

Chapter 1

“The Glory of His Kingdom”

Yaakov desired to reveal the end of days to his sons, but the Divine Presence withdrew from him. He thought, *Perhaps among my descendants there is someone who is not deserving [does not stand with me in unifying God — Rambam, Hilchos Shema 1:4], like Avraham, from whom came out Yishmael, and like Yitzchak, from whom came out Esav. His sons said to him, “Shema Yisrael Hashem Elokeinu Hashem Echad — Hear, Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One.”* They said, “As in your heart you mean nothing but One, so in our hearts we mean nothing but One.” At that moment Yaakov began [speaking] and said, “*Barruch Shem kevod malchuso l’olam va’ed — Blessed is the Name of His kingdom’s Glory forever and ever.*” The Rabbis said [about this verse]: “What should we do? Should we say it? Moshe did not say it [did not write it in the Torah]. [Perhaps we should] not say it, but Yaakov did.” They decreed to say it quietly. Rabbi Yitzchak said: “This is like a king’s daughter who smelled a meat pudding. If you say it [to bring it to her], it is demeaning. If you

don't say it, she suffers. They brought it to her in secret." When there came to be many heretics [who suspected the Jews of muttering something improper under their breaths],¹ they [the Jews] began to say it out loud [again].

(*Pesachim* 56a)

This short passage is puzzling. Why did Yaakov doubt his children? What is it about their answer that set their father's mind at ease? What does his response mean?

Furthermore, since Yaakov said it, we say it, too; since Moshe did not say it, we say it in an undertone? This seems to imply that all prayer must be based on biblical text. But that is not so. In the words of the Tzlach (on *Pesachim* 56a), "not a Shabbos passes without many, many prayers that were composed long after Moshe's time."²

More Questions

A related tradition cited by the Avudraham tells us that when Moshe went up to Heaven he heard the angels recite, "Blessed is the Name of His kingdom's Glory..." and he appropriated it without their knowledge and brought this declaration down to us. Since we do not want the angels to become jealous over their stolen mystery, we recite it in a whisper, except on Yom Kippur. On that most holy of all days, Jews reach the level of the ministering angels and can by right loudly proclaim, "Blessed is...His kingdom's Glory." We now must reconcile these

1. For the identity of these heretics, see *Maharitz Chiyos and Rashi on Berachos* 12a.

2. Perhaps this is an allusion to "Moshe's Prayer," chapter 90 of *Tehillim*, which is said on Shabbos morning.

The patriarch is lying in his bed. He is troubled because perhaps his children have taken after Yishmael and, like him, believe that God is composed of attributes and is not totally and indivisibly unique.¹ He worries that they may have committed the error of the sons of Esav, who introduced multiplicity into their conception of the Divine.

Yaakov's sons respond, "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One."²

The patriarch raises his voice. There is still one thing that must be clarified. *Is it possible that my sons believe in the God of the philosophers Who knows naught of this world and cares not for deeds of men?* He cries out, "Blessed is the Name of His kingdom's Glory forever and ever." My God is the King of the universe; the whole world is filled with His Glory. He knows and supervises, decrees and disposes, punishes and rewards, commands and enlightens. He is the King and the Redeemer. This is the God of Israel.

Yaakov's sons have upheld this principle throughout the ages. To us, God is first and foremost the King of the world and the Ruler over humanity. He is in charge of nature and of human history. His power and the Glory of His kingdom fill the universe and our own lives.

"*Baruch Shen kevod malchuso...*" is therefore a translation and application of "*Shema Yisrael...*" It restates the verse's message so that it is not open to misinterpretation.

The fulcrum of this translation is the concept of the Name and of Glory. It is important to appreciate the meaning of the

1. The official philosophy of Islam, the *Kalam*, follows this view. See *Moreh Nevuchim* 1:53.

2. For another understanding of this response, see Mahara!l, *Gevuros Hashem* 5:13.

worldly.¹ This is Yaakov's message to his sons — God is not only a presence that sustains and nourishes the world but also the King Who guides and administers it. "God is your watchman; God is the shadow at your right hand" (*Tehillim* 121:6). Just as your shadow mimics and reflects your every move, so does your Master respond to your every action and guide you.²

Why Did Moshe Say It Quietly?

Rabbi Tzadok Hakohen explains that the story of Moshe's ascent to the Above hides a profound idea. The Sages speak to us of the soul of man, his innermost hidden aspect, and its core, that deepest pristine aspect of each person that is a part of the Divine and always remains connected to it. Moshe is paradigmatic of a person who scaled the pinnacle of faith. A man who succeeds in accessing that hidden aspect of his own soul knows the Oneness of God with utmost clarity as he knows himself, and he recognizes his own unique portion within the Divine. In such a state of being, one must feel ashamed and apologetic for the very need to assert the sovereignty of God, and so it can only be done in a whisper.

Yaakov symbolizes the man from whom Godliness is concealed, a man overwhelmed by the disparate multitude of forces and processes all around him, a man amid the confusion and concealment of the Egyptian exile (see *Michtav MeEliyahu*, vol. 3, pp. 205–6). Such a person must proclaim his faith loudly to

1. This was pointed out by Rabbi Dovid Cohen in his discussion on scientific aspects of Torah concepts in *Avraham Yagel Yitzchak Yeranein* (Mesorah Publications).

2. This popular interpretation can be traced ultimately to Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev, the Kedushas Levi (as noted in the introduction to the ArtScroll Selichos).

drive away the winds of disbelief and apostasy that swirl all around him (paraphrase of *Siach Sarfei Kodesh*, ch. 4; compare *Nefesh HaChaim* 3:11).

And Yaakov called for himself E-1, the God of Israel.

(*Bereishis* 33:20)

The explanation is that Yaakov Avinu required the Divine Inspiration to rest upon him [in order to prophesy]. Since it departed from him, he exclaimed, "Blessed is the Name of His kingdom's Glory..." in an effort to have it restored. Moshe Rabbeinu, however, was always prepared for prophecy and "invested with garments of royalty." Therefore he did not need to mention "Blessed is the Name of his kingdom's Glory..."

Rabbeinu Bachya, Encyclopedia of Torah Concepts, p. 294)

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drive away the winds of disbelief and apostasy that swirl all around him (paraphrase of *Siach Sarfei Kodesh*, ch. 4; compare *Nefesh HaChaim* 3:11).

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