

Hochmah Binah Va'Da'at or Dei'ah Binah V'Haskeil?

by Rabbi Haim Jachter

It is one of the most well known variations in the text of the Amidah. In the fourth Bracha of the Amidah, the prayer for wisdom, do we request Hochmah, Binah Da'at or Dei'ah Binah V'Haskeil? An examination of the wide range of Sephardic Siddurim found at a diverse Sephardic congregation such as Congregation Shaarei Orah, the Sephardic Congregation of Teaneck, reveals that the Minhag Yerushalmi/Rav Ovadia Yosef based Siddurim as well as the Syrian Siddurim have the text of Hochmah Binah Va'Da'at. On the other hand, the text in Moroccan and Turkish Siddurim is Dei'ah Binah V'Haskeil.

Arguments for Dei'ah Binah V'Haskeil

Strong arguments may be made for the assertion that Dei'ah Binah V'Haskeil represents the original text. The oldest Siddurim including the Siddur of Rav Amram Gaon and Rav Saadia Gaon as well as the Rambam have this variation. The work Divrei Shalom V'Emet (1:50) offers another compelling proof that this was the original text. This work notes that on Motza'ei Shabbat in the Ata Honantanu addition to the fourth Bracha all Sephardic Siddurim include a request for Mada V'Haskeil or Mada Binah V'Haskel. Mada is, clearly a variation on Dei'ah and not Hochmah.

Arguments for Hochmah, Binah VaDa'at

The work Sha'arei Tefillah (Dinei Amidah number 5) asserts that the formulation Hochmah, Binah VaDa'at seems to be based on Shemot 31:3. In this Pasuk, Hashem describes how He endowed Betzaleil, the chief architect of the Mishkan, with Hochmah, Tevunah and Da'at.

The work Sha'ar Kolleil (14:12) offers another basis for the formula of Hochmah, Binah VaDa'at. This work notes that the Amidah's fourth Bracha is referred to as the Bracha of Hochmah in Brachot 33a, Binah on Megillah 17a and Honein HaDa'at at Brachot 33a.

The Kabbalists embraced the formulation of Hochmah, Binah VaDa'at and is, as well known incorporated in the Nusah Sefarad Siddurim used by Hassidim

and those of Hassidic ancestry. The most famous proponents of this version are the Ari HaKadosh (Sha'ar HaKavanot Derush 6), the Siddur of Rav Shalom Sharabi (a great Yemenite Kabbalist who had great influence on many Siddurim) and the Kaf HaHaim of Rav Haim Palagi (15:23).

Explaining the Community's Customs

Why is it that Moroccan and Turkish Jews adopt the version of Dei'ah Binah V'Haskeil and the Minhag Yerushalayim and Syrian recite Hochmah, Binah Da'at? It seems to me that the reason is as follows. The version of Dei'ah Binah V'Haskeil is championed in the classic and authoritative Siddur of the late Rishon the Avudraham. The Avudraham resided in Spain.

The Spanish expulsion of large numbers of Jews who refused to convert to Christianity (referred to as the Megorashim, or expellees) caused considerable Halachic upheaval in the countries to which they relocated. Tension emerged as to which Minhagim should be followed, the Spanish Minhagim of the Megorashim or the Minhagim of the original Jewish residents (Toshavim). In Turkey and much of Morocco the customs the Megorashim brought from Spain emerged as the dominant Minhag. In Syria and Eretz Yisrael the practices of the original residents held sway.

It appears that the formulation of Dei'ah Binah V'Haskeil was the practice in Spain, based on the Siddur of the Avudraham. Thus, in Turkey and most of Morocco¹, Dei'ah Binah V'Haskeil emerged as the prevalent custom. This formulation had far less impact in Syria and Eretz Yisrael where the customs of the Megorashim had less impact.

Conclusion

It is utterly fascinating to see Jewish history come to life with a mere perusal of the range of Siddurim at a Sephardic synagogue that embraces the full range of Sephardic practices. It sends chills down my spine simply to see how Jewish History is not relegated (God forbid) to a museum or university class but rather a living and vibrant way of life with an illustrious past and brilliant future.

¹ An additional factor is that Moroccan practices are less inclined to be influenced by Kabbalistic considerations.