur* is not merely the sum of its parts, not even in a corporate sense. The *tzibbur* has a fundamentally different relationship with God than does the individual, even the perfectly righteous individual. The individual is at best a servant of God, one who does His bidding and fulfills His will. The *tzibbur* – specifically, the *tzibbur* that recites a *davar she-be-kedusha* – is the "chariot of the King," the bearer of God's presence in the world, the **cause** of God's kingship. The voice of the *tzibbur* is **part** of the kingship of God and speaks to God internally, as it were, and not as a message coming from below. Israel, as a people, **is** God's majesty. By forming a *tzibbur* through joining together to recite *davar she-be-kedusha*, as the Rav explained, the individuals radically transform their relationship with God from that of supplicant subjects to the upholders of God's majesty in the world.

This changes both *Kriat Shema* and *Shemoneh Esrei*, although in different ways. *Kriat Shema* is a declaration of loyalty, a pledge of allegiance, so to speak. If an individual recites it, it is a reaffirmation of his obligation (*kabbalat ol malkhut shamayim*). If a *tzibbur* recites it, specifically a *tzibbur* who is engaged in building and increasing the immanent majesty of God, it is an act of establishment of that majesty. It **makes** God king, for it is the declaration of His kingship over that *tzibbur*.

For *Shemoneh Esrei*, the presentation of our needs before God, the recitation by the *tzibbur* changes it from mere supplication of a poor man begging for benevolence to something more akin to a meeting of the cabinet of the kingdom to discuss its needs. The king meets with his people to see what the needs of the kingdom are. The needs of the people are the needs of the kingdom, and are, therefore, **the needs of the king**. This justifies the statement of the Rambam, "The prayer of the *tzibbur* is always accepted." In fact, this can be clearly seen if we examine the *gemara* that is presumably the basis for the Rambam's statement (*Berakhot* 8a):

R. Natan says: From whence [do we know] that the Holy One, blessed be He, does not despise (*mo’es*) the prayer of the many? As is written: “Behold, God is mighty (*kabir*) and does not despise” (*Iyov* 36:5).

Rashi explains that the word *kabir* is being interpreted as "many." Apparently, the verse is being read as though it were written, "Behold, God, the many does not despise." I think the derivation reads the verse somewhat differently. "Behold" – an exclamation which indicates that something new has taken place, something glorious and astounding. "God is great" – God has been magnified and exalted, *hitgadal ve-hitkadesh*. "He does not despise" – He does not reject or ignore the prayers of those who are constituting the greatness of God, who are the very being of the throne of God.

The *gemara* continues with a different source:

And it is written: “He redeemed my soul in peace from battles against me, for with many were they against me” (*Tehillim* 55:19). God said: One who is engaged in Torah and kindness and prays in public, I consider him as though he has redeemed Me, Me and My children, from among the nations of the world.

Praying in public, *be-tzibbur*, is the "redemption" of God. The *tzibbur* does not only address God, but is constituent in God's majesty, rescuing it from the servitude expressed by the nations of the world, who are idolaters. Here it does not even state that God hears the prayer; apparently, it is obvious, for if the prayers are themselves the redemption of God, then of course they are heard by Him.

This explains not only why there are two *devarim she-be-kedusha*, one for *Shema* and one for *Shemoneh Esrei*, but it may also explain the difference between them. *Barkhu* is general, expressing that God is great and blessed by us. That is appropriate and sufficient for the *Shema*, the declaration of God's kingship. The *Kaddish* makes more explicit the idea that we are **increasing** the name of God – ***yitgadal*** *ve-****yitkadesh*** *shmei*. In other words, the *Kaddish* is addressing a situation in which we perceive a deficiency – not in God, of course, but in His majesty in the world. This is even more explicit in the explanation of the Machzor Vitry for the heart of the *Kaddish* – the *"yehei shmei rabba mevorakh*." The Machzor Vitry (see Tosafot, *Berakhot* 3a, s.v. *ve'onin*) explains:

We are praying that His name be completed, as is written, “For the hand is on the throne [*"kes,"* an incomplete form of the word "*kisei*"] of K-ah [an incomplete form of the full name of God], for neither His name nor His throne are complete until the seed of Amalek is obliterated… and we are praying that His name be great and complete.

The *tzibbur* that recites the *Kaddish* is one that is engaged in correcting deficiency, in completing the kingdom of God. The *Shemoneh Esrei* is where we are presenting our own deficiencies and asking God to complete them. Taken together, we are, as I stated above, presenting before the King the deficiencies of His kingdom. Hence, *Barkhu* is recited before *Shema* and *Kaddish* before *Shemoneh Esrei*. In doing so, we transform ourselves into the bearers of God's name in the world, and in so doing, transform our prayer as well.