

תנא דבי אליהו, כל השונה הלכות בכל יום מובטח לו שהוא בן העולם הבא

IT WAS TAUGHT IN THE ACADEMY OF ELIYAHU, WHOEVER STUDIES TORAH LAWS  
EVERY DAY IS ASSURED THAT HE WILL BE PRESENT IN THE 'WORLD TO COME'

## Chapter 2, Question 9

### *The beracha of אשר יצר 'Asher Yatzar'*

#### *Part 2*

At the end of Part 1 of Essay 2.8 we asked a fundamental question regarding the beracha of אשר יצר, which one recites after using the bathroom. Why was this particular *nusah* (constitution) chosen for this blessing? We observed that surely a beracha of this nature could have been written in a more concise form, or alternatively, in far more detail? Could we therefore assume that there is a deeper significance behind the choice of these words by the Sages of the Talmud?

Let us first look into the source of this beracha and where it first appears on the Jewish historical map. We find in the Talmud at the end of tractate Berachot<sup>1</sup> a debate occurs between the Amoraic Sages regarding how to conclude the end of the beracha of אשר יצר. The great Amora, Shmuel, says that the beracha should be concluded with the words **רופא כל בשר** *Rofeh Chol Basar* ("Healer of all flesh"). Another renowned Amora, Rav Sheshet, disagrees with Shmuel and says it should be concluded with the words **מפליא לעשות** *Mafli La'asot* ("Performer of wonders"). Along comes a much later Amora, Rav Pappa, and with his unfathomable wisdom concludes that we should establish this beracha according to **both** the opinions of Shmuel and Rav Sheshet, as follows:

**ברוך אתה ה' רופא כל בשר ומפליא לעשות.**

**"Blessed are You Hashem, Healer of all flesh and Performer of wonders."**

This is the accepted nusah today.

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1. דף ס: 1.

The reader may ask why we refer to Rav Pappa's wisdom as 'unfathomable'?

The Talmud is full of endless debates between the Sages on intricacies to do with the Oral Law, which are often resolved with conclusions that are sensitive to both parties. So what is so special about Rav Pappa's conclusion in this case? The answer is that Rav Pappa's opinion established exactly **45 words** for the beracha of **אשר יצר**. It is remarkably mysterious to discover that hundreds of years later we find revealed in the writings of the **Ari z'l** that according to the '**Sod**' (Kabbalistic truth) there is actually a necessity for there to be exactly forty five words in this specific beracha!

Before we look into the reasons why exactly forty five words are so crucial for **אשר יצר**, let us acknowledge the following dilemma that stems from the Talmud above and begs us to ask some fundamental questions on how we should approach the knowledge of the Sages of the Talmud in relation to the later revealed Kabbalistic Wisdom.

Firstly, did Rav Pappa actually know that there is an intrinsic Kabbalistic necessity in forming exactly forty five words for the beracha of **אשר יצר**, and it was this knowledge that subsequently led to his decision on how to conclude it? Furthermore, we see that the opinions of Shmuel and Rav Sheshet would have formed a nusah with less than forty five words. Would it be possible for us to assume (or dare to assume!) that the great Sages, Shmuel and Rav Sheshet, did not know the secrets of the Kabbalah?

The truth is that it would be very difficult to make such a hypothesis. It is widely known and accepted, as a rule, that when it comes to the spiritual status of Gedolei Yisrael each generation is on a much lower level than the generation which preceded it. The Talmud in tractate Shabbat<sup>2</sup> emphasizes this point clearly:

**אמר ר' זירא אמר רבא בר זימנא,  
אם ראשונים בני מלאכים אנו בני אנשים,  
ואם ראשונים בני אנשים אנו כחמורים**

*Rav Zeira said in the name of Rava the son of Zimona;*

*If the Rishonim were Bnei Melachim (Angels), then we can be called human beings,*

*But if the Rishonim were human beings, then we are (in comparison) like donkeys!*

2. דף קיב, וע"ע מה שכתב הבא"ח בהקדמת ספרו רב פעלים.

There are only a few exceptions to this rule. For example, we all know that the Ari z'l and Vilna Gaon were on a much higher level of spiritual achievement than many of the Gedolim who preceded them. But to compare the knowledge of the Ari z'l to the great Sages - the Tana'im and Amora'im - of the Mishnah and Talmud and to assume he knew more than they did in the secrets of the Torah?! One would have to carry much weight to say such things. So how then should we approach the knowledge of the Tanna'im and Amora'im as expressed in the Talmud with the later revealed Kabbalistic Wisdom? Lo and behold, we seem to have found a profound individual who lived only a half a century ago and who seemed to have carried such weight!

We are wondering at this point whether 'ink' and 'paper' could ever successfully come together to describe the depths of Rabbi Yehuda Leib Ashlag zt'l (Poland, 1885 - 1954). He was one of the greatest Kabbalists of his generation and quite likely of the several generations which preceded him. He was most famously known for the outstanding commentary he wrote on the **entire Zohar** called "HaSulam" (The Ladder), which subsequently earned him the title of the "**Ba'al HaSulam**" (Author of The Ladder).

Rabbi Ashlag explains that when the Zohar was revealed through the holy Tanna - Rebbi Shimon bar Yohai, shortly after the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash, it was revealed in very much a **cryptic form**. It is known that Rebbi Shimon bar Yohai was granted the knowledge of the Zohar on the day of his *petira* (passing) from this world. The Ba'al HaSulam, in his Hakdama (preface) to the Zohar, clarifies that the Sages of that time were not able to successfully decipher the Zohar and it was left and almost forgotten until approximately 1,500 years later when the light of the Ari z'l began to shine in the world. The **Holy Ari z'l** (1534 - 1572), with his unparalleled level of Kedusha, became the unique vessel fitting to receive all the fundamental truths of Kabbalistic Wisdom. How is it that the early Sages were not able to master the secrets of the Kabbalah? Why was the Kabbalah only revealed to the much later generations? Furthermore, why has there recently been such an immense **resurgence** of the knowledge of Kabbalah in the world?

In order to understand the answer to these questions we will need to charter into the unfamiliar, and explore various aspects concerning the spiritual constitution of our world. The whole time-span that Hashem has allocated for the universe - from the creation of Adam until the Messianic Era - is **6000 years**. We are currently in the year 5771 (soon to be 5772 in a couple of weeks) and we are thus very near the 'end' or the 'conclusion' of the creation. The Ba'al HaSulam explains that it was not possible to reveal or decipher the secrets of the Kabbalah to the much earlier generations. The world was in a spiritual state that was not so conducive to truths of the Kabbalah. Let us explain further...

The 6000 year time-line of mankind's existence is divided into three distinct phases - each phase corresponding to a different spiritual reality of the world. The first two thousand years is called the period of **תהו Tohu** (Void or Emptiness) and the generations that lived during this period are given the spiritual analogy of being the "**Rosh**" (Head) of the ultimate human entity, but without a body. This period corresponds to the spiritual realms called **חכמה Hochmah**, **בינה Binah** and **דעת Da'at** - the acronym for this is **תב"ד**. Adam, Noah, Avraham, Yitzhak, Ya'akov and Yosef all lived during this time zone.

The second span of two thousand years is called the period of **תורה Torah** and the generations who lived during this period are given the spiritual analogy of being the "**Toch**" (Upper Body) of the ultimate human entity. The Torah was given to Am Yisrael during this era in the year 2448. This period corresponds to the spiritual realms called **חסד Hessed**, **גבורה Gevurah** and **תפארת Tiferet** - the acronym for this being **תג"ת**. Moshe Rabbenu, Aaron HaCohen, all the Nevi'im (Prophets) and most of the Tana'im lived during this period.

The third set of two thousand years is the period we live in today. It is called the period of **ימות המשיח Yemot HaMoshi'ah** (Days of the Messiah) and the generations who lived and still live during this time are given the spiritual analogy of being the "**Sof**" (End) of the ultimate **completion** of the human form. This period corresponds to the spiritual realms called **נצח Netzah**, **הוד Hod** and **יסוד Yesod** - the acronym for this is **נה"י**.

The Ba'al HaSulam reveals that the people who lived during the first period of *Tohu* were absolute 'Giants' in spiritual terms. This is because their souls emanated from the **spiritual realms** of **חב"ד** which is the greatest of all spiritual realms. However, the disadvantage of this generation was that the **spiritual lights** that were present in the world at that time, which carried within them the secrets of the Torah (**the Kabbalah**), came from the dimension of **נפש Nefesh** - the lowest spiritual light source. These small lights were thus not able to completely fill the immense souls of the people of that generation, because their constitution was like a head without a body.

In the next two thousand year period of *Torah* the spiritual lights increased in abundance to the level of **רוח Ru'ah**. The people of this generation who were in the lower realms of **חג"ת** were able to receive more spiritual lights and this paved the way for the immense soul of the Tanna, Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai, to receive and reveal the Zohar to the world.

As the years went by and the world entered the spiritual realm of **נה"י**, more and more spiritual lights of Kabbalistic wisdom enveloped the world and bore fruit to the Ari z'l, the Rashash and many others. In our generation the spiritual lights have increased to such an immense level - to the level of the **נשמה Neshama**, that we have lived to see and experience the Torah of some of the greatest *Mekubalim* (Kabbalistic Masters) who have ever lived, e.g. like the Hida, the Abir Ya'akov, the Ben Ish Hai and many more. This is why the later generations have achieved such a greater wisdom of the Kabbalah.

Having said all this we should not fail to acknowledge that, very interestingly, all the Sages who preceded the Ari z'l nevertheless still hold much authority in practical halachic law until this very day. It is important not to lose sight of this fact for a moment! This is because their souls emanated from the holiest 'spiritual realms' of **חב"ד** and **חג"ת** and it is within these realms where the truths of the practical laws of Torah are rooted. Whereas the deeper Kabbalistic truths of the Torah are present in the dimensions of the 'spiritual lights'. So when it comes to practical halacha we follow the rulings of the Shulhan Aruch unless there is a contradiction between it and the writings of the Ari z'l. The Ben Ish Hai emphasizes this rule in numerous places in his writings.

What we should also internalise is that the Sages of the Talmud merited to reach the correct conclusions *despite* not having the knowledge of the Kabbalah! This is a fundamental axiom of how we should approach our understanding of the Sages and the awesome knowledge they possessed.

We cannot possibly relate to the level of kedusha (holiness) of the Sages who established our halachot, but let us simply use this beracha of **יֵצֵר יִצְרָאֵל** as one 'proof' of the immense characters we are dealing with. Rav Pappa was able to come to a conclusion that would only be confirmed many years later as Kabbalistically true and necessary according to the teachings of the Ari z'l under the auspices of Eliyahu HaNavi. With this knowledge we can genuinely look upon the rest of the Oral Law with a more sound perspective or belief in the *Ru'ah HaKodesh* (Divine inspiration) that our Sages possessed!

In fact there is a famous medrash that tells us that Avraham Avinu<sup>3</sup>, despite living in a world steeped in idolatry, was able to learn all the laws of the Torah simply from his very 'insides'! Having been born in the highest realm of **ד"ב"ד**, Avraham Avinu's vast level of Kedusha enabled him to deduce all the laws of the Torah in a world which was void of the knowledge of the Torah. An example of this is evident in perashat Vayera where we observe that Avraham Avinu intuitively felt there was a necessity to serve matzah to the three Melachim who came to visit him, because it was Pesah that day.

We have now come to the understanding, through the teachings of Rabbi Ashlag, that the previous generations were not as well versed in the knowledge of the Kabbalah as the later generations. This is echoed by none other than Rebbi Shimon bar Yohai **himself** in reference to a debate which is recorded in the Talmud in tractate Rosh Hashanah<sup>4</sup> between the Sages regarding how one is meant to blow the **shofar** on Rosh Hashanah. The debate between the Sages is whether one should blow either just Tekiyah, or just Teru'ah, or just Shevarim alone. . .

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3. עין מדרש תנחומא ויגש יא

4. דף לד

Rebbi Shimon bar Yohai is subsequently quoted in the Zohar<sup>5</sup> to proclaim the following:

**לא ידעי הני בבלאי רוא**

*These Tana'im from Babylon do not understand the Kabbalistic meaning ...*

The reason why Rebbi Shimon bar Yohai says this is because had the Sages known Kabbalah they would have realised that **all** three sounds are needed according to the Sod. However, what is remarkable is that **Rebbi Abahu** concludes from his own logic that **all three** sounds should be blown in order to fulfill all the opinions, and this is the practical halacha today! So even though we witness here a seemingly lack of Kabbalistic knowledge in some of the Sages, we nevertheless have another brilliant example of how an Amoraic Sage, namely Rebbi Abahu, managed to reach the same conclusion as the Zohar through his own insight of practical halachic law.

Coming back to our beracha and **why 45 words ? ? ?**

HaRav Haim Vital writes in the name of the Ari z'l in Sha'ar HaKavanot<sup>6</sup> the following:

**ברכת אשר יצר היא כנגד אבא שבעולם העשיה  
ולכן יש בה מ"ה תיבות כמספר "אדם" שהוא חכמה,  
כי מסוד החכמה העליונה נוצר זה האדם שנרמז בו.**

*The beracha of 'Asher Yatzar' relates to the dimension of 'Abbah'  
which is within the dimension of 'Asi'ah'.*

*And therefore it has Mem-Hei (45) words -  
the numerical value of which equals that of the word 'Adam'  
which is in the dimension of Hochmah (Wisdom).*

*For it is in the dimension of the Exalted Hochmah that man is fashioned...*

It may be wise to conclude the essay just over here . . .

**Rabbi Yosef Haim David**

This document contains divrei Torah. Please treat it with the necessary respect.

5. פנחס דף רלא ע"ב.

6. דף ב.