YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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**The Philosophy of Prayer**

**Rav Uriel Eitam**

**Shiur #32: The Ari (1)**

**The Raising of the Worlds**

**Introduction**

Last year, we explored the reasons for prayer according to sages from Rav Saadya Gaon to the Ramchal. This year, with God's help, we will discuss prayer in the world of *Chassidut* and Kabbala, and in the perspectives of Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Kook, Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik, and Rabbi Yehuda Leon Ashkenazi (Manitou). However, in order to understand the teachings of most of the thinkers we will deal with this year, we must start again with the central foundations in the teachings of the Ari, Rabbi Yitzchak Luria, which were addressed last year, because the foundations he laid down had a profound effect on many of those who came after him. The first two *shiurim* will be devoted to a review of the teachings of the Ari, which will also allow new participants in this series to embark with us upon the journey that we will be taking this year.

**The Foundations of Prayer in the Teachings of the Ari**

We will enter the Ari's world of prayer through two passages from the words of the "Nazir," Rabbi David Cohen, which summarize the Ari's ideas about prayer:

A person must serve and repair the world through deeds and speech. This service is prayer, for the repair of the world. Every day and in every prayer, new matters are clarified, matters which had not been clarified before. New minds come, and after the prayer, they go back and disappear. However, the worlds as a whole do not ascend until the arrival of the Messiah, speedily in our days. (*Kol Ha-Nevu'a*, p. 240, chapter 69)

The worlds must be raised from below upwards, so that the lower world will be connected to the world above it, to the point that all of the worlds together will be connected to the world of Emanation, when the *Shemoneh Esrei* prayer is recited while standing, and afterwards they must be lowered from above downwards.

Every day, from the beginning of the prayer service to *Barukh She'amar* is the world of Action. And from *Barukh She'amar* to *Yotzer Or* is the world of Formation. And from *Yotzer Or* to the *Shemoneh Esrei* is the world of Creation. And the entire *Amida* prayer is the world of Emanation. (*Kol Ha-Nevu'a*, p. 241, chapter 71)

The first passage discusses the clarifications that are performed during prayer, while the second passage deals with the raising of the worlds that takes place during prayer. These are the main concepts that the Ari coins in the matter of prayer – clarifications and the raising of worlds.

**The Worlds of *Abiya* (*Atzilut*, *Beri’a*, *Yetzira*, and *Asiya*)**

Let's start with an explanation of the concept of worlds. We encounter here in the words of the Ari one of the most basic conceptual systems in his teachings: Reality is constructed out of four worlds, known collectively as the four worlds of *Abiya*: *Atzilut –* Emanation, *Beri'ah –* Creation, *Yetzira* – Formation, and *Asiya* – Action.

The kabbalists taught that above all the created worlds is the world of Emanation, a world that is not separate from the Divine world but rather gives it expression. The world of Emanation (*Atzilut*) is the world that is "by" (*etzel*) the Creator; it is connected to Him. This world is the world of the *Sefirot*, the attributes of God. Just as a person's traits reflect the person, even though they are not him, so God is revealed through the *Sefirot*. It is impossible to separate a person from his characteristics, or from his name, and this all the more true about God.

The source for the names of the worlds of *Abiya* is a verse in *Yeshayahu* (43:7): "Every one that is called by My name, and whom I have created (*berativ*) for My glory, I have formed him (*yetzartiv*), yea, I have made him (*asitiv*)." "Every one that is called by My name, and whom for My glory" – these are the *Sefirot* which are the names of God, and which become revealed afterwards in the worlds of Creation, Formation, and Action, which, as stated, are separate from God.

Another source for these concepts is the story of creation, where we find creation, formation, and action. *Parashat Bereishit* begins with the concept of creation: "In the beginning, God created" (*Bereishit* 1:1). This concept appears several more times in the first chapter, and prominently in the context of man: "And God created man in His own image" (*Bereishit* 1:27). In the rest of the account of the creation, we find mostly the concept of doing, making: "And God made." In the second chapter, which also describes the formation of reality, this time from a different perspective, we encounter the phrase: "Then the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground" (*Bereishit* 2:7). This, however, is not enough: the deeper connection between God and the world finds expression afterwards in the formation of man: "And He breathed into his nostrils the breath of life." The *Zohar* comments on this phrase: "He who breathes, breathes of himself." The Divine breath emanates from God, and thus it belongs to the world of Emanation.

These four concepts differ in their meaning: creation denotes something out of nothing, formation involves something new out of an existing thing, and making refers to an action occurring in the existing reality that does not necessarily involve something new. For example, it can refer to the arrangement, intermingling, or combination of things that already exist. In other words: Emanation is nothing, Creation is something out of nothing, Formation is something new from something, and Action is something that is not new. Thus, what happens in *Parashat Bereishit* is first of all the creation of a new world, and afterwards mostly the arrangement of the created beings after they already exist. Later, regarding man, another level appears – the emanation of breath/soul into man, which gives expression to the world of Emanation. This assertion, that man has a Divine soul (and in this sense it belongs to the world of Emanation), is found already in the words of the Ramban, who was one of the earliest kabbalists.

According to this, all four dimensions appear in the account of creation and describe not only the moment of creation itself, but also the present. These four occurrences are present at all times.

**The Course of Prayer – From the World of Action to the World of Emanation**

The Ari connects the four worlds to the various stages of prayer, as noted in many *siddurim* that follow the rite of the Oriental communities. From *Birkhot Ha-shachar* to *Barukh She'amar*, we are found in the world of Action; in *Pesukei De-zimra*, in the world of Formation; in *Shema* and its accompanying blessings, in the world of Creation; and in the *Amida* prayer, in the world of Emanation.

The Ari does not explain why each section of prayer belongs to the world that parallels it*.* Since the explanation is not revealed, one might think that we are dealing here with technical actions: one recites sections of the established prayer, and through them acts upon the upper worlds. On a deeper level, however, the actions that appear technical are only the external side, whereas inside, a very deep and meaningful spiritual occurrence takes place.

The words of the Ari are exceedingly sublime, but we will try to decipher at least something of this structure. We will start with *Birkhot Ha-shachar.* According to the Gemara, the *Birkhot Ha-shachar* are supposed to be recited in the course of doing one's usual morning activities. A blessing is recited when one gets out of bed, when one dresses, when one puts on his shoes, and the like. Only at a later stage was the recitation of these blessings moved to the synagogue. These blessings relate to activities, and thus to the world of Action. The recitation of the order of the sacrifices also belongs to this stage of prayer, as it too describes actions.

This is followed by *Pesukei De-zimra,* which are chapters of song and poetry. Poetry involves artistic formation. In this stage of prayer, we contemplate the world through the eyes of poetry, through the songs and poems of King David. Poetry is something that is alive, something that is formed and comes into being. We are still in the same world that we were in during *Birkhot Ha-shachar*, but we change our glasses. We no longer contemplate it through descriptions of actions, but rather through song and poetry. *Pesukei De-zimra* speak of existing reality, but they describe how God causes it to grow and how He creates within it. Thus, prayer shifts from a perspective of Action to the perspective of Formation.

The first blessing of *Shema* relates primarily to the creation of the world. The second blessing of *Shema* also represents creation, since it deals with the appearance of the Torah – a creation that penetrates the world. In similar fashion, the exodus from Egypt described in the third blessing can also be seen as a kind of creation. The miracles of Egypt testify in a most comprehensive manner to the Creator and Leader of the world (see, for example, the Ramban in his commentary to *Shemot* 13:16). Here, we contemplate creation and encounter not only formation that takes place within reality, but also God's creation of something out of nothing – creation of the world, creation of the Torah, and creation of redemption.

The statement that the *Amida* prayer belongs to the world of Emanation is a significant statement, which changes our view of the essence of this prayer. During the *Amida* prayer, we are found, as it were, "by" (*etzel*) God. How is this reflected in the prayer? The word "You" is most prominent in the *Amida* prayer, all of whose blessings conclude with the formula "Blessed are You, O Lord," and the first four blessings of which also begin with the word "You" – "Blessed are You, O Lord," "You are mighty," "You are holy," and "You graciously bestow." We turn here directly to God. One who approaches the *Amida* prayer exclusively from a position of petition, and with his entire being says only "I, I, I," is liable to miss what is special about this prayer – that it repeatedly turns to "You, You, You."

An even deeper upheaval may take place in the course of the *Amida* prayer. At the end of that prayer, we come to the blessing "who restores His *Shekhina* to Zion." At this point, it is no longer clear whether we are still petitioning for ourselves or for God, that His *Shekhina* should once again reveal itself. Our separate standing before God becomes blurred, and the requests put forward on our own behalf and on behalf of God become intermingled.

The course of prayer changes our view of the world. What appeared to us before prayer as a collection of actions, we now see as an artistic formation. One can look at all the different things a sculptor does with his raw material and see them all as technical actions, until the outlines of the sculpture become visible and it transforms in our eyes into a work of art. The actions reveal themselves as artistic formation. Afterwards, we become exposed to the innovation that underlies reality – to creation. Only after these three stages do we ascend from our world to an encounter with God in the *Amida* prayer. In the *Amida* prayer, we stand right before Him; we are "by" Him, in the world of Emanation.

This entire process carries us deep inside. After the *Amida* come the stages of going back out – three stages of returning to reality.

The Ari still connects the prayer that comes after the *Amida* – *Tachanun* – to the world of Emanation. Only from *Ashrei* and on does the movement of going back out begin. This is somewhat surprising, for we stand before God in the *Amida* prayer, whereas *Tachanun* seems to be different in character. It may be suggested that in *Tachanun* we continue with our supplications, and it is in *Ashrei* and onthat we return to praising God. One can praise another without standing before him, but a request requires the presence of the party being petitioned.

The Ari also describes the structure of the end of the prayer service:

Therefore, when we say *Ashrei yoshvei veitekha* until *Tefilla Le-David*, we bring the abundance down from Emanation to Creation. This does not mean that we bring down the world of Creation itself. And similarly, until *Ein kadosh ka-Shem ki ein biltekha*, when we bring the abundance down from Formation to Action. And afterwards, in *Aleinu le-shabe'ach*, the aforementioned worlds come down, each one in its place. (*Sha'ar Ha-Kavanot* – *Derushei Tefillat Ha-Shachar*, *derush* 1)

The raising of the worlds, culminating in the world of Emanation in which we find ourselves during the *Amida* prayer, brings about formation of abundance; from *Ashrei* on, that abundance goes down from world to world until it reaches the world of Action. The abundance that reaches the world is the daily product of the service of the raising of the worlds in prayer.

(Translated by David Strauss)