

The Kedushah

Good morning. This week's Torah reading is Shelach L'cha.¹ After weeks of descriptive material, we are finally reading stories again. Some of the events that occur in this week's reading are the story of the 12 spies, the story of the Sabbath breaker, and Hosea's name changing to Joshua. This parsha tells Israel it is to have one law applicable to both Israelites and strangers. The portion contains the last verse of the Shema regarding the fringes² as well as the response recited by the congregation early during Yom Kippur evening at the end of the Kol Nidre prayer.³ I will not speak about these passages. Instead, in the next few minutes I will give an introduction to the part of the Jewish worship service called the Kedushah (K).

There are actually three (3) versions of the K: the K De'Amidah, the K De'Yotzer, and the K Uva L'Zion.⁴ The K De'Amidah varies with the service (Sabbath Musaf, Sabbath Shacharit, or weekday) and nusach (Ashkenazi or Sephardi). It is not recited at Maariv, being replaced by ata kadosh (which is what is said during the silent Amidah).

The origins of the K are obscure.⁵ Some claim the K comes from the Essene community, some from the mystics of the Gaonic period (6th-10th century CE), others claim it was developed by the men of The Great Assembly (500-300 BCE). The oldest known reference is in the Talmud,⁶ although the name K is not used there. We also learn in the Talmud that during R. Abun's time (ca. 350 CE) some form of connecting text existed that referred to angels.⁷ The form of the K which was developed first is unknown. It is known that by the year 800 CE the K in Palestine was customary said only on the Sabbath, while it was said daily in Babylonia.⁸

In a Siddur of the early 1500s⁹ not only is the K fully developed, but much space is devoted to what should be done when the K is missed due to late arrival at the service.¹⁰ Thus it seems that by 1500 or so the K had become an integral part of the synagogue worship experience.

The Amidah is the central element of each Jewish worship service, and the K De'Amidah is the central element of the Amidah. Rabbi Donin in his excellent introduction to the orthodox synagogue service¹¹ has written:

The pious ... go out of their way to say K. Even one who has already said his prayers will eagerly join in a group that is saying the K.

This central place may be inferred from the extra rules surrounding the K:

- * K is the only blessing in the Amidah that requires a minyan
- * K may not be interrupted to engage in conversation, even to respond to a greeting.
- * Those not participating in the service, should they be present when the K is recited, should join in its recitation

* Should one be saying the silent Amidah when the congregation recites the K, one pauses in one's private prayer and listens to the congregation. The silent Amidah is interrupted for no other prayer.

* Anyone entering the synagogue during the recitation of the K should wait at the entrance until the K is completed before entering the sanctuary.

I am now going to talk specifically about the K De'Amidah found in the Shacharit service. Much of this information will be true of the other versions of K as well. The Shacharit K De'Amidah can be found in Siddur Sim Shalom on page 357; you may want to open to that page and follow as I discuss this prayer. Two main sections plus a brief closing paragraph comprise this K. The first section is composed of the lines from "We proclaim" until "Praised is the glory of the Lord throughout the universe," and is built around verses from Isaiah 6:3 and Ezekiel 3:12. Its theme is holiness. The opening words, in the Hebrew, are ambiguous. These words could also be translated as "Let us proclaim." Thus, the opening line acts simultaneously as an invitation to proclaim and also as a proclamation of God's holiness. Proclaiming God's holiness is one aspect of being a "light unto the nations",¹² which, according to Isaiah, is Israel's mission. When the Cantor chants

these opening verses, the Cantor is inviting the congregation's participation. When the congregation chants it, the congregation is reminding itself of its obligation to state God's holiness publicly.

Following this introduction, the congregation repeats the words of praise Isaiah heard from the angels. There are multiple Jewish interpretations of the three-fold use of the word "holy". For example, one is that God is holy in heaven, God is holy on earth, and God is holy for all time.¹³ The Malbim¹⁴ supplies another interpretation -- God is holy because He transcends form, God is holy because He transcends matter, and God is holy because He transcends time.

Being built around two mystical verses from the prophets, much mystical meaning has been attached to this first section. For example, the Ashkenazi rite has 14 words between the quote from Isaiah and that from Ezekiel beginning with the words "Az B'kol" ("Then a loud sound"). Supposedly these 14 words are related to the fact that God's name occurs 14 times in the Decalogue.¹⁵ The letter shin occurs 6 times in the opening verse. This alludes to the wings of the Seraphim observed by Isaiah, whose words of praise we will shortly copy. Similarly, the 38 words starting the second section, which begins with the word Mimkomekha, are supposed to connect us with the 38 words of Ezekiel 37:26-28, on which this connecting passage is based.

This second connecting passage is triggered by the last word of the quotation from Ezekiel "mimkomo" ("from His place"). The next word, "mimkomekha" ("from your place"), launches a plea to fulfil the words of Ezekiel 37 and reign over us in Zion. The congregation is directly addressing God and stating that we are anxiously awaiting God's appearance.

This reference to Zion is a bridge to Psalm 146:10. While in the first section we state that God's glory fills the whole world, in the second section we recognize that God's presence is especially strong in one particular locality -- Zion.

The weekday Sabbath K De'Amidah has a shorter connection between the two quotations than the Sabbath Shacharit K De'Amidah.

The K De'Amidah Musaf is like that of Sabbath Shacharit in that the first section's theme is still holiness and the second section's theme is still Zion. The biblical quotes are identical to the Sabbath Shacharit Amidah K, but the introduction and connecting verses, while similar, are different.

There are subtle changes in individual words. For example, as I just stated, Shacharit has "mimkomekha" as the first word in its connecting passage, but Musaf has "mimkomo," the same word in the quote from Ezekiel. Shacharit's first word is "Nekadaysh" ("We will proclaim") versus "Na'aritzekha" ("We will revere") in Musaf. As an aside, these words are for the Ashkenazi rite; the Sephardi rite has four other words in these positions.

However, the main difference between the two Sabbath K occurs after the quotation from Ezekiel and before the quotation from Psalms. This difference is the presence of the opening and closing lines of the Shema. By inserting the beginning and ending lines of the Shema, this statement of faith was slipped into the morning service past the government censors.

The Persian king Juzdegard II, in the year 456 CE, prohibited the public recitation of the Shema -- a statement that argued against the dualism of official Zoroastrianism.¹⁶ Juzdegard posted guards to ensure the decree was followed. These guards would leave before the repetition of the Amidah, satisfied that the Shema had not been recited. Thus, the Jews of Babylonia wove into the Musaf K the first and last verses of the Shema to represent reciting the entire Shema. The congregation, upon hearing the cherished and forbidden opening words of the Shema, bursts out with defiant enthusiasm:

He is our God! He is our father! He is our king! He is our redeemer!
The congregation then pronounces that God, in his mercy, will again declare (as God did at Sinai), "I am the Lord your God."

Even after the prohibition on reciting the Shema was lifted, the Babylonian community kept the insertion. When about 100 years later the Roman Emperor Justinian prohibited the Shema as an attack upon the Christian triune God, the Palestinian Jews copied the ruse developed in Babylonia.

Another version of the K said during Shacharit is the K De'Yotzer, so called because it is part of the Yotzer prayer (see page 345 in Sim Shalom). It is quite short, consisting of the verse from Isaiah, one connecting verse, and the verse from Ezekiel. It is not part of the Amidah, so it is said while seated. A minyan is not required since the congregation is merely describing the angelic praise of God rather than actually praising God. The service at Adat Reyim skips this K when reciting the Yotzer.

The third version of K is found near the end of the weekday Shacharit service. Just prior to the Aleinu, the congregation recites the Uva l'Zion (Sim Shalom, page 157), which has within it the verses from Isaiah and Ezekiel. The motivation for introducing the K at this point was probably to allow latecomers to recite the K. To help the people understand what was being said, the Uva l'Zion was recited in Aramaic (the vernacular

during that time), with the K recited first in Hebrew and then again in Aramic. This custom is still followed with the K appearing in both languages in this prayer. Psalm 146:10 is replaced in this version of the K by Ex 15:18 ("Adonoy will reign forever and ever" -- also said during the Mi Komocha). After the Uva l'Zion is the Kaddish, and at this point it is permissible to remove one's tefillin.

No melody has become an accepted standard for the K. A different melody is used during the High Holidays than during the rest of the year.

The Reform service has modified the traditional K. Reform does not have a Musaf service. To compensate, the Sabbath Shacharit K is a composite of both the Musaf and Sabbath Shacharit versions. It also omits passages from each version.

The verse from Isaiah is important to many forms of Christian worship. It occurs as part of the communion service in Eastern Orthodox, RC, Lutheran, Episcopal, Methodist, and probably other denominations as well. The thrice holy pronouncement is given a Christian slant, of course. It is read as foreshadowing the Good News -- the Father is holy, the Son is holy, and the Holy Spirit is holy.

To sum up, the K is the centerpiece of the Amidah. It expresses the conviction that as expressed in Numbers 14:21 the divine glory of God will fill the whole world. Numbers 14 is part of this weeks portion. Perhaps I talked about Shelach L'cha after all.

ENDNOTES

¹ Num 13:1 - 15:41.

² Num 14:37-41.

³ Num 14:19-20.

⁴Encyclopedia of Jewish Concepts by Philip Birnbaum, Hebrew Publishing Company, New York, 1993; The Encyclopedia of Jewish Prayer by Macy Nulman, Jason Aronson Inc., Northvale, NJ, 1993 (1996 edition). These versions can be found in Siddur Sim Shalom (edited by R. Jules Harlow, The Rabbinical Assembly The United Synagogue of America, NY, 1985) on pages 156, 344, 356, 432, and on other pages as well.

⁵ Jewish Liturgy - A Comprehensive History by Ismar Elbogen, translated from the German by Raymond P. Scheindlin, The Jewish Publication Society, Philadelphia, 1993, page 55.

⁶ Berakot 1:9.

⁷ Elbogen, op. cit., page 55.

⁸ Elbogen, op. cit., page 56.

⁹ The Siddur of R. Amram Gaon.

¹⁰ The Jewish Encyclopedia, Katav Publishing House, NY, 1901, page 463; and Elbogen, page 9, items 3 and 4 as well as page 390, note 17. Both discuss the prayer book of R. Amram Gaon.

¹¹ Rabbi Hayim Halevy Donin, To Pray As a Jew - A Guide to the Prayer Book and the Synagogue Service, Basic Books, 1980, page 124.

¹² Isaiah 42:6.

¹³ Targum Onkelos, The Aramaic Translation of the Torah. Onkelos was supposedly a proselyte and disciple of R. Akiva (Akiva is known to have died 135 CE).

¹⁴ Meir Yehuda Leibush ben Yehiel Michal (1809 - 1880), Russian rabbi who demonstrated the linguistic foundation of rabbinic exegesis. He strove to harmonize the Bible with 19th century science and was a critic of the Reform movement.

¹⁵ The Encyclopedia of Jewish Prayer, op. cit. My count of the number of times God's name occurs is 8 in Exodus 20:2-14 and my count of the number of occurrences is 10 in Deuteronomy 5:6-18. The number of times God's name appears or the term God appears in Exodus 20:2-14 according to my count is 14.

¹⁶ The Encyclopedia of Jewish Prayer, op. cit., page 190; Encyclopedia Judaica, op. cit., page 876; Encyclopedia of Jewish Concepts, op. cit., page 540.