

Parshat Beshalach 5782

As I am about to complete a year of avelut, I have chosen to write about Kaddish and its links with both the Parashah and the Haftara of this Shabbat. The nucleus of Kaddish is the sentence that begins *'Yehay Shmay Rabba...'* Hidden within this declaration lies a cluster of ideas – a theology of Judaism – about Creation (Briyat HaOlam), Revelation (Matan Torah) and Redemption (Ge'ulah). We are familiar with this trilogy in two other places – in our daily Shacharit when we recite a sequence of three berachot that surround the Shema and then, a second time, in the Shabbat Amidah whose central berachah changes its focus from Creation on Friday night to Revelation on Shabbat morning and then to Redemption on Shabbat afternoon.

This same trilogy of ideas is deeply embedded within the sentence *'Yehay Shmay Rabba...'* The Ba'al HaTurim on Bereshit 1:1 points out that both the opening verse of Creation and the introductory verse to the Aseret HaDibrot (Shemot 20:1) each have seven words of twenty-eight letters. He explains that Chazal sought to make a connection with both Briyat HaOlam and Matan Torah by structuring the sentence of *'Yehay Shmay Rabba...'* in an identical way with seven words of twenty-eight letters.

As for the concept of Ge'ulah, two connections can be seen, one through the Parashah and one through the Haftara. The closing pasuk of Parshat Beshalach reads:

וַיֹּאמֶר כִּי יָד עַל כֶּסֶף יְהוָה מִלְחָמָה לְהָאֱמָלֵק בְּעַמְלֵק מִדֹּר־וָצָרַח. *And he (Moshe) said, "The Hand is on God's Throne. God shall be at war with Amalek for all generations."* (Shemot 17:16).

Rashi asks why the two words for 'G-d's Throne' are both abbreviated: כֶּסֶף should be אֱמָלֵק and יְהוָה should be the full four-letter Name. His answer is that neither the Throne of Hashem nor His Name can be complete until Amalek is eradicated. What has this to do with Kaddish? Gemara Berachot 3a brings a Tosefot that quotes Machzor Vitry, an eleventh century prayer book compiled by the students of Rashi. There, יְהוָה שְׁמִיָּה רַבָּא, is reinterpreted to mean *'May the Name of Hashem become great'*, with the word שְׁמִיָּה being divided into two parts to indicate that we pray for a time when the Name (שֵׁם) of Hashem that is currently shortened and incomplete (only two letters יְהוָה) will become whole again.

The Haftara also connects *'Yehay Shmay Rabba...'* to Ge'ulah. However, the focus here is not on what we say but rather on how we say it. In Gemara Shabbat 119b, we read:

אָמַר רַבִּי יְהוֹשֻעַ בֶּן לֵוִי: כָּל הָעוֹנֶה "אֱמֵן יְהוָה שְׁמִיָּה רַבָּא מְבָרַךְ" בְּכָל כַּח, קוֹרְעִין לוֹ גִּזְרֵי דִינֵי

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said: One who responds "yehay shmay rabba" with all their strength can cause the Heavenly Court to tear up a decree of punishment. Rashi explains the phrase 'bechol kocho' to mean 'bechol kavanato', with total concentration. This statement is then supported by a pasuk from Shirat Devorah, this week's Haftara:

שְׁנֵאמַר: "בְּפָרוֹעַ פְּרָעוֹת בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל בְּהִתְנַדֵּב עִם בְּרַכּוֹ ה'". As it is said: *'When punishments are annulled in Yisra'el, when the people volunteer themselves, bless Hashem'* (Shoftim 5:2). Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi explains his statement by interpreting the verse as follows:

מָאי טַעְמָא "בְּפָרוֹעַ פְּרָעוֹת" — מִשּׁוּם דְּבְרַכּוֹ ה' *'What is the reason for punishments being annulled? Because the Jewish People blessed Hashem.'*

It seems a puzzling piece as we are left wondering how the proof-text provides support for the initial statement. But when we read the Haftara and see the verse in its context, we understand better. Following the Jewish victory over Yavin, the king of Canaan, Devorah HaNeviah sang a shirah and praised the dedication of the ten thousand volunteers from the tribes of Naftali and Zevulun who risked their lives to fight a battle that was divinely commanded. When the declaration of *'Yehay Shmay Rabba...'* is made 'bechol kavanato', Chazal view it as a verbal form of mesirat nefesh that has the same power to overcome potential danger as did the life-risking dedication of the Jewish soldiers at the time of Devorah. Just as the mortal threat posed by Yavin was annulled, so too one who recites *'Yehay Shmay Rabba...'* with total concentration is worthy of having his or her evil decree torn apart. If we demonstrate a readiness – as the soldiers did - to give back our soul to Hashem in order to fulfil a Kiddush Hashem in this world, it then becomes possible to annul evil decrees and to achieve a personal redemption.

In conclusion, we can say that the nechamah for the mourner who recites Kaddish lies in the knowledge that our parents are links in a chain that stretches from Briyat HaOlam, through Matan Torah and to the ultimate Ge'ulah. Although we experience darkness when we are bereaved, there is a bigger picture that leads to light. Each of our ancestors plays a purposeful part in the story that is unfolding and that will turn tears of sorrow to tears of joy.

Ideas and sources drawn from Rabbi Kimche's youtube shiur on Kaddish; Rav Schwab on Prayer; Rabbi Nissan Wilson in the United Synagogue's Sefer HaShiva.

To commemorate the first yahrzeit of my mother Chava bat Wolf on 17 Shevat and the ninth yahrzeit of my father Yom Tov Azriel ben Ya'akov on 29 Shevat. May their memories always be for a blessing.