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"HEAR, O FATHER"

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The Shema, the most celebrated and significant passage in all of Jewish literature, is one that we are required to pronounce twice every day. Yom Kippur is, of course, no exception. Yet those who are observant will have noticed that there is one slight difference between our recital of the Shema during the rest of the year and our reading of it on this Holy Day. Every other day of the year we say: Shema Yisrael ha-Shem Elokeinu ha-Shem echad, "Hear O Israel, the Lord is our G-d, the Lord is One." And then, before the passage beginning ve'ahavta, "thou shalt love the Lord thy G-d with all thy heart and all thy soul and all thy might," we recite be-lachash, in a soft undertone or whisper, the line: barukh shem kevod malkhuto le'olam va'ed, "blessed be the name of ^{G-d's} ~~His~~ glorious kingdom for ever and ever." On Yom Kippur, however, we do not confine ourselves to whispering that line of barukh shem kevod. Instead, we recite it be'kol ram, in a loud voice: "Blessed be the name of His glorious kingdom for ever and ever."

Why this difference? Why on Yom Kippur do we give such loud and clear ~~voice~~ expression to a sentence which we otherwise whisper in the most subdued tones?

The answer I propose to you today is, I believe, one that has a real, relevant, and terribly important message for each of us. It goes back to the two sources of the Shema in the Jewish tradition.

The first source of the Shema is well known to you. It occurs in the Bible, and consists of the words spoken by Moses to his people, Israel, in one of his very last discourses with them. Hear, my people Israel, he tells them, there is only One G-d in the world. And he then immediately proceeds to tell them ve'ahavta, you shall love this G-d with all your heart and soul and might. Moses did not ~~at all~~ mention the words barukh shem kevod malkhuto le'olam va'ed. They are not at all mentioned in the Bible. ^{recorded}

The second source is in the Aggadah, in the oral tradition of our people.

and here the Shema is presented in a completely different setting.

^ The Aggadah relates a most interesting and moving scene. The Patriarch Jacob, whose name is also Israel, is on his death-bed. His twelve sons surround him, ready to bid farewell to their aged father as he is about to depart from this earth. It is a tender scene -- but a disturbing one. For Jacob, or Israel, is not dying peacefully. He is tossing and turning restlessly. His face seems troubled, distraught. There is something on his mind that will not let him rest, that will not let him go down peacefully into his grave. "What troubles you, father?" the children ask.

"What is it that causes you all this mental pain and anguish?" Jacob's answer was straightforward. "My grandfather Abraham died leaving a good son -- Isaac; but he also left a son by the name of Ishmael, who was a disgrace to him, a blot on his name. My father Isaac had two sons. I have followed in his ways; but he also left a son Esau, whose whole ^{life} career was one of violence to all our father stood for and lived for. Now that I am about to die, I am worried: shema yesh pesul be'mitati, perhaps I too am leaving a child who will rebel against G-d, who will offend all I have lived and died for." When the twelve sons of Jacob, called Israel, heard what ^{was} ~~had~~ troubling their father on his death bed, they answered as in one voice, and cried out:

Shema Yisrael -- hear, O Father Israel, ha*Shem Elokeinu ha*Shem echad, the Lord you have served all your life, He is our G-d; the tradition you inherited and bequeathed to us is the one we shall live by and hand over to our children; we shall never leave your ways or abandon the Lord G-d in ^{whose} ~~Whose~~ service you reared us, for the Lord is One! When Israel -- Jacob -- heard this affirmation of his faith by all his children, when he realized that he would leave no pesul be'mitati, no unworthy issue behind him, that he would be able to die in peace and in serenity, he called out in deep gratitude: barukh shem kevod makhuto l'olam va'ed, "Blessed be the name of His glorious kingdom for ever and ever."

This, then, is the second source of the Shema. And it is this source of the Shema where we do find mention of that passage ~~of~~ barukh shem kevod.

these two versions of The origin of Shema Yisrael?

What is the difference between ^{them}? The Shema of Moses is a command to a nation; that of Jacob's children is a promise to a father. Moses' Shema is a theological proposition; that of Jacob's sons is a personal commitment. The first Shema is a declaration of ideology; the second is that which cements and unites a family. Moses recognized only one father -- the Father in Heaven. Jacob's sons realized that the sense of duty towards the Heavenly Father came from a sense of obligation and love for their earthly father, Israel. While the Shema of Moses is intellectual, a structure of the mind, that of Jacob's sons is emotional and sentimental, stirring them ~~very~~ to the very core of their being. In the Shema of Moses, the emphasis is on ha-Shem echad, the Lord is One; in the Shema of the children of Father Israel, the stress is placed upon ha-Shem Elokeinu, the Lord is our G-d, the tradition will be continued, my father's faith will not die with him. Moses' Shema does not require a response; that of Jacob's children intuitively evokes the joyous, even rapturous reaction of "tahnk G-d," barukh shem kevod malkhuto le'olam va'ed.

My dear friends, all year long we pronounce the verse barukh shem kevod softly, only be'lachash, in a whisper. During the year it is the Shema of Moses that predominates, the Shema of the intellect, the ideological ~~and theological~~ Shema which does not evoke any response of barukh shem kevod. But on Yom Kippur we abandon the Shema of Moses in favor of that of the sons of Israel. On the Holiest day of the year we are not satisfied with intellectual ^{abstractions}, with theological formulations. Today we rise and with full voice, be'kol ram, we proclaim for all the world to hear: Shema Yisrael, Hear Father, hear mother, wherever you may be today, ha-Shem Elokeinu, your G-d is my G-d. No matter that sometimes I seem to have strayed from the path ^{onto which} you guided me, ~~onto~~ ^{often} that I ^{often} seem to have abandoned your heritage and forsaken your faith and neglected the richness and beauty of the Jewish tradition you passed on to me -- today I promise you, father, that ha-Shem Elokeinu, your faith is my faith, your tradition is my tradition, your G-d is my G-d, your Torah is my Torah; ha-Shem Echad, this is the one Torah for which generations have ^{lived} ~~labored~~ and ^{ever} given their lives,

the One G-d Whose overriding claim on our loyalties ~~and very lives~~ has been acknowledged by Jews throughout ^{the ages} ~~all generations~~. On Yom Kippur we return to our Father in Heaven via our fathers whom we ^{respected} ~~knew~~ and our mothers whom we loved on earth. This day our Shema must be more than a profession of faith; it must become a confession of fidelity, a declaration of loyalty. Kol Midre may effectively release us from all personal vows and annul all oaths; but there is one promise, one commitment too great, ^{and} too deep, too terrible, ^{and} too magnificent ever to be abrogated. It is the oath: Shema Yisrael, Father, hear me now: your Lord is my G-d, the One G-d.

On this Holy Day as we recall the memory of revered fathers and sweet, beloved mothers, it seems to me as if they and their parents, and all generations who labored to bring us forth, stand breathlessly awaiting our move. I can see agony written across their foreheads and ~~in~~ the pain of suspense in their eyes: shema yesh pesul be'mitati, perhaps my children will forget me, my spirit, all I lived for and lived with. Perhaps ^a in that strange new world called the ^{"Space Age"} ~~modern world~~ they will cut all ties to us, and ~~reject~~ our Torah and tradition in favor of the glittering superficialities of their world ~~times~~. Perhaps their ^{indifference} ~~treason~~ to Torah will reflect disgrace and shame upon me. At this time it becomes the duty of each of us to reassure them, so to speak, to make a promise to the past that we shall not forsake the future. We must say Shema Yisrael not only as Moses said it, but with the intimacy, the personal fervor, the love and undying affection that Israel's children said it to him. What greater Yizkor can there be! What greater memorial can anyone erect for his parents than to declare to ~~him~~ ^{them} that there is something ~~impersihable~~ that has survived ~~him~~ ^{them in us!} because we have the ~~filial~~ loyalty they wanted of us! When we can say Shema in that way, ~~in that atmosphere~~ with that deep love and emotion, then all our past arises as one to respond to our words: barukh shem kevod malkhuto, blessed the name of ^{G-d's} ~~the~~ glorious kingdom, not only for one year or one decade or one generation, but le'olam va'ed, forever and ever; for ~~is~~ such is the depth of a son's and daughter's loyalty, then the future of Torah, of Judaism, is assured. Thank G-d!

they will ignore their responsibility to us with past & future, first, then, then

read

And then, when we have ~~declared~~ the Shema in that way, and proclaimed be'kol ram, in loud and clear tones, the barukh shem kevod, ~~the~~ our confidence that our oath to the past has been acknowledged, that our debt to parents and grandparents, to Jewish history itself, is accepted, then we can pass safely on to the next level: ve'ahavta et ha'Shem Eloekha, "thou shalt love the Lord thy G-d." Then all our lives become suffused with a new meaning, a deeper purpose, a more elevated love and warmth that transforms us completely. For to say the Shema in this way is more than to agree that there is only One G-d. It is to change our whole way of life, to live more fully and more meaningfully, to have the ennobling spirit of Torah penetrate every level of our existence. No man who has lived the Shema of the sons of Jacob can ever retain only half-hearted loyalty to Judaism. The Shema of Yom Kippur means that your loyalty to G-d Almighty and your love of all that is Jewish that even heaven itself cannot shake you in your convictions! Just recently I read of a prayer ~~of~~ uttered by a Jew in the Middle Ages, recorded in the book called Shevet Yehudah. In English it reads something like this: "Master of all the worlds! I see that You are trying so hard to get me to abandon my faith! You bring upon me persecutions and trials and suffering and hatred, all to force me to give up being a Jew! So I want You to know, Gottenyu, that despite all You and Your heavenly hosts will say or do, I am a Jew and a Jew shall I remain, and nothing You can do will ~~move~~ ^{make} me ~~from~~ change my mind!" There you have the kind of love and loyalty and magnificent pride in Jewishness that comes from the Yom Kippur Shema, from the awareness that Judaism is more than a set of beliefs, but a ^mcommitment to all the past and a pledge to all the future, ^{continuity, then} that knowledge that if I break the ~~chain~~ I have been treacherous to my forebears and deserted my descendants. That is why the Shema has always been the last words on the lips of Jewish martyrs - - it was not so much the Shema of Moses as the Shema of the sons of Jacob, not so much the everyday Shema as the Yom Kippur Shema. When the Jew stood ready to offer is very life for G-d and Torah, all the generations of the past received him ^{with open arms and} with the triumphant welcome; barukh shem kevod ~~malbuto~~ malbuto le'olam va'ed.

My dear friends, we have a greater and more difficult task than dying for Torah. Our task is living ^{for} with Torah. On Yom Kippur, in these sacred precincts of the synagogue, as we are about to invoke the memory of beloved parents and grandparents, we pledge ourselves anew to their great ideals. We shall not become the instruments, passive or otherwise, whereby Judaism will dissolve. We shall not stand by idly while mitzvah after mitzvah is abandoned. We shall not close our eyes while year after year we see ourselves slipping from the firm kind of faith which alone can guarantee meaning in our lives. There is a love that strains to burst forth from our breasts, a powerful love that encompasses G-d and man, Torah and Israel, family and friend and stranger alike. With this love, this ve'ahavta, we face the past in order to be able to face the future with confidence. If we cannot in good conscience say our Shema as did Jacob's sons, ~~then~~ if we cannot say ^{it} so that the response of barukh shem kevod comes be'kol ram, then our Yizkor is meaningless. Then we have perhaps remembered, but we have failed to remind G-d; and, after all, we pray Yizkor Elokim, that G-d remember our dear ones.

The golden chain of the Jewish tradition is dangling before our eyes. The last link was placed upon it by our parents. It is swinging back and forth, the whole Jewish past waiting for you to grasp it, add on your own golden link and then pass the chain on to your children. If you let it swing past you, you may never again have a chance to hold it, and you will have failed both your past and your future, your parents and your children. If you grasp it - - then you will yourself be the newest link, the newest addition to the sacred tradition.

Grasp it, my friends. Never let it go. Ve'ahavta et ha-Shem be'chol levavekha u-ve'chol nafshekha u-ve'chol me'odekha. And when you have it, ve'shinantam le'vanekha, pass it down to your own children and grandchildren, so that all generations can proclaim: barukh shem kevod malkhuto le'olam va'ed, ^{that is it} blessed be His glorious kingdom for ever and ever."