

YESHIVAT HAR ETZION  
ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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TEHILLIM: THE BOOK OF PSALMS

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In commemoration of the ninth yearzeit of our husband and father, Aryeh ben Yosef haLevi,  
The Rothstein Family

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Psalm 145: Tehila U-Berakha - Part II

Last lecture attempted to express the importance of Ashrei due to its reflection of the different levels of the God/man relationship. A tehila, reflecting man's awe-inspired attempt to connect with God; a berakha, enhancing that nascent relationship, surging towards a close intimate friendship. And back again to the praise, as one comes short of concretizing that friendship.

This by itself is an important observation and yet, in describing this psalm as to render one who recites it "worthy of the world to come," it falls short. In order to fill out the picture we should like to know not only THAT it exists but HOW we can attain this relationship. What are the tools we need in order to reach a tehila and ultimately a berakha?

I think that the answer can be found through an analysis of the specific verses of praise in the psalm. What are we praising God about? Are these not the qualities that exemplify His greatness? And are not those qualities ones to which we should emulate, "just as He is merciful so should you, just as he has grace so should you."

While an exhaustive analysis is not in the confines of this lecture, I would like to point a direction we can take towards grasping this message in the psalm.

"Karov"

Each verse (2) in Ashrei can be seen as its own verse, presenting its own theme. The new, second half is represented by a conjunctive 'and,' ('vav'). For example, the third verse reads as follows:

"Gadol Hashem u-mehulal me'od // ve-le'gedulato ein cheiker." (God is great and very praiseworthy // and his greatness has no dubiety.)

The first statement offers a praise, the second strengthens it through a qualification. The general rule we can assert is that were we to extract one half of the verse, the other half would stand on its own, able to express itself acceptably.

Two exceptions to the rule exist in our tefila: 'Chet' and 'Kuf.' Neither verse contains a vav to separate each verse from its partner. But whereas in verse chet, the second verse nevertheless presents a different idea from the first, (3) verse kuf exhibits quite a different message in that each verse supports its neighbor - a literary symbiotic relationship. Let's look into this verse and try to solve the mystery of the missing 'vav.'

"Karov Hashem le-khol kor'av // Lekhol asher yekra'uhu be-emet." ("God is close to all who call out to Him // To all who call out to Him in truth.")

These two verses at the outset seem to disclaim one another. The first verse maintains that God's connection spans a wide spectrum; all one needs is to call out to God, to them He is close. The other half, though, seems to qualify - God answers only those who call out to Him in truth. Which one is it, is a general addressing satisfactory, or is an intense cry out of sincerity required?

In line with the last shiur, we employ a dualistic attitude. Though unequal, each approach is valid in God's eyes. To all who seek Him, he draws near. This basic connection, however, is finite, it reaches a specific limitation. If one were to pray and 'speak' to God, God would in turn draw near, but this closeness would be bound by the extent to which the call was made in truth. (4) Through a genuine cry to God, through a prayer with no ulterior motive other than to reach out to God, God's spirit descends on man with limitless intimacy.

Each verse in the verse stands alone, yet, at the same time, each one harmoniously unites with its partner. Within the verse lies the key to developing a successful relationship with God. Your first step can effect a relationship with God; but that is only the first step, in order to experience the true closeness to God, an absolute, unadulterated, cry out to God is in order. (5)

Built into this verse also rests a concept in teshuva (6):

"Dirshu Hashem Be-himatz'o // Kera'uhu bihyoto karov" (Seek out God when He might be found // call out to Him when He is near.") (7)

When is God close? Chazal interpret this line to mean during the ten days of teshuva between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippurim. (8)

Based on the integration of this verse and verse "kuf," one could suggest that there exists a cyclical movement in man's relationship to God. When should one call out to God? When God is close to man (bihyoto karov). How does God draw close to man? When man calls out to Him in truth (yikre'uhu be-emet). Conclusion: Call out to God, in truth, whenever you can. Remember, though, that if your call is not genuine, if you have ulterior motives in your tefila or in your teshuva, God does not shun you, rather he draws near. Realize, though, that this closeness is less intense.

How beautiful is the idea that different levels can exist in our relationship with God, and if we search hard enough in the psalm we find a blueprint for achieving this relationship. We may begin with a detached praise, yet we end up with the closest of blessings. As long as we call out to God, in any form, our prayers will be heard. Depending on what we put in to our relationship with our creator, and how genuine and sincere our call is to God, God will respond in kind, drawing nearer to us, blessing us as a father to his children.

The Talmud Yerushalmi (9) states that avoda zara seems close, but in reality is very far; in contrast, God "nir'eh rachok ve-ein karov mimenu." In our journey towards developing that relationship with God, sometimes "he seems so far away, but [if we call out to him in truth] there is no one closer than Him." Mizmor 145 encompasses all of our emotions vis-a-vis our connection with God. Tehila u-berakha; a praise, a blessing; a commentary on man and his existence in the world of God.

#### Endnotes

(1) A verse in poetry is a distinct or enclosed part of a sentence. Often a sentence will have two verses which might be symmetrical in nature. An example would be 1 Ma tovu ohalekha Yaakov / 2 mishkenotekha Yisrael. Other times the second half will have a separate meaning altogether.

(2) God has pity // God is slow to anger and full of goodness. This idea was first shown by Rav Yeshaye DeTrani, in Piskei Rid Le-berakhot; Machon Yerushalayim, pps. 7-8. See also Sefer Ha-Manhig of Rav Abraham ben Nathan of Lunel; ed. by Dr. Yitzchak Rafael, Mosad Harav Kook Jerusalem 1978; Vol. 1, p. 53. With regard to the explanation of verse 'chet,' I have not found a sufficient answer to this query.

(3) Malbim, in his peirush on Tehilim, expresses this multi-faceted approach to seeking out God.

(4) In this vein in the prayer of "anim zemirot" ascribed to Rabbi Yehuda Ha-chasid, an interesting verse is elucidated.

Pe'ero alai u-fe'eri alav // ve-karov eilai bekor'i eilav."

"His splendor is upon me and mine on His, and He is close to me when I call out to Him." When is God truly close to man? When man calls out to Him (in truth).

(5) Undoubtedly, since what is teshuva if not an attempt to recreate an intense relationship with one's God.

(6) Yeshayahu, 55:6.

(7) Bavli Yevamot, 18a.

(8) Yerushalmi Berakhot 9:1.