

Parashat Va'etchanan 5784, 2024:

Encountering Kriat Shema

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ה' יעזור וירחם על אחינו כל בני ישראל, בארץ ישראל ובכל חלקי הארץ

Kriat Shema is one of the best-known *mitzvot* in Parashat Va'etchanan. The Rambam *zatzal* (1135-12-04) rules that “*Shema Yisrael*,” the first *pasuk* of this *mitzvah*, has singular halachic status: “One who recites the first verse of *Kriat Shema*, that is, ‘*Shema Yisrael*,’ without intention—*v’lo kivane libo*—does not fulfill his obligation. [However, one who recites] the rest without intention fulfills his obligation.” (*Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Kriat Shema* 2:1, translation, Rabbi Eliyahu Touger) Rav Yosef Karo *zatzal* (1488-1575) follows this opinion nearly verbatim in his *Shulchan Aruch (Orech Chaim* 60:5).

The words, “*v’lo kivane libo*,” are difficult to understand, as neither the Rambam nor Rav Karo elucidate their meaning. Fortunately, Rav Yisrael Meir Kagan *zatzal* (1838-1933) explains this elusive phrase:

The [type of] *kavanah* (intentionality) that is required in this matter [the recitation of the *pasuk*, “*Shema Yisrael*,”] is for one to intensely think about and focus upon (*l’hitbonane u’lasum al libo*) what he is saying. Fairly to do so in the reading of the first verse prevents one from fulfilling the *mitzvah* [of *Kriat Shema*], since it contains the essence of *kabbalat ol malchut Shamayim* (accepting the yoke of Heaven) and His Unity may He be blessed. (*Mishnah Berurah, Orech Chaim* 60:5, subsection 11)

In sum, for Rav Kagan, the *kavanah* that is required in the first *pasuk* of *Kriat Shema* is *l’hitbonane u’lasum al libo* the words one is reciting in order to attain the requisite level of *kabbalat ol malchut Shamayim*. Moreover, failure to do so renders the *mitzvah* null and void.

My rebbe and mentor, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik *zatzal* (1903-1993), known as “the Rav” by his students and followers, defines *kabbalat ol malchut Shamayim* as “*hichnayah lifnei Hashem*—submission to Hashem’s authority.” (This and the following quotations, *Al HaTefilah*, Rabbi Reuven Grodner *shlita*, editor, page 73, translation and brackets my own) Basing himself on one of Rashi’s glosses (1040-1105) in *Talmud Bavli, Berachot* 12a (s.v. *sh’ne’emar l’hagide ba’boker chasdecha*), the Rav maintains there are actually two distinct types of *kabbalat ol malchut Shamayim*: *kabbalat ol malchut Shamayim shel boker* (of the morning), as depicted in the *tefilah, emet v’yatziv* and *kabbalat ol malchut Shamayim shel erev* (of the evening) as found in the prayer, *emet v’emunah*.

According to the Rav, *kabbalat ol malchut Shamayim shel boker* is an active process of *hichnayah lifnei Hashem* that is performed through the “recognition of the good and [giving] thanks to the Holy One blessed be He” that he describes in this fashion:

A person realizes that he is not independent, the opposite is the case, as he is dependent upon others, and most of all, he is dependent on the Holy One blessed be He. He begins by recognizing the good bestowed upon him by his parents and his teachers and in the end, recognition of all the good from the Holy One blessed be He. [As *Dovid Hamelech* said:] “*l’hagide ba’boker chasdecha*—to declare your kindness in the morning.” (*Sefer Tehillim* 92:3)

In contrast, for the Rav, *kabbalat ol malchut Shamayim shel erev* is a combination of our trust (*bitachon*) and faith (*emunah*) in the Holy One blessed be He, that leads to recognizing our dependence upon Him. This degree of faith encapsulates more than the present moment, as it is “*emunah b’atid mitoch tikvah*—faith in the future that is based upon hope.” [As *Dovid Hamelech* said:] “*v’emunatcha ba’lailot*—and Your faith at night.” (*Sefer Tehillim* 92:3)

With Hashem’s help, and the Rav’s thoughts as our guide, may our recitation of *Kriat Shema* ever be one of authentic *kabbalat ol malchut Shamayim*, and may we thereby give voice to *Dovid*

HaMelech's stirring words: "l'hagide ba'boker chasdecha v'emunatcha ba'lailot." V'chane yihi ratzon.

Shabbat Shalom

Past *drashot* may be found at my blog-website: <http://reparashathashavuah.org>

The email list, *b'chasdei Hashem*, has expanded to hundreds of people. I am always happy to add more members to the list. If you would like to be added, please contact me via email: <mailto:rdbe718@gmail.com>.

*** My audio *shiurim* on the topics of *Tefilah* and *Tanach* may be found at: <http://tinyurl.com/8hsdpyd>

*** I have posted 164 of **Rabbi Soloveitchik's** English language audio *shiurim* (MP3 format) spanning the years 1958-1984. Please click on the highlighted link.