

DOES HASHEM PRAY? (DAVEN)

Parshas Yisro

By Rabbi Menachem Rokeach

1) The very question in the title is bewildering. We all pray to Hashem. Because "L'Hashem Hayeshua" (salvation comes from Hashem) (Tehilim 3:a). The source of all power to help the one in need is Hashem. What is the sense of Hashem Himself praying? To Whom?

The Shemona Esrei (basic Tefila) begins with three introductory ברכות, which are not meant to pray or beseech Hashem to respond to our needs. It is, rather, an acknowledgement that He is the Author of all life and all its blessings. It is the harbinger to prayer, to authenticate the source of all goodness. Thus after the third Bracha we begin to beseech Hashem to bestow upon us blessings we need. How can Hashem Himself indulge in prayer? To Whom? It's like the non Baal Tzedaka who takes from one pocket and places it in his other pocket.

The answer, however, to the question in our title, surprisingly, is "yes", a resounding yes. Hashem does pray sometimes, in exceptional cases. Or, at least, prays along with our prayers, before responding to the prayers.

So we learn in the Gemoro (Brochos 7a): "Wherefrom do we know that Hashem prays? From the passage, Hashem saying: "I will bring them to My holy mountain, and I will gladden them in My house of prayer..." (Isaiah 56:7). Apparently Hashem prays, so it is Hashem's house of prayer. The Gemoro queries what is the prayer about? It is as follows: "May My characteristic of mercy overwhelm that of anger."

It is obvious that this prayer in particular needs the assistance from Above, because it negates the original principle of creation "Beraishis Boro Elokim". The intention was to create a world based on strict judgment, (Elokim represents Midas Hadin). When man's behavior is unworthy, harsh judgment is called for. In order to allow man to pray that this principle be ignored, that nevertheless the attribute of mercy should dominate, Hashem Himself assists by joining in such a prayer.

2) This brings us to a remarkable statement in today's Sidra: In the context of the laws of the MIZBAIACH in the Beth Hamikdosh, Hashem says "Wherever I will pronounce My name ("Azkir es Shemi") I shall come to you and bless you." Rashi interprets "Azkir" "Wherever I permit my name to be mentioned" (as e.g. the Beth Hamikdosh).

The Tzror Hamor, however, quotes a Yerushalmi and Zohar that AZKIR refers to Hashem Himself pronouncing the ineffable Name.

Especially on Yom Kippur, in the Avoda of the Kohain Godol (high priest) when he quotes the Chumosh passage about Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the year, when we are purified "before Hashem", the ineffable Name is pronounced by Hashem Himself. The Name is "Yotzei MePi Kohain Godol, emanating through the mouth of the Kohain Godol (see Mishna Yuma 6:2, Tiferes Yisroel 20).

The Sidur Otzar haTefilos, on Yom Kippur Avoda, quotes an opinion that the human faculties of speech do not include the ability to pronounce the ineffable Name correctly. The Shechina assists him to pronounce the Name. Hashem is, thus, involved, participating in our prayer.

3) The Seforim expound the two fundamental words expressing the acceptance of Torah, "Naaseh V'Nishma" (Shemos 24:7) as follows:

"Naaseh" we shall do, "V'Nishma" may we merit again to hear Hashem Himself, as we experienced before. This is in reference to the first two of the Ten Commandments which were heard from Hashem Himself, as the Talmud teaches (Makos 24a): "Onochi (I am Hashem your G-d) and Lo Yihye (you shall have no other gods) we heard directly from Hashem."

Where do we find a fulfillment of the supplication to hear again directly from Hashem Himself? Writes the Chamro Tovo (Barniver Rav, R' Avrohom Simcha) it is in the Kohain Godol's prayer in Yom Kippur Avoda, as indicated in the word "Azkir", as above.

4) An interesting "Shiluv" (connecting the conclusion and the beginning of the Parsha) may be here suggested: The Parsha begins with Yisro coming to his son-in-law Moshe in the Midbar... His entry into the Chosen People was celebrated with a festive meal, which brought the participants to a heightened level of spirituality. "And Aaron and all the elders of Israel came to eat bread with the father-in-law of Moshe before Hashem" (Shemos 18:12). Queries the Talmud (Brochos 64a) "What is the meaning "before Hashem"? This meal was to honor Moshe and his father-in-law. However, this comes to teach us that whoever benefits from a meal at which a Torah scholar is included in the gathering, it is as if he benefits from the radiance of the Divine Presence.

5) Much to think about in heightening the spiritual aspect during a meal. No wonder the grace after meal includes an appreciation "for the Torah You have taught us". And, of course, heightening our Tefila, which may merit, though only in the Yom Kippur Avoda, the participation of Hashem Himself.

