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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This week’s shiurim are dedicated in commemoration of the yarhzeit of
Rabbi Lipman Z. Rabinowitz, by his family

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Please daven for a refua sheleima for YHE alumnus
Rav Daniel ben Miriam Chaya Rut

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Shiur #10:

**Blessed Be the Name of His Glorious Kingdom For Ever and Ever (II): The Higher and Lower Oneness of God**

**Seeing the End of Days: What Yaakov Told His Sons**

In this *shiur*, we will examine a *gemara* in *Pesachim* that also names our patriarch Yaakov as the original source of the statement, “Blessed be the name of His glorious kingdom forever and ever.”

 According to the view of the Midrash in *Devarim Rabba*, which we studied in the previous *shiur*, Yaakov himself said, “Blessed be the name” in a whisper. This, it seems, is the basis for our practice of reciting this line quietly until today. The key to this quiet recitation is rooted in Yaakov’s failed attempt to reveal the end of days to his sons.

 In the beginning, Yaakov believed that he was prevented from revealing the end of days because of the unworthiness of his children. However, it became clear to Yaakov that his children were not the problem; they were entirely pure. Rather, it was simply that God did not want to reveal the end of days.[[1]](#footnote-1) Yaakov concluded from this that God wanted him and his children to live their lives in the present and not in some future that will be revealed “on that day” (*Zekharia* 14:9).

 Therefore, Yaakov whispers what he sees with his deeply penetrating eyes – the kind of vision evoked in the verse, “The Lord revealed Himself to me from afar” (*Yirmeyahu* 31:3). By viewing the end of days, Yaakov is able to state, “Blessed is the name of His glorious kingdom forever and ever.” One who sees the end of days, who sees the entire world from one end to the other, can truly understand the inner workings of the world. Through his vision, Yaakov connects the past with the present and the future and sees the complete picture of God’s kingship operating within our reality, as the verse states: “In that day they shall say: This is our God; we trusted in Him, and He delivered us. This is the Lord, in whom we trusted; let us rejoice and exult in His deliverance” (*Yeshayahu* 25:9).

 When the end of days was obscured from Yaakov’s vision and could no longer be revealed, it was no longer appropriate to proclaim this idea of the complete kingship of God, of the revelation of the name of His glorious kingdom, within our reality, which seems deficient and lacking. Therefore, Yaakov stated this idea quietly. *Sefat Emet* explains the matter in the following way:

There is a shining glass, this being the aspect of Yaakov, before whom there is no concealment; he sees everything clearly. And there is a glass that does not shine, this being the aspect of faith. For we must come to the truth by way of the concealment itself through faith. It is called a glass that does not shine because the light comes from the concealment… Since Yaakov was unable to reveal this end, namely, to clarify the truth for them through the shining glass, the repair must be by way of the aspect of faith. (*Sefat Emet*, *Vayechi* 5635)

Nothing is concealed from Yaakov; he can declare, “Blessed be the name of His glorious kingship forever and ever” out loud. However, when the end of days was obscured and he could not reveal it to his sons, the matter remained in the realm of faith alone, and thus it was only proper to recite the statement quietly.

**The Parable of the Spiced Pudding**

In contrast, the passage in *Pesachim* explains our quiet recitation of “Blessed be the name” by emphasizing the tension between Yaakov’s declaration and Moshe’s silence. This explanation is rather surprising, as *Tzelach* points out:

We should ask [based on this]: Can it be that we have only one statement of praise that would amount to saying that which Moshe did not say? On the contrary, we have several *piyyutim* that we say, which the *paytanim* composed. Our patriarch Yaakov should not be like one of the *paytanim* that we should be wary of reciting the praise that he – Israel, the holy elder – said, simply because Moshe did not say it.[[2]](#footnote-2) (*Tzelach*, *Pesachim* 56a)

In addition, the passage compares the case to that of a king’s daughter who smelled a spiced pudding (*tzikei kedeira*). It seems that the recitation of “Blessed be the name” is compared to the spiced pudding (as it is recited quietly, just as the pudding is brought secretly to the king’s daughter). But what is the nature of this pudding? Is it a fancy dish or is it a kind of food that is generally despised?

It may be that the king’s daughter lusts after the pudding because it is a delicacy, but she is not permitted to indulge in the pudding openly because she demands it at the wrong time or place. Alternatively, it may be that the reason the king’s daughter is not allowed to eat the pudding in public is that it is a food of poor quality, and since it is inappropriate for a king’s daughter to be seen eating such fare, it is brought to her secretly.

The *Rishonim* debated the meaning of the parable of the spiced pudding, as well as its significance in relation to the quiet recitation of “Blessed be the name.” Rashi, in explaining the meaning of the expression *tzikei kedeira* (*Yoma* 75a, s. v. “*tzikei*”), states: “A spice for a mixed and seasoned dish.” Rabbeinu Yona explains the passage in *Pesachim* in the same vein:

She smelled *tzikei kedeira*, i.e., the things that season the dish and improve it. In addition, this is what it means: It is a delight to recite “Blessed be the name” at the time when one accepts upon himself the yoke of God’s kingship. (*Talmidei Rabbeinu Yona*, *Berakhot* 8b)

Based on this, the explanation for the parable is that the king’s daughter craves the pudding when it is not mealtime, which is not fitting for someone of her stature. Thus, her servants bring her the pudding in secret.

 In light of this, the moral of the parable is that the people of Israel crave the addition of a certain “spice” to their acceptance of the yoke of God’s kingship. This “spice” is the added praise of “Blessed be the name of His glorious kingdom forever and ever.” However, this praise can only be recited by Yaakov, who saw the end of days. Moshe, on the other hand, did not say it, since he lived in this world, in the reality in which God’s kingship is not completely revealed.

 Moshe accepts upon himself the yoke of God’s kingship, declares that God is the Creator of heaven and earth, that He is the one and only God in His world. But His kingship is not openly revealed in the eyes of every living being. In this reality of concealment, it is inappropriate to say, “Blessed be the name of His glorious kingdom forever and ever,” and as a result we recite it quietly.[[3]](#footnote-3)

 In contrast, some interpreted *tzikei kedeira* in a negative light. In his commentary on the Torah, Malbim writes, “*Tzikei kedeira* is the lowest form of food” (Malbim, *Devarim* 6:4).

Despite the difference in his interpretation of the phrase, Malbim’s explanation of the meaning of the parable is still similar to the explanation that we outlined above. According to his explanation, the nation of Israel desires to complete their acceptance of the yoke of God’s kingship, extending it to all of existence and to the entire universe, by saying “Blessed be the name of His glorious kingdom forever and ever.” Malbim explains the craving for *tzikei kedeira* as the people’s aspiration to subject even the forces of evil to God’s sovereignty and kingship:

The moral is that the king’s daughter, who represents the aspect of kingship, smelled the spiced pudding, which is the lowest form of food, and which represents the lowest part of the universe and the evil forces and spirit of impurity within it. These will be subjected to that king’s daughter, “and His sovereign rule will be over all,” “and the mouth of wrongdoing is stopped,” when “He eliminates the wicked rulers from the earth.” These are *tzikei kedeira*, the most foul and wretched food in all the universe, and she desires to bring close to her even this refuse and to bring them under her sovereignty. It causes her pain [to leave this desire unfulfilled], but it is unfitting for her to state this in public, because the time for repair – for improving this refuse and making it “a hero’s meal” – has not yet arrived. So they instituted that we recite [“Blessed be the name”] in quiet, since these repairs still must remain secretive and whispered by those who engage solely in dedicating their souls [to God] and in holy service.

**“Blessed Be the Name of His Holy Kingdom”: The Lower Oneness of God**

 R. Tzadok Ha-Kohen of Lublin also understood that the phrase *tzikei kedeira* has a negative connotation. In contrast to Malbim’s explanation, according to R. Tzadok, the parable of the spiced pudding means something entirely different in relation to reciting “Blessed be the name” quietly. The parable indicates that by whispering the statement, we achieve a lower spiritual level from a certain perspective.

 Following the approach of the *Zohar* (*Zohar*, *Bereishit* 18b), which states that the *Shema* is the “higher oneness” and that “Blessed is the name” is the “lower oneness,” R. Tzadok writes:

“One Lord” is the higher oneness, the oneness of before the world was created, which was before the revelation of creation at the beginning of the emanation. As all the traits and attributes that appear to be a variety of different traits are subsumed in complete unity at their source, which is the higher intellect, as all is one there in complete unity.

“With one name” refers to the side of God’s creations, as one can only name something when there is one thing that is perceived as separate and apart from oneself, which he can then name… The name that accords with man’s grasp and comprehension of God is the name that God should be called. Because it was on this basis that the entirety of creation that can comprehend God’s divinity and dominion was created. As even after the world was created, in truth there is nothing separate or apart from Him, God forbid. As Rambam wrote in the beginning of *Hilkhot Yesodei Ha-Torah*, all of reality stems solely from the truth of His existence. This does not refer to the beginning of creation alone, but to the reality of the present as well, and for all eternity. Since He, may He be blessed, revives everyone and “continually renews the work of creation, day after day.” This is the lower oneness of “Blessed be the name of His glorious kingdom forever and ever,” as all of creation is meant to reveal the aspect of His kingship, since there can be no king without a nation, as is known. (*Pri Tzaddik*, *Kedushat Shabbat* 6)

We will attempt to clarify the matter to the best of our meager abilities. The question of the relationship between God and His creations is what stands as the basis for the gap between the higher oneness and the lower oneness. From a divine perspective, the approach is one of complete unification. All of God’s creation in its entirety is subsumed in Him; there is none beside Him. The idea of creation is subsumed in Him, as is the creation in practice. This is the higher oneness.[[4]](#footnote-4) From this perspective, there is nothing that exists in the world aside from God. All of His creation and existence are subsumed in Him, rendered nullified in relation to the existence of God Himself.

 We mentioned earlier that creation and divine providence are essentially connected; it is impossible to describe creation without providence. God, the Creator, sustains His creations at any given moment. Without the divine will, God’s creation would not be able to exist even for a single moment. Clearly, then, all of God’s creation is subsumed within Him, as every moment in time is like a new creation *ex nihilo* that is subsumed within Him and His divine plan.[[5]](#footnote-5)

 This is the meaning of our declaration in reciting the *Shema*. We state that God, who is the Creator, is completely one. It is as if we are saying that there is none beside Him and all of God’s creation is subsumed in Him.

 However, there exists another viewpoint that allows for the possibility of the discrete existence of God’s creation. It is specifically in the existence of God’s creation that His kingship in the world is expressed. Since there can be no king without a nation, we must view the King and His nation as two separate entities, as it were.

 The purpose of the discrete existence of God’s creation is to crown God as King of the world and to emphasize His unity. This point is reflected in in the phrase “the name of His glorious kingdom.” The whole concept of naming can only exist when there are multiple separate entities, such that it becomes necessary to label them in order to refer to them independently. We too, as God’s creations, declare our own existence by stating that God’s name is one, and that we have crowned Him as King over us.

 In his work *Resisei Layla*, R. Tzadok expands on the matter:

And this is the meaning of God’s oneness, as the tribes said to Yaakov, “Just as there is in your heart no division…” (*Pesachim* 56a) – that even though we are divided souls, all is actually one, a complete unit. It was because of this that Yaakov said, “Blessed be the name of His glorious kingdom forever and ever” – an expression of lower oneness through the aspect of God’s kingship. As there can be no king without a nation, which implies numerous separate individuals, but nonetheless we are all one nation from the perspective of our subservience to the king. But Moshe did not say it, as [the *Zohar* states,] “Moshe on the inside; Yaakov on the outside” (*Tikkunei Zohar*, *Tikkun* 13). From the inner perspective, there is only the higher oneness, which is the complete oneness of the notion that there is none beside Him. But from the outer perspective, which states that there exist separate creations, but nonetheless their inner quality is one, this is the lower oneness of Yaakov, who sees his children diverge after him. And this is the spiced pudding that the king’s daughter smelled. This means that God enjoys it, even though it is shameful to say, since it appears that there are separate entities. But nonetheless this is the key to the king’s honor, so we bring it secretly. (*Resisei Layla* 40)

The difference between the two types of God’s oneness lies in the question of whether we negate the very existence of God’s creation by subsuming it within the existence of God or if God’s creations affirm the existence of one God in His world by crowning Him within that existence. The higher oneness is expressed in God’s solitary selfhood – that there is none beside Him – while the lower oneness is expressed in God’s creations, who recognize His kingship and view Him as the one and only King of the world.

 R Tzadok continues in *Pri Tzedek*:

As the higher oneness, which is expressed in God’s selfhood, may He be blessed, and His leadership is revealed to the hearts of all the people of Israel. Because of this, Moshe said only this, and wrote it in the Written Torah, since Moshe’s face was like the face of the sun, which is a revealed, shining light for all… as [we read,] “Moshe on the inside; Yaakov on the outside.” This means that Moshe our master is the root of the inner quality of all of Israel, as he shines only for the eyes of the intellect and the heart. But Yaakov is the root of all of Israel even in their outer quality.

Moshe sees the depth of God’s inner quality, which is that there is none beside Him – the deeper perspective that everything is subsumed within God. In contrast, Yaakov adopts the outer perspective of God’s creations, who see His creation from the outside. From this vantage point, as we said, God’s creations exist independently of God, and their purpose is to crown God alone over the entire world.

 Thus, we invoke the higher oneness of God by unifying His name out loud through the verse “Hear, O Israel!” which is the oneness of God associated with Moshe. In addition, we invoke the lower oneness of God by crowning His name over ourselves from the perspective of His creations, through the legacy of our patriarch Yaakov – the father of the nation of Israel – with the statement, “Blessed be the name of His glorious kingdom forever and ever.”

**The Dual Kingship on Rosh Hashana**

At *Musaf* of Rosh Hashana, we recite the series of verses called *Malkhuyot* (“Kingships”). According to the *gemara* in *Rosh Hashana*, one must recite four Biblical verses within the blessing of *Malkhuyot*, three at the beginning and one at the end. However, the *gemara* points out that no more than three verses dealing with kingship can be found in the Torah, and as a result the following law is cited:

We can understand this being done with *Zikhronot* (“Remembrances”) and *Shofarot* verses, because there are many of them [in the Torah], but of *Malkhuyot* verses there are only three: “The Lord their God is with them, and their King’s acclaim in their midst” (*Bamidbar* 23:21); “The He became King in Jeshurun” (*Devarim* 33:5); and “The Lord will reign forever and ever” (*Shemot* 15:18). We require ten verses [in all] and [in this way] we cannot find them! R. Huna replied: Come and hear. “Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord alone.” This is a *Malkhuyot* verse according to R. Yose, though R. Yehuda says it is not a *Malkhuyot* verse. “Know therefore this day and keep in mind that the Lord alone is God in heaven above and on earth below; there is no other” (*Devarim* 4:39). This is a *Malkhuyot* verse according to R. Yose, though R. Yehuda says it is not a *Malkhuyot* verse. “It has been clearly demonstrated to you that the Lord alone is God; there is none beside Him” (*Devarim* 4:35). This is a *Malkhuyot* verse according to R. Yose, though R. Yehuda says it is not a *Malkhuyot* verse. (*Rosh Hashana* 32b)

Three verses are cited in this passage as candidates for the role of final *Malkhuyot* verse, even though the word “king” does not appear in any of them. As the *gemara* states, the *Tanna’im* debated whether these verses are viable *Malkhuyot* verses, and it appears that their debate is connected to our discussion here.

 In each of the three verses, the unity of God is stressed as the only possible conception of reality. We discussed at length above how “Hear, O Israel!” fits this description; the other two verses also emphasize the fact that there is only one God and there is none beside Him. These three verses present the reality that God is one and that His oneness subsumes within it all the rest of the universe and all that exists in it.

 The *Tanna’im* debate, then, whether we can appreciate the concept of God’s kingship in a world in which all of existence is subsumed within God Himself, or if such an absolute conception of God’s existence negates the existence of His nation, without which there can be no King.

 It seems that there are two aspects to the concept of kingship. These two aspects find expression in the words of the ancient *piyyut*, *Adon Olam*: “Lord of the universe, who reigned before the birth of anything – when by His will all things were made, then was His name proclaimed King.” Thus, even though there can be no king without a nation, and “then was His name proclaimed King” only once “all things were made,” nevertheless the deeper essence of His kingship existed even “before the birth of anything” – in the creation that existed in His thoughts and subsumed within Him. This is the higher plane of God’s kingship. Our custom is that we crown God as King over us on Rosh Hashana through His lower oneness, while concluding the blessing of *Malkhuyot* with His higher oneness: “Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord alone.”[[6]](#footnote-6)

**A Final Thought**

To complete our overview of “Blessed be the name of His glorious kingdom forever and ever,” let us present a passage from the *Zohar*:

“Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord alone.” This verse may have been acceptable when Yaakov’s sons said it to their father, or when Moshe said it to Israel, but now, when everyone recites “Hear, O Israel!” to which “Israel” are we speaking? Rather, we learned that our patriarch Yaakov did not die, but God placed him on a precious throne so that he could constantly witness his children as they unify the name of the Holy One, blessed be He, as they do every day two times… At that moment, all the host of heaven begin to say, “Blessed be the name of His glorious kingdom for ever and ever.” (*Zohar Chadash Rut* 28a)

Based on this passage, the nation of Israel unifies the name of God throughout the generations by reciting the *Shema* twice daily. This unification is God’s higher oneness, as our patriarch Yaakov testifies that his children unify God’s name every day – as they should – two times. At that moment, all the host of heaven – the angels, who see the nation of Israel unifying God – proclaim out loud, “Blessed be the name of His glorious kingdom forever and ever.”

 It is specifically the holy angels, who live on high, who understand how important it is for God’s “lower” creations to praise their King. The angels see, through all the veils and barriers that obscure our view, God’s kingship revealed throughout the world by the actions of the people of Israel. From their exalted perspective, they declare this openly and unabashedly. Fortunate is the King whose lower creations crown Him upon them. We too must accept upon ourselves, twice daily, with great love:

“Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord alone.”

“Blessed be the name of His glorious kingdom forever and ever.”

Translated by Daniel Landman

1. As God told Daniel, “But you, Daniel, keep the words secret and seal the book until the end of days. Many will range far and wide and knowledge will increase” (*Daniel* 12:4). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See the remainder of *Tzelach*’s commentary, where he concludes that the reason we recite “Blessed be the name” quietly is that we want to avoid interrupting between two of Moshe’s statements: “Hear, O Israel!” and “You shall love.” However, if one wants to recite “Blessed be the name of His glorious kingdom” in a different framework, he may recite it out loud. *Tzelach* writes:

It is for this reason that I have found justification for some communities that have the custom, when they fast on Erev Rosh Chodesh, to follow the prayers of Yom Kippur Katan by reciting “Hear, O Israel!” and then reciting “Blessed be the name” out loud. Some reproached them, but I said that since they are only reciting the first verse of the *Shema*, there is no reason to insist [that they recite “Blessed be the name” quietly”], because there is no interruption between Moshe’s statements.

The *poskim* expanded upon *Tzelach*’s reasoning; see *Yabi’a Omer* 8:11. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See also Maharal, *Netzach Yisrael* 44. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The idea arose in Him to create the world, an idea that is an inseparable part of God Himself. It is well known from Rambam (in *Hilkhot Yesodei Ha-Torah*) and from the kabbalists that He, His thought, and His wisdom are all one. As a result, His unity is a simple unity – unlike man, whose identity and whose thoughts are two distinct entities. As we will explain below, it is not only the idea of creation that is subsumed in Him, but the creation itself as well. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. See *Tanya*, *Sha’ar Ha-Yichud* 1-2, 7-9, for more on these ideas. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. See also *Be’er Miriam*: *Rosh Hashana*, where I offer an explanation of the debate between the *Bavli* and the *Yerushalmi* over the use of the phrase “the holy King” during the Ten Days of Repentance in the *Amida*. I explain that the question is also whether the emphasis is on the sanctity of God’s name because of God’s oneness – that there is none beside Him – or if the sanctity of His name expresses itself in God’s sovereignty over his creations. I explain at length the foundation of this dispute, and in light of our discussion here, it will become clear that the two perspectives also represent the relationship between God’s higher oneness and His lower oneness. It may be that the Sages of *Eretz Yisrael* adopted the concept of God’s higher oneness, while the Sages of Babylonia adopted the concept of His lower oneness. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)