YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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**The Philosophy of Prayer**

**Rav Uriel Eitam**

**Shiur #27: The Ari (3)**

We ended the previous *shiur* with the Ari's remarks concerning the difference between each and every prayer, and the novelty of each prayer in relation to all others. Each prayer is different to such a degree that it achieves a clarification never before achieved by any other prayer since the creation of the world. Let us examine his words more closely:

You should know that there is a big difference between weekday prayers and Rosh Chodesh prayers and Yom Tov prayers and Chol ha-Mo'ed prayers and Shabbat prayers. What is more, even regarding Yom Tov itself, the prayers of Pesach are unlike the prayers of Shavuot or the prayers of Sukkot. And what is even more, the prayer of one day is unlike the prayer of the day before. And what is even more than all this, even regarding the three prayers of every day, there is a big difference between them, the morning prayer being unlike the afternoon prayer or the evening prayer. The bottom line is that no prayer, from the day that the world was created until the distant future, is in any way similar to another. (*Sefer Olat Tamid – Sha'ar Kellalot ha-Tefilot*)

We see that there are differences between prayers recited on different occasions, and there are also differences between one instance of a prayer and another instance of that same prayer, because each prayer achieves a different clarification. These are two separate statements: prayers vary in accordance with the nature of the day on which they are recited (the various festivals, different days of the week), and every prayer is also different from all previously recited prayers by virtue of the very fact that it is new. Considering the second explanation, why is the first explanation necessary? If a new clarification is reached each day, one that had not been achieved the day before, what is the significance of the difference between weekdays and Shabbat, or between festival days and the rest of the year? Every regular weekday is also different from every other day! Does that not nullify the explanation that weekday prayer is different from Shabbat prayer?

### The General Framework and the Specific Clarification

The continuation of the passage resolves our difficulty, and sharpens the principle under discussion:

The reason is, as we have already explained, that all of the prayers come to clarify matters regarding the seven kings that died. Every day, and in every prayer, new matters and sparks are clarified that had not been clarified until then. Just as the clarifications that are achieved in each prayer are unlike the clarifications of a different prayer, because those first clarifications were already achieved in the first prayer, and now in the other prayer, other new clarifications are achieved and repaired, and they are not the first ones themselves. And if so, in accordance with the value of the sparks that are clarified in that prayer, so will be the value of the minds stemming from the Lesser Countenance and the Feminine Divine Presence and what is above them. (Ibid.)

Let us imagine ourselves entering a large place that is in need of repair. On the first day, we enter the first room and repair what needs to be repaired there. On the second day, we move on to the second room and make the repairs that are needed there. Every period of time is a zone; each appointed time has its own set of clarifications that must be achieved. The difference between the two statements above is in fact the difference between generalities and specifics. There is a zone of repair in which we are found on ordinary weekdays, a zone of repair for Shabbat, and so forth. But what we do in each zone – which specific repairs we make in each time framework – varies from day to day. With respect to its general framework, each Shabbat morning prayer is similar to the Shabbat morning prayer recited the week before, but a new occurrence is supposed to take place within it. This is one way to understand the relationship between the two statements.

### Cyclical and Linear Time

Another option also distinguishes between generalities and specifics, but in a deeper way. According to this possibility, the statements are indeed different in essence: from one perspective, we repeat the same prayers, whereas from the other perspective, each prayer is completely new. The dimension of time can be perceived as either circular or linear – as a recurring cyclical movement or as a constant advance forward. Sometimes we experience the cyclic nature of time; at the end of each week, we find ourselves once again in Shabbat, and at the end of each year, Rosh Hashana arrives anew. Sometimes, however, we experience a linear advance to places we had never been before. On a birthday, for example, we feel both elements: We find ourselves on the same day we experienced the year before, but this time at an age that we have just now reached. From the circular perspective, the prayers of all Shabbatot are the same, because each week is a complete circle in which Shabbat plays a prominent role. In a certain sense, we find ourselves each time engaged in the same type of service. From a different perspective, however, we are constantly advancing; in this linear dimension, we achieve a new clarification each day that was never before reached since the beginning of creation.

Every day, a new cycle of life begins, and we open it with prayer. This is a cyclical occurrence; every day, we are renewed in the same way, through a similar prayer. On the other hand, there is also a linear occurrence; in every morning prayer, there are different sparks that need to be repaired and elevated – until all the repairs are made and the Messiah will arrive. These two occurrences take place in parallel, through the same prayers.

An example of the two occurrences can be seen in the counting of the *Omer*. According to the accepted explanation (found, among other places, in *Sefer ha-Chinukh*), the counting of the *Omer* is directed toward the revelation at Mount Sinai. This is a linear perspective: the count in its entirety involves movement toward a goal, which is measured each day by the progress made toward the giving of the Torah. In contrast, the cyclic perspective sees each day individually, and experiences it as a complete life cycle.

The linear occurrence lies on a historical axis – a long, drawn-out movement of the world's progress. This view underlies the thought of Rav Avraham Yitzchak Kook (in his remarks on the development of the world in *Orot ha-Kodesh* II, *Hit'alut ha-Olam*, and elsewhere). His trust in the world's progress is not just an optimistic attitude, but follows on the Ari's position that the entire world is moving toward its perfection, from fracture to repair, and that every day more and more sparks are repaired on the way to complete repair.

These two dimensions parallel the two well-known explanations of the *Amida* prayer that appear in the Gemara: the prayers correspond to the daily offerings, and the prayers correspond to the patriarchs. The prayer that corresponds to the daily offering is a fixed prayer, an event that repeats itself in every life cycle of a day. In contrast, the patriarchs belong to a linear occurrence; they open the path of progress that will end with the coming of the Messiah. Avraham is the starting point of the process, and Yaakov already marks the final destination, "until I come to my lord, to Seir," at the end of days.

Both dimensions are present in our prayer, as we are still in the process. In the days of David and Shlomo, for example, there was almost no need for the linear occurrence, since there was no shortage of anything, as it were. Perfect reality does not obviate the need for prayer, but the central prayer in a perfect world is cyclical. Elsewhere, the Ari writes that before the separation between the Divine faces – the male and the female, the Holy One, blessed is He, and his *Shekhina* – there was no need for service of clarification. The formula, "*leshem yichud*," which refers to an encounter between the Holy One, blessed be He, and His *Shekhina*, is directed toward this clarification.

### The Daily Cycle of Occurrence

To explain in greater detail the occurrence that repeats itself in every cycle: Each cycle begins at night; when a person sleeps, in a sense he is reborn. He is like a baby, who sleeps for most of the day; while outwardly there is no visible change in him, this is the time when growth processes take place within. The evening prayer prepares us for this occurrence, for a return to the starting point. In the morning, we wake up again, and the morning prayer provides us with abundance for the day ahead. The afternoon prayer, according to the Ari elsewhere, preserves what we achieved in the morning prayer. This is the reason that the afternoon service is much shorter: the main task was completed already in the morning, and in the afternoon service we merely need go back there – to reconstruct the dreams we had in the morning, the aspirations that we moved slightly away from over the course of the day, but to which we can still return. In the evening prayer, we close the day with movement toward the next beginning.

We live every day in this recurring circular-cyclical occurrence, and also take part in the linear event, which strives toward the future repair of the days of the Messiah.

(Translated by David Strauss)