



5785 Divrei Torah on Jerusalem by Rabbi Reuven Schreier Parashat Vayechi / פרשת וַיְחִי

The Princess and Her Delicious Dish

As *Yaakov Avinu* gathers the *shevatim* around his deathbed, he blesses them and prophesizes about their future. The *Gemara Pesachim* (56a) famously tells us that as *Yaakov* prepared to reveal eschatological secrets, the Divine Presence departed from him. He worried that one of his son's may be inadequate to receive the prophecy, "perhaps, God forbid, there is a flaw in my bed, like *Avraham* who gave birth to *Yishmael*, and my father *Yitzchak* who gave birth to *Eisav*!" The brothers all responded in unison, שמע ישראל, ה' אלקינו ה' אחד. "Just as there is only One in your heart, so too there is only One in ours." In elation, *Yaakov* responds with the immortal words, ברוך שם כבוד מלכותו לעולם ועד, Blessed is the glorious name of His kingdom forever and ever. Paralleling his original dream of the supernal latter on the *Har HaBayit*, *Yaakov* is surrounded by twelve rocks that are united into one integrated whole, bound together by their undying loyalty and belief in *achdut Hashem*.

As the *Rambam* (*Hilchot Kriat Shema* 1:4) explains, we recite this same verse of שם ברוך today to imitate and relive the experience of our forefather *Yaakov*. However, as every school child knows, we do so quietly. The *Gemara Pesachim* explains that we are caught in a pickle: on one hand, *Moshe Rabbeinu* never recited this verse when explicating the *Parsha* of *Shema* to *Am Yisrael* in *Sefer Devarim*. On the other hand, *Yaakov Avinu* himself said it. To appease both concerns, we recite *Baruch Shem* quietly. In the study house of *Rebbe Ami*, they provided the following parable. A princess smelled the aroma of a delicious dish. It would be unbecoming for her to explicitly request for it, and it would be painful for her not to have it. Her servants therefore began bringing it to her secretly.

This cryptic *mashal* is exceedingly profound and confusing. What is problematic with the great praise of *Baruch Shem*? In a seminal approach to this *Gemara*, Rav Chaim Volozhiner (*Nefesh HaChaim* 3:11) explains that the *pasuk* of *Shema Yisrael* is the ultimate declaration of Divine unity. We willingly nullify all of existence in front of the omnipresence of *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*, essentially declaring אין עוד מלבדו, there is none other than Him. Our illusion of independence is a fleeting mirage; ultimately, we are inextricably bound to Him. The following verse of *Baruch Shem* is a "lower" declaration of unity. We acknowledge the reality of our worldly experience in which we perceive separation and independence. But we dedicate all of the lower realms to *Hashem's* glorious kingdom.

After declaring the awesome total unity of *Hashem* with the *pasuk* of *Shema*, the recitation of *Baruch Shem* is almost an embarrassment. "Would one consider it a praise of a human king to say that he rules over many ants and fleas and that they willingly accept the yoke of his rule upon them?" Nonetheless, God revealed to us His desire for such praise, so we say it, discreetly. (A more complete explication of these ideas is warranted, but we'll leave that for a different time.)



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However, there is one place in which *Baruch Shem* is recited constantly and vociferously. The *Gemara Taanit* (16b) explains that in the *Mikdash*, the congregation would respond with *Baruch Shem* to every single blessing instead of reciting *amen*. They did so with a deafening roar. (The *Rambam* explains in his commentary to the *mishna* in *Rosh HaShanah* 4:1 that the phrase *Mikdash* refers to the totality of Jerusalem. It is possible that the *Rambam* thought this *Gemara Taanit* applies to all of Jerusalem and not just to the *Har HaBayit*.)

How can we be less sensitive to the princess' shame, in the palace of the King no less?! Where is the shame over this delicious dish for which we were so concerned everywhere else in the world?

In the holy city of *Yerushalayim*, the perception of *Hashem's* unity is heightened. Under the *Sha'ar HaShamayim*, the heavenly gates that open to higher realms, a Jew's natural sense of the Divine presence is sharpened. In the King's palace, where He rejoices over His bride, the Jewish people unify and perceive their inextricable connection with *Hashem*. Ironically, it is specifically in the *Mikdash* that our perception of existence and God's unity is not viewed as a contradiction. We can loudly and proudly declare *Hashem's* unity and His the dominance of His glorious kingdom forever and ever. There is no embarrassment when the dish is served in the innermost sanctum, hidden from the view of all.

We will *be'ezrat Hashem* continue to discuss these ideas in the weeks to come.

