

Shema: Rigid Allegiance or Dynamic Freedom?

R. Aviva Richman- richman@hadar.org

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I. Shema: Allegiance and Obedience

1. Berakhot 13a

אמר רבי יהושע בן קרחה: למה קדמה פרשת "שמע" ל"והיה אם שמע" — כדי שיקבל עליו עול מלכות שמים תחלה, ואחר כך מקבל עליו עול מצות.

R. Yehoshua ben Korhah said:

Why does one say the *Shema* passage before "If you listen [to the mitzvot]" passage?

So that one accept upon themselves the yoke of the reign of Heaven first, and afterwards accept the yoke of mitzvot.

II. Shema: Proactively Crowning God

2. Rosh haShanah 16a

ואמרו לפני בראש השנה מלכיות זכרונות ושופרות. מלכיות — כדי שתמליכוני עליכם, זכרונות — כדי שיעלה זכרוניכם לפני לטובה, ובמה — בשופר.

And recite before Me on Rosh HaShanah verses that mention Kingships, Remembrances, and *Shofarot*:

Kingships so that you will crown Me as King over you; Remembrances so that your remembrance will rise before Me for good; and with what? With the *shofar*.

3. Rosh haShanah 32b

ראש השנה לב:

תא שמע: "שמע ישראל ה' אלהינו ה' אחד" — מלכות, דברי רבי יוסי. רבי יהודה אומר: אינה מלכות. Come and hear": Hear o Israel Hashem Our God, Hashem is One" – is Malhut – these are the words of R. Yossi. R. Yehuda says: It is not Malhut.

4. Pahad Yitzhak: Rosh Hashanah Essay #24

The Talmud records a Tannaitic dispute as to whether one fulfills one's obligation to recite "Kingship" (*malhuyot*) on Rosh HaShanah with *Shema Yisrael* (RH 32b)...This merits analysis. Is not *Shema Yisrael* the very verse through which all of Israel daily discharge the obligation of the acceptance the yoke of the reign of Heaven? How is it possible that this verse cannot serve as "Kingship" on Rosh HaShanah?

The Tanakh teaches: "*Mei'oivai tehakmeini* - from my enemies make me wise" (Psalms 119:98).

Sometimes wisdom is gained specifically from the course of the matter for one who hates us. And so it is in this issue.



In the laws of idolatry, we hold that the proclamation "you are my god" made to an idol is judged as equal to sprinkling or slaughtering or the like [i.e. acts of worship]. (Sanhedrin 60b) Our teacher, the Hazon Ish innovated in this that one who says "you are my god" is culpable for idolatry only when saying it as a statement of coronation but not when it is uttered as an acknowledgement of a pre-existing fact. In other words, the statement must not be merely a declaration that a situation continues to exist, because such a statement simply affirms a known fact in which the one who pronounces it does not participate in its formation. The kind of statement which makes the one who says it liable for idolatry must be a statement of activating its sovereignty. In other words, through this statement he makes the god into a king and the statement creates the status of sovereignty. "From my enemies make me wise."

Herein we find the distinction between the acceptance of the yoke of the reign of Heaven throughout the year and the statement of Kingship on Rosh HaShanah. In our daily acceptance of the yoke of the reign of Heaven, our task is not at all to emphasize the activation of the creation of sovereignty. We accept upon ourselves the yoke of sovereignty which existed continuously even before our acceptance.

The statement of Kingship of Rosh HaShanah is totally different, because the essence of the Kingship of Rosh HaShanah is specifically the act of coronation. The Kingship verses of Rosh HaShanah are the crowning of the Sovereign. It is the Kingship verses of Rosh HaShanah which renew the monarchy.

In this vein, the Sages said on the verse "And He became a king in Yeshurun when the chiefs of the people gathered" (Devarim 33:5): "When is God called a King? When Israel accepts God upon themselves. If not – as it were – God is not called king."

Or as they said on the verse "You are my witnesses...and I am God" (Yesh'ayahu 43:12): "When am I God? When you are my witnesses. But if you are not my witnesses, I am not God, as it were." (Sifrei)

This, then, is the intent...of the Kingship of Rosh HaShanah. We are not merely saying to the Holy, Blessed One, "Behold, you are the King", rather we are saying to [God], "We are crowning You as King". This is the activation of the creation of the Monarchy.

(Translation adapted from R. Aryeh Bernstein)

III. Shema: Being in Dynamic Relationship with God

5. Hazon Ish, R. Avraham Yeshayahu Karelitz, 1878-1953 (Yoreh Deah, 62:17)

אמנם נראה שאין דין קבלה אלא קדם עבודה דאז כשאומר אלי אתה מובנו שמסכים מעתה על ישותה וכחה לעבדה וזהו עבודה שחייבין עליה ... אבל כשכבר עבד וכל שלא שב הוא בחזקת עובד ... אין בזה המובן קבלה מעתה אלא הוראה על זמן עבודה שיעבדה... וקרא דיליף מני' נמי הכי הוא שאמרו לחדש הדבר ולהסכים על העגל כמבואר לשון המקרא

...The category of "accepting" [a foreign god] is only prior to worship, for then, when a person says "You are my god" the meaning is that one is assenting from this moment to its existence and power so as to worship it – and this is the worship for which one is culpable...

But if one has already worshipped or not done teshuvah one is already in their prior status of worshipping [a foreign god]... where this does not have the meaning of accepting from this moment but rather indication that one will worship it at some time...

And the verse from which [the law] is derived also goes in this direction, for they said [This is your god] to create something new and to assent to the calf... (Ex 32:24).

