

Torah Insights

Some Insights into the קדושה - "Kedushah"

by Rabbi Bennett M. Rackman

(with gratitude to Mr. Harry Harris of Far Rockaway, who taught me how to chant (layn) from the Torah and gave me a love for the Torah cantillation)

ש ק ד ו ש : Above the *aron kodesh* in the chapel, there is brass sculpture by the famous artist Chaim Gross, which says: קדוש קדוש קדוש - *holy holy holy*. Jews recite this phrase taken from Isaiah VI, 3, several times each day. But, why is it necessary to say "holy three times? What is accomplished by saying the word three times? Does it mean, holy, holier, holiest? I think not! Can't the angels just say "holy" once? What is gained by repeating it?

Each day in our prayers we recite the paragraph: ובא לציון which also contains this verse from Isaiah. But, here we also recite the Aramaic translation of Yonason the son of Uziel. This translation is at least two thousand years old. Each קדוש has a different emphasis or focus. The first holy refers to God being holy in the Heavens (שמי מרומא); the second קדוש refers to God's holiness on Earth (על ארעא); and the third קדוש connotes God as holy "forever and ever" (לעלם ולעלמי עלמיא). So now we can understand the need to repeat the word holy three times. The angels, and we, are praising different aspects of God's holiness.

This understanding of Yonasan ben Uziel can also be gleaned from another source. Our mesorah, our tradition, also informs us as to how to read and chant verses in the Bible.

The musical notes assigned to קדוש קדוש קדוש are *dargah - tvir - tipcha*. The first קדוש is sung with a high pitch (as if going up to the Heavens), the second קדוש is sung with a low pitch (as if going down to Earth), and the third קדוש is sung with emphasis (to connote "forever and ever"). The music gives "meaning" to the understanding of the words we say.

(This is not similar to the comment of the Vilna Gaon on the verse in Genesis XL, 18, since there the *GR"A* is utilizing the names of the notes, and not the music, to gain deeper insight into the understanding of the text.)

ב ר ו ך : The musical notes also convey to us the proper way to read the second verse in the "*Kedushah*." Some people mistakenly pause in the verse from Ezekiel (III, 12) after the first word, or after the second word. However, the second and third words form after the first word, or after the second word. However, the second and third words form the phrase כבוד ה', glory of the Lord. The pause should be after the third word. And, the musical notes also convey the same meaning. The notes on this verse are: *mayrcha - tipcha - sof pasuk*. Again, our *mesorah*, our tradition, informs us as to how to read and chant this verse.

י מ ל ו ך : The last verse in the "*Kedushah*" is an excerpt from Psalm CXL, 10 (The Lord shall reign forever, your God, O Zion, from generation to generation.) We say ימלוך ה' לעולם. We do not say the verse found in Exodus XVI, 18: ועד: ה' ימלוך לעולם ועד - God will reign for all eternity. The verse from Exodus would appear more powerful and desirable for us to quote rather than the verse from the Psalm! Granted that King David wrote the Psalms with רוה הקדש - Divine inspiration. But, imagine yourself with 600,000

other male Jews, Perhaps three or four million men, women, and children all singing praised to God.

For what? The clouds of Glory protected their rear flank from the Egyptian arrows and Spears; in the middle of the night God provided the Pillar of Fire - עמוד אש as cited in Exodus, ויאר את הלילה ; the ground they walked upon was smooth; they looked down and found diamonds rubies, and pearls; and if they were hungry, God provided fruit trees in the middle of the Sea to assuage their hunger. Truly they were experiencing miracles in the present. Indeed, *Onkelos* who wrote the Aramaic translation on the Five Books of Moses translates the verse as ה' מלכותה קאם - in the present tense. The correct English translation should be, God reigns for all eternity. On the other hand, the verse in the Psalm translates ה' ימלוך as the future tense. How can this be?

The Jewish people at the splitting of the Reed Sea saw God's presence; they saw, experienced God intervening in Nature, in history. They saw גילוי שכינה - they had Divine revelation. Our sages tell us that the lowly maid-servant at the Sea had a more profound God-experience than even the prophet Isaiah. For them God was not in the past, or future. For them, God was only and forever present. Therefore, they could give expression to God's Omnipresence - ה' ימלוך לעולם ועד, God reigns for all eternity. And, God continued to perform miracles during their sojourn in the Wilderness for forty years. Therefore, *Onkelos* purposely changed the future tense to a present tense.

(Indeed, when we recite ה' ימלוך in the "*Kedushah*" we are praying that soon, in the future God will reign supreme. So, we recite the verse composed by King David. We are looking forward to the time when God's Kingship will be recognized by All. On the other hand, when we recite the "*Kedushah*" in the prayer וּבֹא לְצִיּוֹן, we are speaking of the end of days when the Messiah - משיח - already appeared. Now it is more appropriate to recite the verse from Exodus which is phrased in the present tense: ה' - ה' ימלוך לעולם: קאם - מלכותה קאם.

(Our sages are critical of King Hezekiah. When God performed miracles for his Generation. They were worthy that the Messiah should appear and redeem the Jewish people. The reason they offer that the משיח did not come was due to the lack of appreciation of that generation. They did not sing a song of Thanksgiving! One may ask, if the Jewish people recognized God's Omnipotence and Omnipresence at the shores of the Reed Sea, then why did not the Messiah appear at that point in history bringing about the Ultimate Redemption. The answer is simple: the Jewish people first needed to receive the Torah on Mt. Sinai and they also had to inherit the Land of Israel.)

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