

DOES HASHEM PRAY? (DAVEN)

Parshas Yisro

By Rabbi Menachem Rokeach

We ask "Does Hashem Daven?" 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."

"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.

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.

While the two interpretations do not seem to be in accord, there exists a combining element: the people listening to the pronouncement of the name play an indispensable role. The Talmud teaches (Sanhedrin 39a) כל בי עשרה שכינה שרויה dwelling among us, with the assembly of a Minyan of ten, representing כלל ישראל. The common denominator between Rashi and Tzeror Hamor is that the Almighty is involved in our praying. Either Hashem Himself pronouncing the Name (according to Rashi), or allowing us to pronounce it (according the Tzror Hameor), which is indicative of His presence and His positive response.

The mention of the שם המפורש, ineffable Name, is restrictive: only in the Beth Hamikdosh, only by the Kohain Gadol, only on Yom Kippur. Yet it is obvious that the Name used by all, in our daily prayers, (other than שם המפורש) also requires our heightened concentration (כוונה) (see Sotah 38a), thereby deserving, hopefully, His positive response.

The Azoro (Beth Hamikdosh) was filled to capacity on Yom Kippur when the NAME emerged from the mouth of the Kohain Godol, all standing and listening in utmost awe and reverence. According to Rabban Gamliel (Rosh Hashono 34b) this consciousness is an imperative all year round, at the Chazan's repeat of the Amida (see Mevartenura ibid). The source for this point of view may be the above connection of Tzibur consciousness, to the Yom Kippur Avoda, and the utterance of the name of Hashem.

In the introductory Bracha to the chapters of Psukai d'zimra, ברוך שאמר, we clearly state: וְנוֹזְכִיר שִׁמְךָ we shall pronounce Your Name. Apparently, we must condition ourselves to allow us that privilege. In Haazinu (Devorim 32:1) the Targum Jonoson counts eighty-five letters פ"ה אותיות (פה = mouth), Moshe sanctifying his mouth before pronouncing the name of Hashem.

How much more so, more frightening excitement, being conscious that Hashem Himself, is with us, כביכול, in our prayer. And, thus, the positive retort from Above is more sequential.

The Pesach Seder, the subject discussed in the previous portions (בא, בשלח) may be a parallel for better comprehension of the above thesis.

It is customary to begin the Seder ceremony, with the intellectual course, the four questions מה נשתנה, asked by the youngest child. Then the older siblings ask. Finally, the elder, conducting the Seder, father, or grandfather, responds: "So, children, you are asking appropriate questions. You're asking ... שבכל הלילות... מה נשתנה... then you asked... the third question was... and the fourth", repeating the whole gamut. Finally he adds, "all good questions, deserving a good answer. Here it is: עבדים היינו", and proceeds the הגדה.

So is the נמשל. Hashem davens with us. So you're asking for wisdom, you're asking רפאנו, you're asking for טובה. The Almighty prays with us, repeating our pleas, and then responds, presenting us with all the blessing we requested.

Daily prayer is called עבודה, an appropriate designation, similar to the Pesach Seder, which is called עבודה, ועבדת את העבודה, you shall perform this service... (Shemos 13:5).

