

## LESSON NINE

### PRAYER AND RITUAL IN THE MYSTICAL LIFE

TEXT ONE --- **Heikhalot** text (105-106)

Who is like the Lord our God; who is like our Master; who is like our King, who is like our Creator? None is so holy as our God, for there is none like Him and there is no Rock like our God. Rabbi Ishmael said: all these hymns and everything related to this matter, Rabbi Akiba heard when he descended to the **Merkavah**; he comprehended and learned them before His Glory, for the ministering angels of the Holy One, Blessed be He, chanted them before Him and blessed His glorious Name, and would exult for each blessing and praise.

TEXT TWO --- **Mishnah Berakhot** 2:2

Rabbi Joshua ben Korcha said: Why does the paragraph with **Sh'ma Yisrael** precede that of "**V'hayah im shamo**"? So that one might first acknowledge God's sovereignty, and afterwards accept the obligation of the commandments.

TEXT THREE --- Talmud, **Berakhot** 61b

When Rabbi Akiva was taken out for execution, it was the time to recite the **Sh'ma**. While the executioners ripped his flesh with iron combs, he was accepting God's kingship (i.e., reciting **Sh'ma**). His disciples said to him: Even to this point? He said to them: All my life I have been troubled by the verse, *You shall love the Lord your God with all your soul*, (meaning) even if God takes your soul (even if you die for loving God). I said: When will I have the opportunity to fulfill this? Now that I have the opportunity, shall I not fulfill it? He prolonged the word **echad** ("one") until he died while saying it. A heavenly voice went forth and proclaimed: Happy are you, Akiva, that your soul departed with the word **echad**.

TEXT FOUR --- Judah Lowe of Prague, *Netivot Olam* 2:39

The problem is how he established that he loved God with all his heart and all his soul by prolonging the word **echad** until he died while saying it. It is because a human being's love for God consists in the fact that, from his own perspective, a human being is worth nothing. He comes from God and returns; everything returns to God. Besides God, there is

nothing; there is only the Lord and the Lord is one...Because God is one and there is nothing besides God, everything returns to God...Now, Rabbi Akiva prolonged the word **echad** until his soul departed, since insofar as God is one, the soul returns to God...This is the explanation of the love of God. The Torah teaches: *Hear O Israel! The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God.* For since God is one, no existing being in the world is separated from God; all things that exist depend upon and cleave to God, since He is the basis for all. It is for this reason that love applies to God. Indeed, love of God is more fitting than love of anything else. For in every kind of love between two human lovers, though they may cleave to one another, nevertheless, each retains his or her individuality. However, in the love of a human for God, a human being can completely return his spirit and soul to God to the extent that he loses his individual existence and completely cleaves to God, as it is written, *to love the Lord your God...and to cleave to Him* (Deut. 11:22). This is complete love...when someone surrenders one's life to God, for by so doing, one completely cleaves to God.

TEXT FIVE --- **Shnei Luchot Ha-brit**, Isaiah Horowitz; excerpts from *Sha'ar ha-Gadol* ("The Great Gate"), sect. 48-67

**Ein Sof** watches over them (the **sefirot**) from the beginning of their emanation. **Ein Sof** bestows the influx in them and illuminates them with its light. The influx of this light causes them to bond in a true and powerful union. This influx is never lacking. They (the **sefirot**) are all nourished from the best of the influx...From this perfection, they provide bread, law and food to the rest of the worlds: the worlds of Creation, Formation, and Making. The sustaining of the connection among (the four) worlds and the elements, until the hub of our world, depends upon the influx. Were it to be withheld for even an instant, all the material worlds would vanish into oblivion. However, the spiritual elements would return to their source...

This is the correct intention a person should have in mind when reciting **Sh'ma**. In so doing, a person unites all the worlds from below to above, until the First Cause. For all of these (four worlds) are connected and united, each effect with its cause, level after level, until the First Cause. By means of God's great and holy influx, they are connected from the first point to the point of the hub, the center of the world...The correct intention in reciting **Sh'ma** is that we unite all the **sefirot** with one another, and all of them with the One who caused them to come forward. Thereby, we make God King over all creatures, great and small. For God, by means of His great and holy influx, bestowed by His emanations, is the cause of their existence...

It is also found in the words of Shimon bar Yochai (in the Zohar), that in the union of the recitation of **Sh'ma**, one should cause the downward increasing of the flow of the influx. The meaning here is that because of Adam's initial sin and also because of our sins, the conditions of the earth deteriorated, and the influx which had been bestowed on all the words at the time of emanation became diminished. It is no longer at the same degree of power and strength as it was before the sin of Adam. Consequently, we must now increase the flow, through the union in the recitation of **Sh'ma**, so that the emanation will bestow the same great light upon the worlds, as it did before the sin, and the worlds will be strengthened as before.

Each of the sefirot has its own treasury. For example, **Keter** is the treasury for absolute, pure compassion. **Chokmah** is the treasury of wisdom, **Binah** of repentance, **Chesed** of lovingkindness, **Gevurah** of wealth, **Tiferet** of Torah. And so it is for all the sefirot. The influx is released, depending upon the need for human action at a particular time. There might be a need for pardon, forgiveness and atonement; then it becomes necessary to draw down the influx from the supernal pure whiteness which is **Keter**, which whitens the sins of Israel...By means of **Binah** in union with the Supernal Father, **Chokmah**, the influx is released to **Malkhut**. **Binah** and **Malkhut** are thereby united by the six **sefirot** between them. There are a multitude of examples of this, all of which are initiated in response to human action...

The ultimate purpose of one who worships God is to do everything for God's Name, to cause pleasure to the Creator...for through the increase of the flow down of the influx above, that is caused by the arousal of the worshiper, the influx descends below and everything is at peace.

TEXT SIX --- Zohar II, 200b

...When they reach **Emet v'yatziv** ("True and firm," the beginning of the blessing immediately before the **Amidah**), the bride is fully adorned with all her attendants; when they reach **ga'al Yisrael** ("Who has redeemed Israel," the conclusion of this blessing), all must stand erect. For when we come to **Emet v'yatziv**, her attendants lift her, and she raises herself to the supernal King; when they reach **ga'al Yisrael**, the holy supernal King appears in His levels to receive her, and we must stand in awe and trembling before the supernal King, just as when He stretches forth His right hand towards Her, and puts His left hand under her head, and then the two embrace, kissing, as one.

This occurs during the first three blessings; one must concentrate his will and focus his intention on all these rectifications and the order of the prayer. His mouth, his heart, and his will must be as one. Now that the supernal King and the *Matronita* are joined with joy and kisses, whoever has a request should offer it now, in this auspicious hour. After one has made his request of the King and the *Matronita*, he directs his will and his heart to the last three blessings so as to arouse the hidden delight, since through these three blessings She is blessed with another embrace...

TEXT SEVEN --- Siddur Kol Ya'akov (commonly known as the "Art Scroll" siddur), p. 4

Many recite the following declaration of intent before donning the **tallit**: For the sake of the unification of the Holy One, Blessed is He, and His Presence, in fear and love to unify the Name – **yud-kei** with **vav-kei** – in perfect unity, in the name of all Israel.

TEXT EIGHT --- Judah ben Shimon Ashkenazi, 18<sup>th</sup> c. Polish commentator (Be'er Hetev) on the Shulchan Arukh; O.H. 473:4, note 8, quoting Luria

Here is copied the pattern of the Ari's plate from Etz Chayyim, and this is the meaning of it...one takes three **shmurah matzos**, and sets one, representing the **Kohen**, above, and beneath it another, representing **Levi**, and below this one another, representing **Yisrael**, which correspond to the three intelligences, the **Abba Ila'ah** (upper father; i.e., **Keter**, **Chokmah**, and **Binah**). Afterwards one takes the **maror**, **karpas** and **charoset**, the three kinds of dishes, and the shankbone of the roasted lamb, and the roasted egg, setting these five items above the **matzot** as follows: the shankbone, representing **Chesed**, goes on your right, and the egg, representing **Gevurah**, goes on your left. **Maror**, which alludes to **Tiferet**, goes in the center between the shankbone and the egg, because **Tiferet** maintains the balance between **Chesed** and **Gevurah**. Afterwards the **Charoset** goes on the right, directly below the shankbone, because the charoset alludes to **Netzach**. And after that the karpas, alluding to **Hod**, goes on your left, directly below the egg. Then one takes some **chazeret** (lettuce) and sets it directly below the **maror**, in the center, for this corresponds to **Yesod**. And this (**chazeret**) is used for the sandwich. And the plate itself, which includes all of them, is **Malkhut**. Thus there are the ten **sefirot** of wisdom. And one should not alter this arrangement, and happy is the one whose intention is according to the above.

TEXT NINE --- excerpts from **L'kha Dodi**, Shlomo Alkabetz (~1500--~1580)

**L'kha dodi, likrat kallah, p'nei Shabbat n'kablal!**

Go forth my love to meet the bride.

Shabbat's reception has arrived!

(1) "Keep" and "Remember": were uttered as one

By our Creator, beyond comparison.

God is One and His Name is One,

Reflected in glory, in fame, and in praise...

(8) Break out of your confines to the left and the right

Revere the Lord in whom we delight.

Messiah ("son of **Peretz**") is coming to gladden our sight,

Bringing joy and rejoicing in fullness of days.

(9) Come in peace, soul-mate, sweet Bride so adored,

Greeted with joy, in song and accord,

Amidst God's people, the faithful restored,

Come, O Bride; come, O Bride.

TEXT TEN --- "**Ushpizin**" ritual for **Sukkot**

Be seated, be seated, exalted guests; be seated, be seated, holy guests; be seated, be seated, guests of faithfulness; be seated in the shade of the Holy One, Blessed be He...

(Each day:) I invite to my meal the exalted guests:

(On the first day:) May it please you, Abraham, my exalted guest, that all the other exalted guests dwell here with me and with you: Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Aaron, Joseph and David.

(On the second day:) May it please you, Isaac...

(On the third day:) May it please you, Jacob...

(On the fourth day:) May it please you, Moses...

(On the fifth day:) May it please you, Aaron...

(On the sixth day:) May it please you, Joseph...

(On the seventh day:) May it please you, David...

TEXT ELEVEN --- From the prayer before study at the **Tikkun Leil Shavuot**

...May it be your will, Lord our God and God of our fathers, that our learning of what we will study tonight will bring You satisfaction, and that it will bring us satisfaction and strength so that we might continue setting the crown on the head of **Ze'ir**, and to make 24 adornments for the **Shekhinah**, corresponding to the 24 books (of the Bible), which correspond to the 24 permutations of Your great Name...

TEXT TWELVE --- **Zohar** II, 135a-b

The mystery of Sabbath: she is Sabbath as she unifies with the mysterious One, causing that One to settle upon her. Prayer for the entrance of Sabbath, for the precious Holy Throne is united in mystery of One, arrayed for the supernal Holy King to rest upon Her. When Sabbath enters, she unites, and separates from the **Sitra Achra**. All evil forces of judgment are removed from her. She dwells in union with the holy light, adorned with many crowns for the Holy King. All powers of wrath and masters of judgment flee; no other power reigns in all the worlds. Her face shines with supernal radiance as she is crowned from below by the holy people, all of whom are adorned with new souls. Then, beginning prayer, blessing Her with joy and beaming faces, saying: **Barkhu et YHVH ha-Mevorakh** – “et YHVH,” precisely, to open by addressing Her with blessing.