**YESHIVAT HAR ETZION**

**ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)**

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**Before Sinai: Jewish Values and Jewish Law**

**By Rav Dr. Judah Goldberg**

**Shiur #73: Berit Avot and Jewish Leadership (4):**

**The King and Spirituality (Value #4)**

The previous *shiur* ended with a description of the unique relationship that the Davidic kings share with the Temple and Yerushalayim. This *shiur* looks past the Temple to consider the king’s spiritual role more generally.

**The King and Spirituality**

While the king’s dedication to the Temple is paramount, he understands as well as anyone that the Divine Presence, as we have previously discussed (*shiur* #22), inhabits a building, but even more so dwells among a people. The Temple and its rites are only meaningful as the highest expression of a deep and vibrant love relationship between God and the entire Jewish people. As “[the king’s] heart is the heart of the entire congregation of Israel” (Rambam, *Hilkhot Melakhim* 3:6), the king must embody this transcendent spiritual quest and cultivate it among his subjects. The king is not a spiritual leader, but he is charged, I would contend, with leading the people in the broad pursuit of the spiritual life.

Responsibility for Sinaitic law, and for instructing and rebuking the people, lie with their sages and prophets, respectively. But the king, as layperson-in-chief, is responsible for promoting spirituality as an overarching value and desiderata for the nation. Certainly, this begins with fidelity to the law and its keepers. The king must write a Torah scroll, keep one with him at all times (Rambam, *Hilkhot Melakhim* 3:1), and engage with its contents constantly (ibid., 5-6). He must show honor to Torah scholars (ibid., 2:5) and is tasked with reading from the Torah at *Hakhel*, a reenactment of Har Sinai held every seven years (Rambam, *Hilkhot Chagiga* 3:3-6).[[1]](#footnote-2)

But in the spirit of *berit Avot*, the king’s dedication to spirituality must transcend these roles. Whether religion is a priority or an afterthought in society, whether its representatives are celebrated or marginalized, and whether God’s presence is welcome and sought after or is declined or ignored – are all heavily influenced by political leadership and depend on much more than mere compliance with the law. Again, in *berit Avot* fashion, the mandate is ambiguous and fluid, yet fundamental to the king’s mission of leading the Jewish people toward their multifaceted destiny.

Fittingly, Tanakh’s expectations and praises of King David and his descendants frequently echo the language of *berit Avot* spirituality that we previously documented in *shiur* #62 – of **love** of God, purity of **heart**, ***temimut***, and **walking** **before** God – just as they invoke the *berit Avot* terminology of *tzedaka u-mishpat* (see *shiur* #39). David’s devotion and purity of **heart** are recurrent themes in the Biblical text,[[2]](#footnote-3) as is his ***temimut***.[[3]](#footnote-4) Like our *Avot*, David “**walks before**” God,[[4]](#footnote-5) and the Sages note their bilateral **love** (*Midrash Tehillim* on 63:2),[[5]](#footnote-6) as well as David’s attachment to the mitzva of circumcision (*Menachot* 43b).[[6]](#footnote-7) Accordingly, King David can be seen as embodying and perpetuating Avraham’s spirituality (in contrast to Doeg and Achitofel, who forsake it), as *shiurim* #62-63 explored.

Furthermore, David is intensely committed to passing on the values of his monarchy to his son and successor, Shlomo. Just as David instructs Shlomo to maintain the path of *tzedaka u-mishpat* (see *shiur* #39), so too does he bid him to stay faithful to the spiritual tradition of *berit* *Avot*. Of course, compliance with *berit Sinai* is an absolute prerequisite for success, and so David commands Shlomo “to observe [God’s] statutes, commandments, laws, and testimonies, as is written in the Torah of Moshe” (I *Melakhim* 2:3). But that is not enough. David also exhorts Shlomo, “Know the God of your father,[[7]](#footnote-8) and worship Him with a full **heart** and with an eager soul, for God investigates all **hearts** and discerns every impulse” (I *Divrei Ha-yamim* 28:9); and of God, David asks, “And to Shlomo, my son, give a full **heart**, to observe Your commandments, testimonies, and statutes, and to do everything, and to build ]God’s] palace for which I have prepared” (ibid., 29:19).[[8]](#footnote-9)

King Shlomo, in turn, perpetuates his father’s messages about ***temimut***[[9]](#footnote-10) and purity of **heart**,[[10]](#footnote-11) as the Sages observe (*Midrash Mishlei* 11:20). In prayer, Shlomo reflects keen understanding of his father’s spiritual legacy:

Shlomo said, “You performed great kindness with Your servant, my father David, insofar as he **walked before You** with truth and with *tzedaka*, and with **integrity of the heart** with You.”(*I Melakhim* 3:6)[[11]](#footnote-12)

Strikingly, Tanakh declares that “God **loved** [Shlomo]” (II *Shmuel* 12:24) and that “Shlomo **loved** God” (*I Melakhim* 3:3).[[12]](#footnote-13) Shlomo, apparently, is more than just another Biblical hero. Like Avraham, he shares a special covenant of love with God.

**Avraham and Shlomo**

The Sages take note of the unusual language regarding King Shlomo and highlight parallels between God’s affection for Shlomo and His affection for the *Avot*. The *Sifrei* draws a straight line between Shlomo and Avraham in suggesting that God’s love for the *Avot*, though it carries over to all of their progeny, is particularly manifest in the figure of King Shlomo and the Temple that he builds:

Six are called ***yedidim*** (adored):

The **Holy One, blessed be He**, is called a *yadid*, as it says, “I will sing to my ***Yadid***” (*Yeshayahu* 5:1).

**Avraham** is called a *yadid*, as it says, “What for My ***yadid*** in My house?” (*Yirmiyahu* 11:15).

Binyamin is called a *yadid*, as it says, “To Binyamin, [Moshe] said: ***Yadid*** of God” (*Devarim* 33:12).

**Shlomo** is called a *yadid*, as it says, “He sent through Natan the Prophet; and he called ]Shlomo’s] name **Yedidya** (=adored of God)” (II *Shmuel* 12:25).

The **Jewish people** are called *yedidim*, as it says, “I handed over the ***yedidut*** (love) of My soul” (*Yirmiyahu* 12:7).

The **Temple** is called *yedid*, as it says, “How ***yedidot*** (adored) are Your sanctuaries” (*Tehillim* 84:2). (*Sifrei*, *Devarim*, 352)

The *Sifrei* concludes:

Let a ***yadid ben yadid*** [Shlomo *ben* (descendant of) Avraham] come and build a ***yedid*** **house** for the ***Yadid***.

Let the **Jewish people**, who are called ***yedidim***, **children of Avraham**, who is called a ***yadid***, come and build the **Temple**, which is called ***yedid***, in the portion of Binyamin, who is called a ***yadid***, for the **Holy One, blessed be He**, who is called ***Yadid***.[[13]](#footnote-14)

Shlomo is not merely another righteous figure but is dubbed “*yadid* *ben* *yadid*” – the direct, spiritual heir to Avraham and leader of a nation of *yedidim*. Together, they erect the Temple, the ultimate testament to God’s intimacy with the children of Avraham.

This passage from the *Sifrei* also appears in *Avot de-Rabbi Natan*, which goes on to note a similar set of textual parallels:

These five are called “**beloved**” (***ahuvim***):

**Avraham** is called beloved, as it says, “The progeny of Avraham, My **adorer** (***ohavi***)” (*Yeshayahu* 41:8).

**Yaakov** is called beloved, as it says, “I **loved** Yaakov” (*Malakhi* 1:2).[[14]](#footnote-15)

The **Jewish people** are called beloved, as it says, “I **loved** you, said God” (ibid.).

**Shlomo** is called beloved, as it says, “And he was **beloved** to his God” (*Nechemya* 13:26).

The gates of **Yerushalayim** are called beloved, as it says, “God **loves** the gates of Zion” (*Tehillim* 87:2). (*Avot de-Rabbi Natan*, Version B, 43)

Here, Shlomo is grouped with the *Avot* as uniquely “beloved,” singled out from among all of their beloved children (the Jewish people), with Yerushalayim identified as the epicenter of God’s covenant of love.

Were David and Shlomo alone associated with the themes of *berit Avot* spirituality, one could have suggested that this reflects only their personal righteousness and not the office that they each held. However, Tanakh frequently revisits the familiar language of *berit Avot* in setting the expectations for *all* Jewish kings.

In David’s final command to Shlomo, David recounts how God told him that his dynasty will be everlasting only if “your children will maintain their path to **walk before Me** in truth, **with all of their heart and all of their soul**” (I *Melakhim* 2:4). Shlomo later quotes this stipulation, acknowledging God’s covenant with David – “if your children maintain their path to **walk before Me** as you **walked before Me**” (I *Melakhim* 8:25; compare to II *Divrei Ha-yamim* 6:16). Finally, God repeats this message back, telling Shlomo that his dynasty will flourish only “if you **walk before Me** **as your father, David,** **walked with wholeness of heart** (***tom-leivav***) and with integrity, to do as everything I have commanded you, [and] you observe My statutes and laws” (*I Melakhim* 9:4; compare to II *Divrei Ha-yamim* 7:17).

Thereafter, Tanakh repeatedly sizes up the ways and hearts of kings, noting which, like those of David and his righteous descendants, were fully devoted to God, and which were less so.[[15]](#footnote-16) Of particular note, King Chizkiyahu appeals to God to recall “how **I walked before You** in truth and **with a full heart**” (II *Melakhim* 20:3; *Yeshayahu* 38:3) – I would say, in the footsteps of his ancestors David and Avraham.[[16]](#footnote-17) All Jews, of course, are expected to embrace the spiritual vision of *berit Avot*, but it seems that the king is singled out to play the role of Avraham as head of the tribe and thus to lead both his own household as well as all of his subjects in this mission.

**Monarchy as a Balancing Act**

The last several *shiurim* argued that the king, while of course bound by *berit Sinai*, is charged specifically with acting as the protagonist of *berit Avot*. On the one hand, he champions the values of *berit Avot* in ways that are not directly related to observance of *berit Sinai*, such as in fighting voluntary wars and ensuring economic wellbeing for the nation. On the other hand, he pursues the values of *berit Avot* as a *complement* to *berit Sinai*, in two senses: 1) The king must support the institutions that *underlie* the flourishing of *berit Sinai*, such as the court system and the Temple; 2) The king must continually push his people to rise *above* *berit Sinai*, to not suffice with mere legal compliance but to aspire to perform *tzedaka u-mishpat* and to walk before God more generally.

As an agent of *berit Avot*, the king has considerable latitude in pursuing its transcendent, amorphous values. But for that very reason, it is crucial that he remains rooted in *berit Sinai* and maintains respect for its rigid boundaries. *Shiur* #38 quoted the Ran’s observation that only the king, in contrast to judges, must wear a Torah scroll at all times, for his broad, open-ended mandate could easily distract him from concern for the law and its meticulous observance. For good reason, Tanakh warns that the success of the monarchy will be a function of its allegiance to the law.[[17]](#footnote-18) Thus, as much as the king is emboldened by the sweeping vision of *berit Avot*, he must simultaneously submit before the regimen of *berit Sinai*.

If only this balancing act were so simple. Later kings, for instance, failed miserably at this task; they were flagrant violators of *berit Sinai* in every respect, and they are held to account. But even the great King Shlomo, the celebrated *yadid* and *ahuv* who arguably brought *berit Avot* to its pinnacle, stumbled. The Sages note that Shlomo violated the *berit Sinai* clauses regarding the monarchy to not amass wives or horses or money (see *Devarim* 17:16-17), and how that ultimately compromised him.[[18]](#footnote-19) How could God’s *yadid* and *ahuv* so brazenly thumb his nose at God’s laws?

Certainly, one could attribute Shlomo’s missteps to hubris. Blessed with superhuman insight (I *Melakhim* 3:12), perhaps Shlomo believed that these laws are only relevant for lesser beings, who would be susceptible to corruption (see *Sanhedrin* 21b). Additionally, though, I would suggest that perhaps Shlomo’s audacity resulted from his understanding of his role. One so closely associated with Avraham – a *yadid ben yadid* – might inherit, together with the *Avot*’s soaring spirit and ambition, an impulse for a mode of worship that was, in its time, unfettered by nearly any constraints.

In this context, I think the following Rabbinic teaching might be instructive:

“Kohelet sought to find words of *chefetz* (delight)” (*Kohelet* 12:10) – Kohelet [=Shlomo] sought to issue judgments from his heart, without witnesses and without forewarning. A Heavenly voice came out and declared, “And *yosher* (uprightness) is written” (ibid.) – “By two witnesses, etc.”[[19]](#footnote-20) (*Rosh Hashana* 21b)

What exactly does Shlomo seek? According to a parallel *midrash* (in which David makes the requests on Shlomo’s behalf), his aspiration is to be God-like:

“[To] Shlomo[[20]](#footnote-21) – God, give Your ***mishpat*** to a king, and Your ***tzedaka*** to the son of a king” (*Tehillim* 72:1). It does not say “my *mishpat*,” rather, “Your *mishpat*.”

David said: Master of the universe, give Your ***mishpat*** to the son of a king. Just as You judge without witnesses and without forewarning, so should Shlomo judge without witnesses and without forewarning. (*Midrash Tehillim* on 72:1)

In other words, Shlomo wants to emulate the ultimate *mishpat* and *tzedaka* of God (see *shiur* #46), who operates by pure wisdom alone. Ostensibly, this is what Avraham was privileged to experience, as his mission of *tzedaka u-mishpat* was guided solely by personal intuition, without objective demands. It is not freedom for its own sake that David and Shlomo are after, but the ability to similarly pursue transcendent values without having to answer to the restrictive rules of *berit Sinai*, such as the need for two witnesses.

Perhaps, like many Jews after him, Shlomo wants to worship God just like the *Avot* did. For the *Avot*, R. Chayim of Volozhin explains, the law was provisional and could be overridden when warranted by their judgment (see *shiur* #5). If he who was prophetically named Yedidya is a figurative reincarnation of the original *yadid*, then perhaps he ought to similarly be able to employ his discretion as to when the law should be suspended in pursuit of higher goals.

In the continuation of the *midrash* above, God grants Shlomo temporary autonomy in his judgment regarding a disputed baby (I *Melakhim* 3:16-28), which indeed illustrates the elevation of pure intuition over traditional methods of jurisprudence.[[21]](#footnote-22) But God’s overall stance is clear: Shlomo must stay tethered to the laws of *berit Sinai*, whether in seeking justice or in advancing other aims.[[22]](#footnote-23) Even history’s “Yedidya” is subject to the principle later articulated by R. Chayim: “This [flexible] kind of Divine service applied only before the giving of the Torah. But ever since Moshe came and brought it down to earth, ‘It is not in Heaven’ (*Devarim* 30:12)” (*Nefesh Ha-chayim*, Preamble to Section 4, ch. 7) – adherence to the law is nonnegotiable.

Shlomo, though, does not absorb this message, and he indeed ends up corrupted. If, at the beginning of his reign, *Sefer Melakhim* declares that “Shlomo **loved** God, to follow the rules of his father David” (I *Melakhim* 3:3), by the end it laments, “And King Shlomo **loved** many foreign women” (ibid., 11:1). The heart that once swelled with religious devotion is led astray: “When Shlomo grew old, his wives turned **his heart** after other gods, **and his heart was no longer whole with Hashem, his God, like the heart of his father David**” (I *Melakhim* 11:4).

**Regulation of the Heart**

But there is a further, piercing irony embedded in Shlomo’s story. I conjecture that Shlomo, in his dogged pursuit of the pure, transcendent values of *berit Avot*, including worship with a full and whole heart, did not want to let minor details of *berit Sinai* slow him down. If only he had heeded *berit Sinai*’s warning against excess wives for the king “so that his **heart** does not deviate” (*Devarim* 17:17)! In other words, *berit Sinai* doesn’t *get in the way* of a pulsating, bursting heart. To the contrary, *the law keeps it on track*. Moreover, it is precisely those who most deeply internalize and identify with *berit Avot* and its language of values who need to realize that most.

The story of Shlomo’s tragic downfall speaks first and foremost to kings and other political leaders, whose latitude to run after grandiose visions could easily turn into neglect of the rules that are meant to ground them. But it also speaks to anyone who is tasked with balancing ambition with obedience, independence with servitude, passion with discipline, *berit Avot* with *berit Sinai* – in other words, all of us. Furthermore, the lessons to be learned are not only about the inviolability of the law, but also about the dangers of undervaluing it. Shlomo’s troubles began not with deciding to override some laws, I would say, but with ever doubting their necessity.

On the one hand, we do not deny the real possibility of surface-level conflict between the different modes listed above, as well as the need to sometimes surrender unconditionally before the rigidity of the law. On the other hand, we do not want to be so preoccupied with the tensions that can emerge from a multiplicity of orientations that we miss what they lend each other, as well as their composite beauty. The law is not a hindrance to political achievement, or spiritual aspiration, or supreme justice, as Shlomo might have suspected. Rather, it is ultimately a pathway to them, the perfect complement to transcendent values.

Every Jew, if not every person created *be-tzelem Elokim*, is charged with discovering and cultivating the remarkable symbiosis between values and laws. And who better to model that than the king?

**For Further Thought:**

1. **“To Elevate the True Religion”**

In a summary statement about the king’s mission, the Rambam writes:

In everything, his activities should be directed for the sake of Heaven. His aim and intent should be to elevate the true religion, and to fill the world with *tzedek* (justice), and to break the arm of the wicked (see *Tehillim* 10:15), and to fight God’s wars. (*Hilkhot Melakhim* 4:10)

On the one hand, the goals the Rambam specifies – “to elevate the true religion” and “to fill the world with *tzedek*” – certainly overlap with the values of spirituality and of *tzedaka u-mishpat*, respectively, discussed in this and the previous *shiur*. However, it is ambiguous whether these are primarily internal goals for the sake of the Jewish people or external goals directed toward other nations (or both), especially in light of the juxtaposition with “God’s wars.” See Prof. Blidstein, *Ekronot*, 105-110, 230-245 and *mori ve-rabbi* Harav Yehuda Amital, *Resisei Tal* 1:32.

If the king is charged with “elevating the true religion” within the Jewish people, this would underscore his overarching yet informal role in promoting religious worship and conduct. As Prof. Blidstein notes, the king has no formal religious authority; nonetheless:

It would seem that the king is responsible for generating conditions that foster Torah study and mitzva observance. He concerns himself with fortifying the institutions that are responsible for teaching, interpreting, and enforcing the Torah, and even himself should “compel the Jewish people” to follow the path of Torah (see Rambam, *Hilkhot Melakhim* 11:4). (Ibid., 107)

Notably, the king is at the center of the *hakhel* ceremony, which the Rambam describes twice as strengthening “the true religion” (*Hilkhot Chagiga* 3:1, 6).[[23]](#footnote-24) In reading from the Torah before the entire nation, the king is reenacting Sinai and standing in for God (ibid.). Admittedly, this is an anomalous role for the king, who otherwise does not carry sacral responsibilities. However one explains it, though, *hakhel* certainly illustrates the king’s hand in reinforcing commitment to *berit Sinai*.[[24]](#footnote-25)

On the other hand, if the king “elevates the true religion” by waging “God’s wars” against pagan nations, then spreading monotheism might be part of his mandate. Interestingly, this was a focus of Avraham’s activities (though not by coercion; see *shiur* #49) that receives little attention in *berit Sinai*. Could the king be perpetuating Avraham’s mission in this capacity?

1. **David and the *Avot***

This *shiur* highlighted the ways in which King David perpetuates the *Avot*’s spiritual legacy. In that context, I note the following request that a Rabbinic *aggada* (legend) attributes to David:

[David] said before [God]: Master of the universe, why do [the Jewish people] say, “God of Avraham, God of Yitzchak, and God of Yaakov,” but they do not say “God of David”?

[God] said: They were tested for Me; you were not tested for Me.

[David] said before Him: “Master of the universe, evaluate me and test me!” As it says, “Evaluate me, God, and test me; [verify the purity of my kidneys and my **heart**]” (*Tehillim* 26:2). (*Sanhedrin* 107a)

David apparently seeks to join, in some sense, the exclusive ranks of the *Avot*. God replies that what set the *Avot* apart was their endurance of “tests” (*nisyonot*, such as the *akeida*) and their willingness to sacrifice for the sake of God – arguably a function of their “purity of heart,” as explained in *shiur* #62. David then asks for his own *nissayon* so that the purity of his heart can be similarly demonstrated.

The aggadic request to have the Jewish people pray to the “God of David” sounds audacious, but it has a basis in the Biblical text. God never identifies Himself as “God of Moshe” or “God of Yona” in Tanakh, as some medieval commentators observe.[[25]](#footnote-26) But twice He introduces Himself as “Hashem, **God of David**, your forefather” (II *Melakhim* 20:5; *Yeshayahu* 38:5; II *Divrei Ha-yamim* 21:12),[[26]](#footnote-27) just as He is called “God of Avraham” (and of Yitzchak and Yaakov), and that parallel is likely what this *aggada* is reflecting.

According to the *Bavli*, David ultimately falls short of the *Avot* and is denied his request.[[27]](#footnote-28) However, this doesn’t mean that his grouping with the *Avot* is wholly rejected.

First, the *Yerushalmi* nonetheless formulates a blessing of “**God of David** and Builder of Jerusalem,” as noted in the previous *shiur*. Similarly, *Midrash Shmuel* (26:3), commenting upon the verse, “And I made you a great name, like the name of the great ones” (II *Shmuel* 7:9), remarks: “From here the Sages established ‘**God of David** and Builder of Jerusalem,’ parallel to ‘God of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov.’”

According to the Tosafot Rid (*Ta’anit* 13b), the *Bavli* and the *Yerushalmi* disagree about the fate of David’s request. The thirteenth-century R. Moshe of London, however, suggests a resolution between the *Bavli* and *Yerushalmi* (*Tosafot Chokhmei Angliya*, *Pesachim* 117b): David’s request was that “God of David” should be said together with “God of Avraham, God of Yitzchak, etc.” *in the blessing of Avot*, so that he will be mentioned even on Shabbat and holidays. This request, according to the *Bavli*, is rejected, but the phrase “God of David and Builder of Yerushalayim” can still be said in the weekday prayer, as the *Yerushalmi* advises; indeed, it was recited by R. Moshe himself, as attested by his son, R. Eliyahu.[[28]](#footnote-29)

Second, even though the phrase “God of David” is not incorporated into our prayers according to mainstream practice, the verse “I made you a great name, like the name of the great ones” comes to fruition, according to the *Bavli*, through the post-*haftara* blessing that ends, “*Magen* (Defender) of David” (*Pesachim* 117b). This closing parallels the closing to the first blessing of the *Amida*, “*Magen Avraham*”; thus, the *Bavli* also recognizes that David is given distinction alongside “the great ones.”

To the extent that David is at all grouped with the *Avot*, we can ask: Is this merely a reflection of his personal stature, or might it speak to a particular spiritual orientation and legacy that he uniquely shares with them?

**More on “Purity of the Heart” and “Walking Before God”**

This *shiur* continued our analysis of these concepts, which began in *shiurim* #62-63. I add here some final observations:

Though the previous *shiur* contrasted the respective spiritual orientations of kings and priests, “purity of the heart” and “walking before God,” which we have highlighted with regard to kings, occasionally appear in the context of priests as well – see I *Shmuel* 2:30 and *Ezra* 7:10.

Similarly, God praises both kings and priests for acting in accordance with His “heart” – see I *Shmuel* 2:35 and II *Melakhim* 10:30.[[29]](#footnote-30)

Regarding God’s heart, see also *Yirmeyahu* 32:41, as well as *Tosefta Avoda Zara* 4:5.

**Chizkiyahu and the Sages**

Though many Jewish kings had little regard for the law, King Chizkiyahu was a shining exception.[[30]](#footnote-31) Nevertheless, he tested the law’s limits when it came to gathering the people for the Pesach offering and then asked for God’s forgiveness and understanding (II *Divrei Ha-yamim* 30:15-20; see Rambam, *Hilkhot Biat Ha-mikdash* 4:17-18). The Sages of his time did not agree with his decisions (*Pesachim* 56a). How might this episode illustrate friction between the champion of *berit Avot* and the keepers of *berit Sinai*? Also consider Chizkiyahu’s audacious, direct appeal to God, in defiance of a prophecy of his impending death by *Yeshayahu* (II *Melakhim* 20:1-3; *Yeshayahu* 38:1-3), as well as the conversation between themrecorded in *Berakhot* 10a (and discussed in *shiur* #5).

1. **Shlomo’s Prayer**

The Temple is typically thought of, first and foremost, as a place of sacrificial worship (see, for instance, the opening to the Rambam’s *Hilkhot Beit Ha-bekhira*). Yet when Shlomo dedicates it, he focuses instead on the Temple as a locus of prayer (I *Melakhim* 8:22-53), perhaps in keeping with Yaakov’s description of a “*sha’ar ha-shamayim*” (gateway to Heaven; *Bereishit* 28:17). Might prayer represent a more natural, intuitive engagement with the Divine Presence, in contrast to the formal rites assigned to the priests? Might these two modes align with *berit Avot* and *berit Sinai* approaches to the Temple, respectively?

1. **The Messiah**

The Messiah, a descendant of King David who will reestablish the monarchy, is anticipated to play many roles, summarized by the Rambam in the closing to his *Mishneh Torah* (*Hilkhot Melakhim*, Chapters 11-12; see also *Hilkhot Teshuva* 9:2). To what degree is the Messiah a wholly unique figure, both in terms of personality and functions, and to what degree does his mission both echo and model that of all kings under Jewish law? See Prof. Blidstein, ibid., 117-123, 245-253.

1. See For Further Thought #1. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. I *Melakhim* 11:4, 14:8, and 15:3; *Tehillim* 9:2, 17:3, 26:2, 27:8, 51:12, 57:8, 86:11-12, 108:2, 111:1, 119:7, 10 (with *Midrash Tehillim*), 34, 58, 69, 80, 145, 138:1, and 139:23; and I *Divrei Ha-yamim* 29:9-19 (and *Bereishit Rabba* 70:1-2). Contrast with I *Shmuel* 17:28, in which David’s brother Eliav doubts his heart! [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. II *Shmuel* 22:24, 26, and 33; and *Tehillim* 7:9, 15:2, 18:24, 26, 33 (and *Midrash Tehillim*), 19:14, 25:21, 26:1, 11, 37:18, 37, 41:13, 64:5 (and Radak), 84:12 (and *Midrash Tehillim* on 1:1), 101:2, 6, and 119:1 (and *Midrash Tehillim*). See also *Sifrei* on *Devarim* 18:13 and *Sota* 10b. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. See, for instance, *Tehillim* 56:14 and 116:9, as well as Rashi on II *Divrei Ha-yamim* 6:14. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. See also *Midrash Tehillim* on 119:113; *Tanna De-vei Eliyahu Rabba*, 3; and Rambam, *Hilkhot Lulav* 8:15. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. See also Rabbeinu Bechaye on *Bereishit* 17:24:

The Jewish people were privileged to have this mitzva [of circumcision], which is entrenched among them, and through it they were promised three gifts: 1) regarding the Davidic monarchy, that it will not end; 2) regarding the gift of the Land [of Israel], that it will be an everlasting inheritance for them; and 3) regarding the Divine Presence, that it will dwell among the Jewish people. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. See also *shiur* #48. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. See Rashi, who compares this verse to Shlomo’s own prayer in I *Melakhim* 8:57-61. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. See *Mishlei* 2:7 (and *Tanchuma*, *Lekh Lekha*, 11), 2:21, 10:9, 29, 11:3, 5, 20 (and Rabbeinu Yona), 13:6, 20:7 (and *Shemot Rabba* 25:5 and 30:20); 28:10, 18 (and *Midrash Tehillim* on 55:1); and Rabbeinu Bechaye on *Bereishit* 17:1. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. See, for instance, *Mishlei* 20:9 with *Midrash Mishlei*. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. See also Malbim. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
12. See also II *Shmuel* 7:14. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
13. See also *Menachot* 53a and *Midrash Tehillim* on 84:2. Additionally, *Midrash Tehillim* on 137:2 applies the term “*yadid*” to all three *Avot*.

Notably, “*yadid*” appears twice in the third blessing over circumcision (see *shiur* #53). As to whom it refers, see Rashi and *Tosafot* on *Shabbat* 137b; *Tosafot* on *Menachot*, ad loc; and *Sefer He-arukh*, “*yadid*,” in the name of R. Sherira Gaon. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
14. Regarding Yitzchak, see Rashi on *Shabbat* 137b. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
15. I *Melakhim* 11:2-9, 33, 38, 14:8, 15:3, 11-14, and 22:43; II *Melakhim* 10:31, 22:2, 23:3, and 23:25; and II *Divrei Ha-yamim* 12:14, 15:12-17, 16:9, 17:3 with Rashi, 6 (see also *Midrash Tanchuma*, *Shoftim*, 1), 19:3, 20:32-33, 21:12, 22:9, 25:2, 30:19 (see Radak and *Yerushalmi Pesachim* 9:1), 31:21, and 34:2, 31. See also I *Divrei Ha-yamim* 22:19 and II *Divrei Ha-yamim* 11:16-17, 19:9, 26:16, and 32:25-26. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
16. The parallel to Avraham is noted by Radak (*Bereishit* 17:1). [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
17. See, for instance, *Devarim* 17:19-20 with *Sifrei* and Rashi. See also *Mekhilta* on *Shemot* 18:27: “Three things were given on condition: the Land of Israel, the Temple, and the Davidic monarchy.” [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
18. See, for instance, *Sanhedrin* 21b and *Yerushalmi Sanhedrin* 2:6. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
19. The reference is likely to *Devarim* 19:15; see *Dikdukei Soferim*. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
20. Regarding the text, see *shiur* #39, note #4. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
21. According to the *midrash*, this is hinted in the verse, “Shlomo sat on the throne of God” (I *Divrei Ha-yamim* 29:23). *Shir Ha-shirim Rabba* (1:10) explains: “Just as ‘the throne of God’ judges without witnesses or forewarning, so does the throne of Shlomo judge without witnesses or forewarning.” I speculate that the *midrash* is referring to verses that speak of God’s throne as resting upon *mishpat* and *tzedek*/*tzedaka* (*Tehillim* 9:5-8, 89:15, and 97:2). Similarly, *Midrash Lekach Tov* (*Kohelet*, ad loc.) explains that the link between “matters of ***chefetz***” and God-like judgment is found in *Yirmeyahu* 9:23: “For I am God, who **performs** ***chesed***, ***mishpat***, and ***tzedaka*** in the land, for these I desire (***chafatzti***).” [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
22. See *Mishnat Rabbi Eliezer*, 8: “[Shlomo] requested to judge this way all his days, but the Holy One, blessed be He, did not let him.” [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
23. Regarding the Sanhedrin’s role in “strengthening religion,” see *Hilkhot Mamrim* 1:2 and 2:4. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
24. See also R. Rechnitz, *Medina Ke-halakha*, 41-42, 47. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
25. See the kabbalistic sources in footnote #28 below. However, compare to *Mishnat Rabbi Eliezer*, 8 and *Midrash Ha-gadol*, *Bereishit* 9:26. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
26. See also I *Melakhim* 1:36 (as noted by *Meshekh Chokhma*, *Haftara* to *Parashat Chayei Sara*) and II *Divrei Ha-yamim* 34:3. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
27. See *Sanhedrin* ad loc., as well as *Yerushalmi Berakhot* 9:5 and *Midrash Tehillim* on 18:31 and 26:2. Compare to *Bava Batra* 17a. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
28. *Peirushei Rabbeinu Eliyahu Mi-Londrish U-fsakav*, p. 105. There is also a medieval kabbalistic tradition that, while David does not belong to the triad of *Avot*, he is the fourth “leg” of God’s *merkava* (chariot; see, for instance, *Sefer Ha-Emuna Ve-habitachon*, Chapter 15). Thus, R. Yitzchak the Blind, a twelfth-century kabbalist, would say the *Yerushalmi*’s formulation “in order to mention the *merkava* in its entirety, with **four *Avot***, in his prayer” (*Rabbeinu Bechaye*, *Bereishit* 32:10; see also *Magen Avraham*, O.C. 188:4). See further in R. Shmuel Ashkenazi, “*E-lohei David U-voneh Yerushalayim*,” *Kovetz Beit Aharon Ve-Yisrael* 7:2 (Vol. 38; 5752 [1992]), 134-138. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
29. See also I *Shmuel* 13:14 and *Yirmeyahu* 3:15. Compare to II *Shmuel* 7:21 and I *Divrei Ha-yamim* 17:19. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
30. See, for instance, *shiur* #39, note #11. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)