

Ashrei, the Great & Holy Psalm

Based on the Kabbalistic Commentary of Rabbi Moshe Cordovero As Explained by Rabbi Ariel Bar Tzadok

By HaRav Ariel Bar Tzadok

Copyright © 2010 by Ariel Bar Tzadok. All rights reserved.

*In beloved memory of Moshe Ben Chaim Alter (z"l),
dedicated by his son Mr. Michael Alter*

PART TWO

Psalm 145 is one of those exceptional psalms whose verses are written in the order of the letters of the Hebrew alphabet. The first verse begins with the letter Alef, the second with the Bet and so on through the alphabet with the exception of the letter Nun, which is absent. We will discuss the letter Nun in its place.

A point that Rabbi Moshe Cordevero makes in his commentary to this Psalm is the secret of the Hebrew letter Vav. Vav always represents the sefirotic face of Zeir Anpin and the sefirah Tiferet. As such, Vav represents the Face of G-d that is revealed to Israel and it also represents the Torah itself.

The Hebrew letter Vav represents the spiritual domain (Olam HaYetzirah) that connects to the physical domain (Olam HaAsiyah). Each verse of Psalm 145 (with two exceptions that will be discussed in their places) is divided in the middle by the letter Vav, translated into English as the word "and."

Vav is the medium through which the Binah mind that is tapped into the Keter source transfers its inner knowledge from one's inner seat of emotions (Tiferet) and into Malkhut (one's body and thus behaviors). Therefore, each verse serves a dual purpose of reaching up to grasp and embrace and then pass on down that which was grasped. This is done at each level represented by each of the letters of the Alphabet.

Psalm 145:1

Tehilah L'David. Aromimkha Elohigh HaMelekh, V Avarakha Shimkha L'olam Vaed

A Praise of David. I will raise You on high my G-d the King, AND I will bless Your Name forever.

Tehilah (praise) is the highest source of connection; it is where Binah connects to Keter. The influx of revelation, even though it is not a conscious connection is still felt deeply within the psyche and arouses



a sense of jubilation. Remember, true jubilation is not an emotional sensation, but rather a deep inner awareness of the inner state of connection. Once the shefa (spiritual influx of Divine energy) begins to flow from the unseen worlds into the Neshama soul and from there into the unconscious mind, the conscious mind becomes dimly aware of something happening. This dim awareness is experienced as something similar to an emotional sensation, and it is therefore often interpreted to be one. However, the source of the sensation lies far deeper than any emotions can penetrate.

The Psalm is said to be “of David.” Literally we would translate “L'David” as “to” David and not “of” him. This literal translation also reveals to us a hint about the movement of the spiritual energy (shefa) that is received through the “Tehilah.” The word “Tehilah” represents the union of Keter with Binah that is then passed through Tiferet, the Vav, and then on down to Malkhut (the physical domain).

King David is always associated with the sefirah Malkhut/Kingdom, for after all, David is the King of Israel. The Name David, beginning with the letter Dalet is also associated with the Hebrew word “Dal” which means poverty. The sefirah Malkhut does not produce its own light and relies entirely upon the shefa that it receives from the sefirot above. Therefore, Malkhut is called “poor.” The opening statement “Tehilah L'David,” therefore is no mere statement of the Psalm's authorship, but rather a coded statement of the Psalm's intent and purpose.

Thus the verse states, “I will raise you on high my G-d the King.” There are three elements here. The first is the action of “raising G-d” on high through the words our our prayer. The second and third are the dual mental acknowledgments that G-d is both personal, as it says, “My G-d” and impersonal, as it says, “The King.” The process of meditative ascent occurs as the Binah conscious mind ascends into the unknowable (unconscious) Keter source. From here the shefa is released and the sense of Tehilah (praise/jubilation) is experienced.

In this sense of inner knowing and balance one gains momentary insight, revelation and experience of the Divine, being both personal and intimate (“My G-d”) and at the same time transcending the finite boundaries of the self to recognize the Divine Authority and Direction in everything else in existence. Thus G-d is called “The King,” He is experienced, even if only for the moment as the Melekh HaOlam, (the King of the Universe).

With this inner awareness received in Binah from Keter, now the Vav comes into play and takes the Binah conscious mind revelation and allows it to descend into the lower domains of Tiferet and eventually Malkhut. As the shefa descends from the cerebral part of the mind to those that control the emotions and the body, we say, “I will bless your Name.” A blessing is an offering to The One who just gave to us a free-will offering (the shefa of Keter to our individual Binah) and we in return approach G-d through that element of the Divine which reveals itself here below, His “Name.” The Name of course is Y-H-V-H, the essential Name of Tiferet.

What we see from this one verse and we will continue to see in the following verses is that this Psalm (and many others like it) are actually written in a coded form. Each poetic statement is much more than mere words; they are subtle statements of the ebb and flow of human consciousness as it proceeds through the meditative process.

Psalm 145:2

B'kol Yom Avarakheyka V Ahalalah Shimkha L'olam Vaed
Every day I will bless You AND I will praise Your Name forever.

Following the order of the Hebrew alphabet, the next verse begins with the Hebrew letter Bet. The verse states, “every day I will bless You.” This is stated to add deeper meaning to the previous verse. For one might consider that the meditative process hinted to in the first verse is a one-time affair, to be performed a single time and no more. This verse comes to teach us that constant repetition is

necessary in order to strengthen the meditative process and to establish its benefits firmly in the conscious mind and in our behavior that follow.

“I will bless You” we have already discussed above. The nature of spiritual energy is that it needs to be reciprocal. The shefa is cyclical by nature; therefore what we constantly receive from Heaven we must constantly return. Being that the shefa is not anything physical, nor is Heaven an actual physical place, there is no actual thing being passed on to any actual place. Rather, the way to return the shefa to Heaven is our passage of it to others in this world.

By our performance of the meditative techniques in prayer we enable our mental/psychic connection to keep the doorways open between the worlds enabling us to serve as the conduits to channel the shefa to Earth. This is how Israel serves as a nation of priests and as a light to the world. We perform our meditative services to bring spiritual benefit to all and not just to ourselves.

Once we perform our duty of receiving the shefa we incur the obligation to fulfill the shefa needs of others. We must then literally pass on the shefa that we receive to nourish other souls. As the shefa passes from us to others nearby, it also passes from them to many more who are in equal need. In this way, the movement continues and in some way unseen to our eyes performs its task and eventually ascends in return as Ohr Hozer (returning/ascending light).

Now again we have the great Vav, the symbol of the heart and the Torah itself. Remember, we are commanded to place Torah upon our hearts (Deut 6:6). This commandment found in the daily reading of the Kriyat Shema emphasizes how in order for Torah to become actualized in the individual soul, it must be “placed upon the heart.” This union of Torah and heart is what is now performed meditatively with the coded intents of this section of the verse.

For the mental process of the Keter/Binah union in the first part of the verse was to focus on the continual flow of the shefa, distinguishing it from being just a one-time event. Now with this established we also establish this flow from above (the upper sefirot of the Mohin) to below (the lower sefirot of Zeir Anpin and Nok) to be continual, so we say, “I will praise Your Name forever.”

Again, here we emphasize the same continuation with the usage of the term “forever,” and that which is forever is the “praise.” The Hebrew word here used is another grammatical form of the word Tehilah. However whereas Tehilah is a noun, “Ahalalah” (I will praise) is in a verb form. Tehilah is a statement, “Ahalalah” is an action.

The sefirah Malkhut is also called the Olam HaAsiyah, the World of Action. Therefore, in order for the shefa to be received here, it can only be accomplished through action and not by mere thought or desire alone. The action of choice, of course, is the spiritual union achieved the meditative process of prayer and then transformed into the action of speech, specifically the recitation of these very words.

Words are projections of thoughts. G-d created the universe through speech; we in turn can become “co-creators” with our words. This is what makes prayer, and more importantly praise, so valuable.