



TOWARDS MEANINGFUL

TEFILLA

BY REBBETZIN ZEMIRA OZAROWSKI

Director of OU Israel L'Ayla Women's Initiative



ברכות קריאת שמע

After completing the Pesukei dZimra, we arrive at the next section of Shacharit, the ברכות שמע. The Gemara Brachot 11a tells us that קריאת שמע in the morning needs to be recited with 2 brachot beforehand, and one bracha afterwards.

Each of these three brachot has a different theme. The first bracha of יוצר אור, which we will discuss here, is about Hashem's creation of nature. The second bracha רבה רבה focuses on Hashem's love for us, His chosen people. Finally, the bracha following Shema focuses on Geula, redemption. These themes are intrinsically connected to קריאת שמע. How so? The main theme of קריאת שמע is accepting Hashem as King. Hashem's sovereignty is expressed through His control over nature and through His chosen people. Forces of nature obey Hashem in their every action; the Jewish people obey Hashem's mitzvot throughout the day. Therefore, a discussion about Hashem's control over nature and a discussion about His control over His people are the perfect introduction to קריאת שמע itself. Additionally, it makes sense at the conclusion of קריאת שמע to discuss Hashem's protection and redemption of

the Jewish people, since this is a direct consequence of our acceptance of עול מלכות שמים.

As we mentioned earlier, the main theme of the (very long) bracha of יוצר אור is that Hashem is the master over nature. We begin with the פתיחה, the opening part of the bracha –

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה'... יוֹצֵר אֹר וּבוֹרֵא חֹשֶׁךְ עֲשֵׂה שְׁלוֹם וּבוֹרֵא אֶת הַכֹּל:

in which we praise Hashem for creating the light and darkness, and everything as a whole.

We then make the very important statement of

And in His goodness renews creation constantly on a daily basis. This is an extremely crucial point! We are not praising Hashem for an action that He did in the past, for the fact that He created the world thousands of years ago. Rather, we are acknowledging the fact that Hashem is actively involved in our lives and in running the world on a daily basis. This statement *needs* to be emphasized prior to accepting עול מלכות שמים.

We go on and recount all of Hashem's amazing creations – 'מָה רַבּוֹ מַעֲשֵׂיךָ ה'!

We then use the Alef Bet to list many of the ways that Hashem controls nature -

אתה ה', יוצר המקאורות:

קל ברוך גדול דעה. הכין ופעל זקהרי חמה. טוב יצר כבוד לשמו. מאורות נתן סביבות עזו...

The blessed God, great in understanding, prepared and brought about the rays of the sun. The Generous One created glory for His name. He placed luminaries around His strength....

As we mentioned in the past, when we give praise using the Alef Bet structure, we are in essence saying that the One we are praising does everything, from A-Z, there is no shortage of ways we can describe His greatness.

At the end of this very long bracha, we again focus on the same theme of Hashem's control over nature.

המחנך בטובו בכל יום תמיד מעשה בראשית... ברוך

In His goodness He renews every day, continuously, the work of creation...Blessed are You, God, Creator of the luminaries.

It is important to note that though we have praised Hashem's control over nature numerous time during Pesukei dZimra, here the focus is different. Here, the goal is not to appreciate all Hashem does for us, but rather to enable us to fulfill with 100% clarity the mitzvah of עול מלכות שמים accepting Hashem as King.

In between these two sections is a very long section about מלאכים, angels, in which we discuss the daily service of the angels, which climaxes with the famous words of קדוש קדוש קדוש. What does this have to do with our theme? The מלאכים are Hashem's

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“messengers” so to speak. They watch every single detail of Hashem’s mastery of nature. For example, the Midrash (Bereishit Rabba 10) tells us that every single blade of grass has a corresponding angel assigned to making sure that it grows. And so, as they watch firsthand as the beauty of nature unfolds before them, they can’t help but burst forth in praise. The *malachim* teach us how to look out at Hashem’s hand in nature, recognize Hashem’s Omnipotence, be overwhelmed with awe, and from there to arrive at accepting שמות מלכות שמים.

וְכֹלֵם פּוֹתְחִים אֶת פִּיָּהֶם בְּקֹדֶשׁ וּבְטָהָרָה. בְּשִׁירָה וּבְזִמְרָה, וּמְבָרְכִים וּמְשַׁבְּחִים וּמְפָאְרִים וּמְעֲרִיצִים וּמְקַדְּשִׁים וּמְחַלְלִים: אֶת שֵׁם הָאֵל הַמְּלַךְ הַגָּדוֹל הַגְּבוּר הַנּוֹרָא. קְדוֹשׁ הוּא. וְכֹלֵם מְקַבְּלִים עֲלֵיהֶם עַל מַלְכוּת שְׁמַיִם זֶה מִזָּה... וְנוֹתְנִים בְּאֵהָבָה רְשׁוּת זֶה לָזֶה לְהַקְדִּישׁ לְיוֹצְרָם

All of them open their mouths in holiness and purity, with song and music, and bless, praise, glorify, extol, sanctify and ascribe kingship to the name of the Almighty, the great, powerful and awesome King, Who is holy. They all accept upon themselves the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven, one

from another, and they all lovingly grant permission to each other to sanctify their Maker...

Before we arrive at קריאת שמע and fulfill the fundamental daily mitzvah of accepting שמות מלכות שמים, this first of the ברכות קריאת שמע teaches us to use the nature around us and the example of the *malachim* to be prepared to really accept Hashem’s rulership over us.

One crucial lesson we learn from the *malachim* is how to praise and accept Hashem **as a nation**. It’s not enough for each of us to do so as individuals. We, like the *malachim*, need to be “בְּאֵהָבָה רְשׁוּת זֶה לָזֶה”, to *lovingly grant permission to each other to sanctify our Maker*. There are many different types of Jews coming from all across the spectrum, and we may agree or disagree on many different issues, but we need to be able to make room to allow everyone to praise Hashem together, no matter where they are coming from. We must remember that “כולם אהובים”, Hashem loves us all and is waiting for us to sing to Him in unison! ■

— Cut and paste into your siddur — — — — — 

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