YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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*Avodat Hashem*

Foundations of Divine Service

By Harav Baruch Gigi

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Happy Chanuka! In honor of the matriarch of our family, Oma Ina,

May you continue to shine your light on us brightly!

From her children, grandchildren and great grandchildren

The Sondheim - Adler and Distenfeld Families.

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In Honor of Avital Nehorah’a 1st Birthday, 30 Kislev

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**Shiur #09:**

**Blessed Be the Name of His Glorious Kingdom Forever and Ever**

**Introduction**

After reciting the first verse of *keriat Shema*, “Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord alone,” it is customary to add quietly the words, “Blessed be the name of His glorious kingdom forever and ever.” On Yom Kippur, it is customary to recite these words out loud. What is the significance of reciting this “verse,” and what is the reason for the unique practice of reciting it quietly except for one day each year?

***Chazal*’s Approach: Yaakov and the Ministering Angels**

 First, we will outline *Chazal*’s position, which explains the background to the addition of “Blessed be the name of His glorious kingdom” to *keriat Shema*. Our Sages related this recitation to our patriarch Yaakov and to the ministering angels. We read in *Bereishit Rabba*:

“Assemble and hearken, O sons of Yaakov” – Elazar ben Achavei said: From [this passage] here, [the people of] Israel merited *keriat Shema*. When Yaakov our patriarch was departing from the world, he called to his twelve sons and said to them: “Listen to the God of Israel, your father in heaven. Is there perhaps division in your hearts about the Holy One, blessed be He?” They replied “Hear, O Israel our father! Just as there is in your heart no division from the Holy One, blessed be He, so too is there none in our hearts. On the contrary – The Lord is our God, the Lord alone.” [Yaakov] likewise uttered with his lips, saying, “Blessed be the name of God’s glorious kingdom forever and ever.” R. Berekhia and R. Chelbo said in the name of R. Shmuel: It is because of this that [the people of] Israel recite in the morning and in the evening: “Hear, O Israel” – our patriarch, from the Cave of Makhpela. The same thing that you commanded us to do still applies to us – “The Lord is our God, the Lord alone.” (*Bereishit Rabba* 98:3)

In this *midrash*, Yaakov says “Blessed be the name…” in response to his sons’ acceptance of the yoke of the kingdom of heaven. However, in contrast to “Hear, O Israel!,” which is depicted as a recitation that is meant to continue throughout future generations, this is not how “Blessed be the name” is described in this *midrash*.

 The *midrash* takes a step in this direction, however, in *Devarim Rabba*, in a parallel midrashic passage that includes one very significant addition:

“Hear, O Israel” – From where did Israel merit [the *mitzva* of] *keriat Shema*? From the time that Yaakov lay down to die, he called to all the tribes and said to them: “Perhaps once I pass from the world you will bow to a different god.” From where [do we know this]? Since it is written: “Assemble and hearken, O sons of Yaakov; hearken to Israel your father” (*Bereishit* 49:2). What is “Hearken to (*el*) Israel your father”? He said to them: “The God (*el*)of Israel is your father.” They said to him: “Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord alone,” and he said **quietly**, “Blessed be the name of his glorious kingdom forever and ever.” R. Levi said: What does Israel say now?: Hear, our father Israel; the same thing that you commanded us to do applies to us. “The Lord is our God, the Lord alone.’” (*Devarim Rabba* 2:35)

Similarly, Yaakov recited “Blessed be the name” quietly in order to model how to do so in future generations. We turn daily to the God of Israel, our forefather who is buried in the Cave of Makhpela, and announce to Him that we are still faithful to the tradition that we received from Him and that we continue to accept the yoke of the kingship of heaven morning and evening. At this stage, it is as if we are echoing Yaakov’s historic whisper, as if it is his lips that emit the faint declaration: “Blessed be the name of his glorious kingdom forever and ever.”

 We find a different approach to explaining our quiet recitation in the *gemara*:

And what is the reason that we do recite it?[[1]](#footnote-1) ... The Rabbis said: How shall we act? Shall we recite it? But Moshe our master did not say it! Shall we not say it? But Yaakov said it! **[Thus,] they enacted that it should be recited quietly.** R. Yitzchak said: The school of R. Ami said: This is to be compared to a king’s daughter who smelled a spicy pudding. If she reveals [her desire], she suffers disgrace; if she does not reveal it, she suffers pain. So her servants began bringing it to her in secret. R. Abahu said: They enacted that this should be recited aloud, on account of the resentment of the heretics. (*Pesachim* 56a)

Based on this passage, the quiet recitation is a compromise between Yaakov’s practice and Moshe’s practice. Yaakov said “Blessed be the name,” while Moshe did not say it, so we attempt to satisfy both opinions by reciting it quietly.

 However, it is not entirely clear why Yaakov’s approach and Moshe’s approach contradict one another. Moshe did not recite “Blessed be the name” because he was not divinely instructed to inscribe the line in the *Shema*; thus, there is no true dispute between Yaakov and Moshe. In addition, we can explain the practice based on the *gemara*’s parable, which draws a parallel between the recitation of “Blessed be the name” and the “spicy pudding” that the king’s daughter desires.

 A different approach in *Chazal* relegates the practice of reciting “Blessed be the name of His glorious kingdom forever and ever” to the angels. The *midrash* thus states:

Another idea: “Hear, O Israel” – The Rabbis said: When Moshe went up to heaven, he heard the ministering angels saying to the Holy One, blessed be He, “Blessed be the name of His glorious kingdom forever and ever,” and he brought it down to Israel. And why does Israel not say it in public [aloud]? R. Asi said: To what is it similar? To one who stole jewelry from the king’s palace and gave it to his wife and said to her, “Do not adorn yourself with it in public; rather, [wear it] in your house.” However, on Yom Kippur, when they are as clean as the ministering angels, they say it publicly: “Blessed be the name of His glorious kingdom forever and ever.” (*Devarim Rabba* 2:36)

Here, the *midrash* presents “Blessed be the name” as a secret mantra that only the ministering angels utter. Moshe “steals” this secret from them and brings it down to the people of Israel, who use it to praise their Creator, albeit quietly. Of course, this passage leaves much to be explained.

 We find a dual tone in the commentary of Rabbeinu Yaakov, *Ba’al Ha-Turim*. In the laws of *keriat Shema* (*Orach Chayim* 61), *Tur* cites the passage in *Pesachim* and ties our practice to recite “Blessed be the name” quietly to the tension between Yaakov’s use of the line and Moshe’s silence. However, in the laws of Yom Kippur (*Orach Chayim* 619), he cites the passage in *Devarim Rabba* regarding the angels who use the line to praise God, explaining that Israel recites “Blessed be the name” aloud on Yom Kippur because they are similar to angels.

 Thus, we must examine the matter further to determine the true relationship between these two approaches, both of which *Tur* seems to have adopted.

**Angelic Secrets**

 Let us begin with the approach of the second passage in *Devarim Rabba*, which views reciting “Blessed be the name” as the unique province of the angels and not of the nation of Israel (were it not for the fact that Moshe stole the secret).

 It seems that the significance of this explanation regarding the angels’ praise is connected to a passage in the *gemara* at the end of the third chapter of *Pesachim*:

“And the Lord shall be king over all the earth; on that day, there shall be one Lord with one name” (*Zecharia* 14:9). Is He then not “one” now? R. Acha bar Chanina said: Not like this world is the World to Come. In this world, for good tidings one says, “He is good and He does good,” while for evil tidings he says, “Blessed be the true judge,” whereas in the World to Come, it shall be only “He is good and He does good.”

“With one name” – What does “one” mean? Is then now His name not one? R. Nachman bar Yitzchak said: Not like this world is the World to Come. In this world, [His name] is written with a *yod-heh* and read as *alef-dalet*; but in the World to Come, it shall all be one: It shall be written with *yod-heh* and read as *yod-heh*.

Now, Rava thought of lecturing it at the session, [whereupon] a certain old man said to him: [In the verse, “This shall be My name forever (*le-olam*)” (*Shemot* 3:15),] it is written *le-alem* (“to be hidden”). R. Avina pointed out a contradiction: It is written, “This shall be My name, to be hidden,” [and it is also written,] “This My appellation for all eternity.” The Holy One, blessed be He, said: Not as I [i.e., My name] am written am I read: I am written with a *yod-heh*, while I am read as *alef-dalet*. (*Pesachim* 50a)

This world is a world of deception, a world full of falsehood and contradiction, in which good and evil tidings are constantly intertwined. Therefore, we can recite the seemingly contradictory blessings of “The true judge” and “He is good and He does good” in tandem. In our world, in which the enemies of God oppress God’s servants,[[2]](#footnote-2) God Himself is incomplete; He cannot reveal His kingship to the world completely.

 In a world where God hides His face in such a way, God’s kingship cannot possibly reveal itself, and consequently one certainly cannot declare openly, “Blessed be the name of His glorious kingdom forever and ever.” God’s kingship is incomplete in our world, and thus such a declaration – coming from the mouths of human beings in our world – is woefully detached from reality.

 This pronouncement can only be recited by human beings “on that day,” when “there shall be one Lord with one name,” when all aspects of God’s existence will become unified. This can only come to pass when there is no longer duplicity in the world, when difficult and contradictory images cease to exist, when “one thing God has spoken” (*Tehillim* 62:12) leads to *one* thing – not two things – that I have heard.

 All this is true in a world whose human inhabitants live within the limitations of time and space. Angels, who live in a supertemporal reality, are not shackled to this conception of reality. They see God’s kingship within existence with the same perspective that transcends time and space.

 The Tetragrammaton – God’s name written as *yod-heh-vav-heh* – signifies the connection between past (*haya*), present (*hoveh*), and future (*yihyeh*). This is the foundation of God’s supertemporal existence that humans in our world are unable to comprehend. Therefore, this name is written with the letters *yod-heh*, but read with the letters *alef-dalet* (*Adonai*). In the future, even God’s name will become unified, such that it will be both written and read with the letters *yod-heh*.

 Today, in any case, only angels can view God’s kingship in its completeness. Only angels can see the unity that is expressed in God’s one name. The ministering angels are the only ones who can bless God’s kingship and the name through which His kingship is revealed forever and ever. This is the great praise that the ministering angels present God in heaven.

 Moshe wanted to enable humans – made of flesh and blood – to praise their Creator in the same way that He is praised on high. However, being aware of human limitations – that our bleary eyes are unable to see God’s kingship – Moshe enacted that we should recite this awesome praise quietly. The significance of this quiet recitation is that it demonstrates our faith that God is “one Lord with one name,” and “His sovereign rule is over all” (*Tehillim* 103:19), even though it is difficult to see this from a human perspective.

 However, on Yom Kippur, the forces of evil and divisiveness in the world are kept at bay, and the power of the Holy One, blessed be He, is the active, controlling force in the world. As we read in *Tehillim* 139:16, “In due time they were formed, to the very last one of them,” which, according to *Chazal*’s interpretation, refers to Yom Kippur (see Rashi, *Tehillim* 139:16).

 On this day, Israel becomes sanctified, purified, and exalted to the very outer border of the ultimate holiness. When Israel detaches from humanity, as it were, and observes the world with eyes that have drawn closer to the perspective of the angels, they too can give full-throated praise to God, saying, “Blessed be the name of His glorious kingdom forever and ever.”

**Reciting “Amen – May His Great** **Name Be Blessed For Ever and All Time”**

 There is one line that we recite every day of the year, shouting it out loud with all our might. The *gemara* states: “R. Yehoshua ben Levi said: He who responds, ‘Amen – may His great name be blessed,’ with all his might, his decreed sentence is torn up” (*Shabbat* 119b). This praise must be recited with all one’s might, since it is a phrase that expresses our aspirations. Despite all the challenges of the daily reality, despite our inability to see God’s kingship at present, we cry out and pray that the day will come when His great name will be blessed forever and ever.

 When we praise God in the present by reciting, “**Blessed be** the name of His glorious kingdom forever and ever,” we do so quietly. But when we praise God in future tense – “May His great name be blessed forever and all time” – we do so with all our might. Thus, one can indeed merit having his decreed sentences torn up.

 The essence of the entire *Kaddish* prayer and its most important part – “May His great name…” – is a prayer for the revelation of God’s kingship and for His name to become magnified in the world. These two statements, “Blessed be the name” and “May His great name,” are, in practice, the same statement. This notion is implied in the *Targum Yerushalmi* (Pseudo-Jonathan) on the verse that describes Yaakov and his sons:

All the twelve tribes answered Yaakov as one and said, “Hear from us, Israel our father, the Lord is our God, the Lord alone.” Yaakov our father answered and said, “**May His great name be blessed forever and all time**.” (*Targum Yerushalmi*, *Bereishit* 49:1)

The Targum’s loose “translation” of the Torah to Aramaic serves to enable a transition of the Torah’s text into the vernacular, into language that humans can comprehend.[[3]](#footnote-3) Because of this, the Targum opts to copy over the original phrase – “Blessed be the name…” – into future tense. This is the only way that humans, who understand that God’s complete name and kingship will be revealed “on that day” in the future, can comprehend this concept.

 Moshe and the people of Israel made a similar declaration in the Song of the Sea: “The Lord will reign forever and ever” (*Shemot* 15:18).[[4]](#footnote-4)

**Longing for the Temple**

It seems that this approach can also serve as the basis for a new interpretation of a passage in *Berakhot*:

It has been taught: R. Yose says: I was once traveling on the road, and I entered into one of the ruins of Jerusalem in order to pray. [The prophet] Eliyahu, of blessed memory, appeared and waited for me at the door till I finished my prayer. After I finished my prayer, he said to me: Peace be with you, my master! … He further said to me: My son, what sound did you hear in this ruin? I replied: I heard a divine voice, cooing like a dove, and saying: Woe to the children, on account of whose sins I destroyed My house and burned My temple and exiled them among the nations of the world! And he said to me: By your life and by your head! Not in this moment alone does it so exclaim, but thrice each day does it exclaim thus! And more than that, whenever the Israelites go into the synagogues and schoolhouses and respond, “May His great name be blessed,” the Holy One, blessed be He, shakes His head and says: Happy is the king who is thus praised in this house! Woe to the father who had to banish his children, and woe to the children who had to be banished from the table of the father! (*Berakhot* 3a)

The conversation between the prophet Eliyahu and R. Yose deals with the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, the *Shekhina*’s exile from its place and the exile of the nation from its home. R. Yose was praying in the ruins of Jerusalem when he heard a divine voice, cooing like a dove over the destruction of the Temple and the exile.

 When God hears Israel praising Him – when the nation of Israel recites, “May His great name be blessed” – something changes. This praise was pronounced in the Temple after every blessing that was recited, as the *gemara* explains:

What was said in the Temple? “Blessed be the Lord God, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting. Blessed are You, who redeems Israel.” And the congregation responds, “**Blessed be the name of His glorious kingdom, forever and ever**.”[[5]](#footnote-5) (*Ta’anit* 16b)

Thus, when the King hears His people praising Him in synagogues and *batei midrash*, He “remembers” the praise that He would receive in the Temple, and He sees that His nation continues to long for a time when His great name will once again become magnified and sanctified in His world.

Translated by Daniel Landman

1. The story is cited in the *gemara* as it appears in the *midrash*, with slight changes (such as, “Perhaps – Heaven forfend! – there is one unfit among my children, like Avraham, from whom there issued Yishmael”). We will not address these aspects in this discussion. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The *Mekhilta* (*Mekhilta De-Rabbi Yishmael*, *Beshalach*, *Masekhta De-Shira* 8) cites two midrashic interpretations of the verse, “Who is like You, O Lord, among the celestials?” (*Shemot* 15:11). The first states that the revelation of God’s kingship in Egypt, as well as in the distant future, will bring worldwide recognition of God’s kingship. The second, parallel interpretation states that there are times when God’s kingship does not reveal itself. Instead, what is revealed is God’s great ability to withhold his power, as a slight variation on the verse reads, “Who is like You, O Lord, among the mutes” (*ba-ilemim* rather than *ba-elim*). God’s silence may last until He decides to turn the darkness to light and the rough places into level ground (cf. *Yeshayahu* 42:16). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. It may be that this is an additional explanation for the fact that the angels do not understand the Aramaic language. Aramaic is a language that people speak, using human expressions, which the angels cannot comprehend. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. We find an interesting approach in Onkelos’ translation of this verse. Onkelos renders the verse: “The Lord’s kingship is established forever and to all eternity.” Thus, Onkelos changes the verse’s tense from future to present. In this case, Moshe and the nation sing using human language, but the Targum speaks in ideal, prophetic language that looks forward in time to the distant future. However, see R. Yose the Galilean’s interpretation of the verse, cited in the *Mekhilta*:

R. Yose the Galilean said: If Israel had said at the sea, “The Lord is king forever and ever,” no nation or people could ever rule over them. But they said, “The Lord will reign forever and ever” – in the future. (*Mekhilta De-Rabbi Yishmael*, *Beshalach*, *Masekhta De-Shira* 8) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. The *mishna* and *gemara* in *Yoma* imply (as is familiar to us all from the “Temple service” prayers of Yom Kippur) that the congregation would say “Blessed be the name of His glorious kingdom forever and ever” in the Temple after the High Priest would utter the fully pronounced name of God. Indeed, this name expresses the supertemporal nature of God: *haya*, *hoveh*, and *yihyeh*. This is also the name that elicits the response, “Blessed be the name of His glorious kingdom forever and ever,” as it expresses the permanent presence of His kingship in existence. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)