חסידות

From the Chassidic Courts

KOZHNITZ · LECH LECHA, AVODAT YISRAEL

Why calling God 'You' in prayer is itself a kindness

Avodat Yisrael

Addressing HaShem as "Atah" (You) in prayer is itself an act of Divine chesed (kindness), since only through God's kindness are we, mere creatures of clay, enabled to speak before the King of Glory at all; this is the deeper meaning behind Malki-Tzedek's blessing of Avram, who embodies the trait of chesed, and behind the verse "Atah kohen l'olam." Recognizing this chesed as we open our lips in prayer (as in "Adonai sefatai tiftach") is itself the act of crowning HaShem as King — the secret link between geulah (redemption) and tefillah (prayer), and the gateway into malchut (Divine sovereignty). AI SUMMARY

"And Malki-Tzedek, king of Shalem, etc.... and he said: 'Blessed be Avram to the Most High God,' etc." It is stated in the Zohar HaKadosh (Holy Zohar): "Blessed be Avram" — as we say "Baruch Atah" (Blessed are You) — the raza d'milah (secret of the matter) is that these are the tikkuna d'birchan (formulation of the blessings). End of quote.

It seems to me, in my humble opinion, [that one can offer] a bit of explanation of his holy words, based on an introduction from our teachers, may their merit protect us, who explained the verse in Tehillim, chapter 110: "Atah kohen l'olam" (You are a kohen/priest forever). The explanation is this: behold, we are formed of clay, full of sin and iniquity, and nevertheless we merit to speak and to supplicate before the King of Glory, the Creator of all, concerning whom no thought can grasp Him. Moreover, we address Him in the second person, "You," as a man speaks to one standing opposite him — this is certainly a great chesed (kindness) and a wonder from the mercies of HaShem Yitbarach (the Blessed One), Who has mercy on His creatures. And it is known that the matter of chesed is always called by the name "kohen," [as in the phrase] "ish chesed" (man of kindness). This, then, is the meaning of "atah": that we merit to speak to You in the term "atah" is [the aspect of] "kohen l'olam," that is, because "l'olam chasdo" (His kindness is forever). End of quote.

Therefore it seems fitting to explain the words of the Zohar in this way: "Blessed be Avram" is like our saying "Baruch Atah" — that is, that we merit to say "Baruch Atah" is the aspect of chesed, which is hinted at in the word "Avram," who is likewise a man of chesed, as is known. Accordingly, it concludes there fittingly: "the secret of the matter is that these are the formulation of the blessings" — meaning that it hints here at the secret of the order of prayer.

Similarly, one can explain the verse "Atah kohen l'olam," as above, "al divrati Malki-Tzedek" (after the manner of Malki-Tzedek) — meaning, as Malki-Tzedek hinted, according to the explanation of the Zohar cited above. Moreover, the entire subject of the above-mentioned chapter revolves around Avraham, as Rashi explains there.

We may further suggest a hint in this verse, inasmuch as Chazal (our Sages, of blessed memory) said that in the order of prayer one first says "Adonai sefatai tiftach" (O Lord, open my lips). The explanation of their words is: in order to crown the Creator, Blessed be He, as King beforehand — [recognizing] that without His chesed and will we would not have even the aspect of lips to chirp

before Him — and so we pray "Adonai sefatai tiftach." And this is the explanation of the verse "Atah kohen l'olam," as above: this is Your chesed, "al divrati Malki-Tzedek" — meaning, that we merit to speak to You and to call You "Malki-Tzedek" (my King of righteousness), which is the aspect of Adnut (Lordship, Sovereignty). And through this the "gates of righteousness" are opened — malchuta kadisha (the holy kingship), as is known from the explanation of the verse "Adonai sefatai tiftach" by the Arizal (Rabbi Yitzchak Luria, of blessed memory).

Thus the phrase "al divrati" fits well, concerning which Rashi writes there that the yud is extra, and it should properly have said "divrat" — see there. And now it fits well that David spoke of himself, saying that it is by Your chesed that I speak to You in the term "Malki-Tzedek."

And this is what Chazal said regarding the juxtaposition of geulah (redemption) to tefillah (prayer) — that this verse does not constitute an interruption, since once the Rabbis instituted it, it is considered like tefillah arichta (an extended prayer). End of quote. And the letter alef is interchangeable with ayin, so it is as though it read "arichta" (an arrangement) — meaning that through this verse we arrange the entire order of prayer, whereby we crown our Creator as King, [recognizing] that without Him, who gives man a mouth? And this is "the gate to HaShem" — it is malchut (kingship). And understand this.

Translation: translated by AI (anthropic/claude-sonnet-5)