YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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**The Philosophy of Prayer**

**Rav Uriel Eitam**

**Shiur #33: The Ari (2)**

**Clarifying the Sparks**

As noted in the previous *shiur*, this year's study is dedicated to the reasons for prayer in the world of *Chassidut* and Kabbala, and in the thought of Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Kook, Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik, and Rabbi Yehuda Leon Ashkenazi (Manitou). In order to prepare to understand the teachings of most of the thinkers that we will deal with this year, we opened with two central foundations in the teachings of the Ari (Rabbi Yitzchak Luria), although they were discussed last year as well, because those foundations had a profound effect on many of those who came after him. The two foundations are the clarification of sparks and the raising of worlds.

The previous *shiur* addressed the concept of the raising of worlds; in this *shiur*, we will discuss the clarification of sparks.

**Each Prayer is Different from the Previous One**

In a fundamental passage, the Ari speaks about the differences between the prayers of the different days of the year:

Every prayer gives rise to entirely new minds. There is no prayer without new lights, unlike any other. 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 the world was created until the distant future, is in any way similar to another.

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. And there is something like this in the lights of *Keri'at Shema*, because no recitation of*Shema*in the world is similar to another for the aforementioned reason. This is the reason that we are commanded always to pray three times a day and to recite *Shema*twice a day, and if a person missed one of them, this is called “something crooked that cannot be made straight” [[*Kohelet*1:15](https://www.sefaria.org/Ecclesiastes.1.15?lang=he-en&utm_source=etzion.org.il&utm_medium=sefaria_linker)]. The reason is that in every prayer and in every recitation of*Shema*,new clarifications are achieved and new minds flow from above, something that was not done in any other prayer or recitation of *Shema*. (*Sefer Olat Tamid – Sha'ar Kellalot ha-Tefillot*)

According to the Ari, the different prayers of different days attest to something profound that occurs differently from day to day. Not only is there a difference between holiday and weekday, but the prayers vary from holiday to holiday and even from Sunday to Monday – and not only regarding the "song of the day," but regarding what the entire prayer achieves. What is the difference between the weekday prayers that seem so similar to each other? Is something built from the totality of our prayers?

The Ari explains that the reason every prayer is different from all other prayers is that each comes to achieve a certain clarification in the world, and each clarification is new and different from what was already clarified through previous prayers. Here the question arises: What is the relationship between this explanation and the previous explanation, which accounted for the differences between weekdays and Shabbat and festivals? If each prayer achieves a new clarification because the previous clarifications had already been reached, why was it necessary to speak about the differences between weekday, Shabbat, and Yom Tov prayers that stem from the nature of each of those days? To understand that, we must first explain the system of concepts that underlies the concept of clarifications – the death of the kings.

**Clarifications in Prayer**

According to the prevalent understanding, the world was created *ex nihilo* – something out of nothing. "In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth" means that at first there was no heaven and earth, and then God created them. Kabbala explains the creation differently: it describes a process of appearance and emanation from the Divine, level after level, from heavenliness to earthliness, until the world as we know it was formed.

The rest of chapter one of *Bereishit*, from the creation of light onward, ostensibly continues the process of creation that began with the creation of heaven and earth, but the second verse is difficult: "And the earth was unformed and void." The place of this verse in the course of the account of creation is unclear.

The Ari explains that the earth *became* unformed and void. There was a break. God created the world, but the world collapsed and turned into chaos. The *Zohar* calls this occurrence "the death of the kings." (It is alluded to at the end of *Parashat Vayishlach*, which describes those who ruled as kings of Edom and then died.) This is the world of chaos described in the *Zohar* (and also appearing several times in the teachings of Rav Kook). The following verses in *Bereishit*, which describe the process from the creation of light and on, describe in essence the building of the world of repair; it repairs the first world, which was destroyed and turned into a void. A careful examination of the Ari’s words shows that he is not describing an accident; the world did not collapse because of a mistake or a failure, but with purpose, to further a Divine end. In any case, a reality was created that is made up of the fragments of vessels that carry many Divine sparks. During the six days of creation, God repaired the creation in a basic manner. He created a world of repair, but charged the rest of the repair to us. Finishing the repair is man's job, from the end of the creation of the world and until the present day.

One of the main arenas of this correction is in prayer. Each prayer draws a spark of holiness from among the broken vessels, that rises and stirs up a new reality above. Therefore, with every prayer, a new clarification is achieved. What the Ari describes functions in the celestial worlds, but we will try to understand it in light of what is taking place on the ground, in our prayer.

The task of raising the sparks takes place where there are fragments of vessels. In the Torah, for example, we can perhaps say that there are no fragments – only lights. In prayer, on the other hand, our crises and our problems rise up, as do the problems of the world around us (including the essential deficiencies of our reality and of all the worlds), and we stand with them before God. This is clarification of the sparks: we take the shattered vessels within life and present them to God. Prayer is the moment when all that we experience in life fills with meaning; it becomes part of our standing before God. We do not contend with events in a localized manner, but raise them all to this encounter. The entire expanse of life becomes part of the prayer; it all becomes a life of mission, the grand task of repair. When we live our lives in this manner, it has an effect upon all the worlds.

The Ari describes what takes place in the heavenly worlds, but this occurrence stems from the power of prayer of the kabbalist here on earth, from the process that he undergoes in his prayer.

Let us return to the question: We see in the words of the Ari that there are differences between the 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. The fact is that 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 different from all previously recited prayers by virtue of the very fact that it is new. According to the second explanation, why is the first explanation necessary? If a new clarification is achieved each day, that had not been reached the day before, what is the significance of the difference between weekdays and Shabbat, or between festival days and the rest of the year? Even every regular weekday is different from every other day!

**The General Framework and the Specific Clarification**

The Ari goes on to resolve our difficulty and sharpen the underlying principle:

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.)

In order to understand this, let us imagine ourselves entering a large palace with many rooms, all of which are in need of repair. On Sunday, we enter the first room, and repair part of what is there, the part designated for this visit, but only next week will we return to this room and continue to repair it. The next day, we move on to the second room and make the repairs that are needed there, and so on. On Shabbat, we find ourselves on a completely different floor of the palace and deal with what requires our attention there, and we will return on the next Shabbat to continue that work.

Every time period is a different zone; each appointed time has its own set of clarifications that must be achieved. The difference between the two statements is in fact the difference between generalities and specifics. From the perspective of the general framework, we are in one zone of repair on ordinary weekdays, a different one on 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 the general framework, each Shabbat morning prayer is similar to the Shabbat morning prayer recited the week before, but something new 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; for instance, at the end of each week, we find ourselves once again in Shabbat, and at the end of each year, Rosh Ha-shana arrives anew. Sometimes, however, we experience a linear advance to new places. On a birthday, we feel both elements: We find ourselves on the same day as the year before, but this time at a brand-new age.

From the circular perspective, the prayers of all *Shabbatot* are the same, because each week is a complete circle that includes Shabbat. The prayers of Pesach are the same each year, as are the prayers of Sukkot, because the cycle of festivals repeats itself every year. In a certain sense, we engage in the same type of service each time. 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; we are renewed every day in the same way, through a similar prayer. On the other hand, there is also a linear occurrence; with every morning prayer, different sparks 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.

The linear occurrence lies on a historical axis – a long, drawn-out movement of the world's progress. This perspective underlies the view 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 Gemara’s two explanations of the *Amida* prayer: 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 in 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" (*Bereishit* 33:14), at the end of days.

**The Daily Cycle**

As stated, 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 (supposedly) no shortage of anything. Perfect reality does not obviate the need for prayer, but the central prayer in a perfect world is cyclical.

To explain in greater detail the occurrence that repeats itself in every cycle: Each cycle begins at night; when a person sleeps, in a certain sense he is reborn. He is like a baby, who sleeps for most of the day; while there is no visible outward 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 coming 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; we already completed the main task in the morning, and in the afternoon service we merely need go back there – to reconstruct the dreams we had in the morning and reconnect with 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.

In the next *shiur*, we will move on to the world of *Chassidut* and try to understand how it addressed the two issues that we explored from the Ari in this and in the previous *shiur*: the raising of worlds and the clarification of sparks.

(Translated by David Strauss)