“Retzeh VeHachalitzeinu”: An Experiential Paradox

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The most basic way[1] in which “Birkat HaMazon” (grace after meals) on Shabbat is distinguished from the other times that this prayer of thanksgiving is recited during the week and on Yomim Tovim, is by the addition of a special paragraph within the third blessing:[2]

> Find favor[3] “VeHachalitzeinu” Lord, our God, through Your Commandments,
> especially the Commandment of the Seventh Day, this great and holy Shabbat.
> For it is, for You, a great and holy day.
> On it we cease work and rest in love in accord with Your Will’s Commandment.
> May it be Your Will, Lord our God, to Grant us rest without distress, grief or lament on
> our day of rest.
> May You Show us the consolation of Zion, Your City, and the rebuilding of Jerusalem
> Your holy City,
> For You are the Master of salvation and consolation.[4]

The placement of this paragraph within the third blessing of Birkat HaMazon that expresses our hopes for the rebuilding of Yerushalayim[5] [6]constitutes a manifestation of the concept that Shabbat is “Mei’ein

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[1] Another less basic change in Birkat HaMazon for Shabbat is the addition of a “HaRachaman” supplication:

May the Merciful One Cause us to inherit a day that is completely Shabbat and restful for eternal life.

This change can be characterized as less basic since it is outside the context of the four central blessings of the prayer, the first three blessings defined as being obligatory according to the Tora, with the fourth Rabbinic in origin. See Berachot 45b. Consequently an addition to the third blessing is of greater Halachic significance than an addition of a “HaRachaman”.

[2] The Grace after meals consists of four blessings, each associated with a different theme:

1) Thanking God for food and sustenance.
2) Thanking God for the land of Israel.
3) Thanking God for Jerusalem.
4) Thanking God for His general Goodness that He regularly Extends toward us.

[3] The implications of the first word in this paragraph, “Retzeh” (Find favor), was discussed with respect to a paragraph in the Shabbat Amida that also begins with the same word in “Asking God to Help Us Experience Shabbat Properly” found at http://www.kmsynagogue.org/Prayer%2014%20Retzeh%20ViMenuchateinu.htm

[4] Koren Siddur p. 970.

[5] “Have Compassion…on Yerushalayim Your City, on Zion the dwelling place of Your Glory, on the royal house of David, Your Anointed, and on the great and holy house that bears Your Name…And may Yerushalayim the holy city be rebuilt soon, in our time. Blessed are You, Lord, Who in His Compassion will Rebuild Yerushalayim. Amen.”

[6] Obviously, the physical reality of the contemporary Yerushalayim is hardly a ruin or a ghost town. Therefore the references to, e.g., “LeShana HaBa’ah B’Yerushalayim HaBenuya” (next year in the rebuilt Yerushalayim) summon up images of a city that is not only physically beautiful, but also the spiritual center of the Jewish people, devoid of

Olam HaBa",[7] the essence of the World to Come, a state of affairs that most probably lies off in the distant future. The experience of Shabbat properly observed contains the quality of a foreshadowing of the ultimate redemption for which Jews hope and pray, a redemption that includes the restoration of the Temple.

But regarding Shabbat observance as experiencing some aspect of a future that casts Yerushalayim and Beit HaMikdash playing a central role, simultaneously emphasizes the realization that we currently are bereft of such places and institutions. An intriguing paradox results, consisting of on the one hand, the need to make Shabbat as spiritual and pleasurable as possible in keeping with the ideal of the World to Come,[8] and on the other, confronting the depressing realization that the chasm between the current state of affairs in which the Jewish people find themselves and the world that is envisioned for the future is wide and deep. Is it expected that we compartmentalize these two themes, and therefore the only way that they can coexist within each of us is in pristine separation from one another—<u>or</u> are the two ideas somehow meant to holistically and simultaneously coexist, with our joy tempered by our exile and the absence of the Temple, our sadness mitigated by the present and immediate experience of Shabbat? [9] [10]

"Sinat Chinam" (needless hatred) and worthy of (Yeshayahu 2:3) "…Ki MiTziyon Teitzeh Tora U'Dvar HaShem MiYerushalayim" (from Zion will go forth Tora and the Word of God from Yerushalayim.) Much spiritual "building" is required before such a city becomes a reality.

[7] See Berachot 57b, as well as the last stanza of the Shabbat Zemer "Ma Yedidut", Koren Siddur, pp. 386-7.

[8] Thus the wish that we be spared any unnecessary "distress, grief and lament" at least on Shabbat, is in keeping with the statement in Pesachim 50a:

> Said R. Acha bar Chanina: This world is not like the World to Come. In this world, regarding good news, one says, "Blessed is He Who is Good and Does Good", while for bad news, one says, "Blessed is He, the True Judge." In the World to Come, everything will be "Who is Good and Does Good", i.e., there will nothing will occur at that time that will require a "Tzidduk Hadin" (a justification of something disagreeable to a person).

[9] It is interesting to note that during the Nine Days leading up to Tisha B'Av, although there are requirements to engage in certain outward mourning practices (Shulchan Aruch, Orech Chayim 551), Shabbat remains an exception. Nevertheless, one's overall mood on Shabbat is inevitably affected. Furthermore, during the Shabbat prayers of the Nine Days, the custom is to sing Lecha Dodi using the melody of the Kina "Keili Tziyon", to read the verse included in the weekly Tora reading, Devarim 1:12, according to the cantillation associated with Eicha, and to chant those passages from the Haftora taken from Yeshayahu 1 that describe the Jews' sinfulness and the resulting future destruction of Yisrael and Yerushalayim with the same Eicha cantillation. (There is also a custom throughout the Three Weeks, including Shabbat, to sing the final paragraph "Yiru Et HaShem Kedoshav…" to the tune of "Keili Tziyon".) So to what extent is one truly able to enjoy Oneg Shabbat fully, if at all, when continually being confronted with such associations?

[10] In the next to last series of essays on Shabbat prayers, #16, mention was made of a disagreement concerning whether visiting the ill or comforting the mourner is within the Shabbat spirit because of what it might do to one's mood and capacity for Oneg Shabbat—see http://kmsynagogue.org/Prayer%2015%20MiShebeirach%20for%20someone%20who%20is%20ill.htm Perhaps the conflict between Oneg Shabbat/Me'Ein Olam HaBa and Zecher LeChurban are manifestations of the same dilemma.

Acknowledging the complexity of maintaining these competing emotions and sensibilities in a somewhat balanced relationship with one another, might offer an insight into the curious second word of the paragraph added to the Shabbat Birkat HaMazon, "VeHachalitzeinu." The commentary Eitz Yosef,[11] based upon VaYikra Rabba 34:15, notes that the root Ch-L-Tz can have multiple connotations: a) Devarim 25:9 "And his levirate wife approaches him before the eyes of the elders, 'VeChaltza' (and she removes) his shoe…"; b) II Shmuel 22:20 "…'Yechaltzaini (He Delivered/Took me out) because He Delights in me'; c) Devarim 3:18 "…'Chalutzim' (pioneers, troops at the vanguard—a military interpretation including the suggestion that they will be armed with weapons) you will pass by in front of your brothers the Children of Israel, all men of valor"; d) Yeshayahu 58:11 "…And your bones 'Yachlitz' (He will Make strong) and you will be like a watered garden…"[12] The commentator goes on to compose a sentence in which these meanings of the root are utilized in order to offer a lush interpretation of the word in question:

> …by means of the merit of Shabbat that will be properly observed by the Jews[13] they will be (b) redeemed and (a) extracted from the Diaspora and they will go up to the land (c) armed and energized and (d) strong in their bones.

However, it appears equally reasonable to attribute a single meaning to the word "VeChalitzainu". It could be argued that (a) (b) deliverance from exile would not only help to make our Shabbat experience more holy, but would be a step in the right direction with respect to the rebuilding of the Temple, "Kibutz Galiyot" (the ingathering of the exiles) needed to precede the positive spiritual redevelopment of the city of Yerushalayim.[14] And a mass Aliya of this type might well entail (c) a military dimension, comparable to the original conquest of Canaan by the Jewish people. However, thinking about the logistics involved in resettling large masses of people and possible associated warfare are not terribly "Shabbos'dic" (in keeping with the spirit of Shabbat).[15] An understanding of the word in question that would be much more apropos to the ideal of Shabbat is a request of HaShem to Give us strength, not only in our bones, but also the inner strength necessary to deal with the contradictions that the spiritual life often poses. In addition to having to reconcile dreams of redemption with present realities, other

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[11] Otzar HaTefillot, Nusach Sepharad, Nehora D'Orayta, Yerushalayim, 5720, Daf 246a.

[12] While it could be contended that the same root that is used in biblical Hebrew could have a different connotation when the Rabbis employ it in Rabbinical literature, Eitz Yosef does not seem to be disturbed by this possibility.

[13] In Shabbat 118b, R. Shimon bar Yochai states that if all of the Jews completely observe two Shabbatot, the Moshiach will come.

[14] The thirteen blessings that comprise the middle section of the weekday Amida present a plan for the physical and spiritual redemption of the Jewish people. The blessing for the ingathering of exiles is #7 while the rebuilding of Yerushalayim is #11.

[15] RaMBaN, in his commentary to VaYikra 23:24 defines the concept "Shabbaton" which appears with respect to Shabbat as well as Yom Tov, as a positive Commandment to make these days of rest, including refraining from activities that do not fall under the rubric of the prohibition of "Melacha", i.e., in addition to avoiding the negative prohibitions, there is a positive Mitzva to create an atmosphere of rest and relaxation.

challenges that we confront include: theodicy, living a life that is simultaneously particularistic and universalistic, the tensions between faith and doubt, balancing material and spiritual demands, and finding room for individual needs even as one participates in family and communal activities.

While resting on Shabbat from Melacha and our everyday responsibilities is a welcome respite following an often exhausting week, that very "Menucha" (rest) also provides us with time to think about the issues that during the week we often are too busy to consider carefully and seriously. Not only do we hope not to be bothered from without by situations which engender grief and distress, but we also fervently pray that we will find the wherewithal and fortitude to courageously confront the conflicts and questions from within that inevitably arise in one's life, and which are often brought to the fore when we finally are able to sit and reflect.

It is also significant to note that we are directing such a request at God, "You God, Give us strength", acknowledging that we are often not up to the task on our own and recognize our need for Divine Assitance. In this regard, the sentiment added in the second word of the third paragraph in Birkat HaMazon on Shabbat, is very much in keeping with the paragraph added on Shabbat to all of the Amidot throughout the day: [16] [17]

> Our God, and God of our ancestors, "Retzeh" (Find favor) in our rest.
> <u>Make us</u> holy through Your Commandments, and <u>Grant us</u> our share in Your Tora.
> <u>Satisfy us</u> with Your Goodness, <u>Grant us</u> joy in Your Salvation, and <u>Purify our hearts</u> to serve You in truth.
> In love and favor, Lord our God, <u>Grant us</u> as our heritage Your holy Shabbat, so that Israel, who sanctify Your Name, may find rest on it.
> Blessed are You, Lord, Who Sanctifies Shabbat.

Consequently, hand-in-hand with our observance of Shabbat, comes the realization, via the word "VeHachalitzeinu" that we require Divine Assistance to deal with and hopefully reconcile the many tensions that are inherent in our lives in Olam HaZeh, even as we look forward to welcome not only the "essence" of the World to Come, but the World to Come itself.

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[16] The middle portions of the Amidot for Ma'ariv, Shacharit, Musaf and Mincha have been individually discussed in the first four essays of this series on the Shabbat prayers that can be found at http://kmsynagogue.org.Rabbi.htm

[17] ArtScroll Siddur, pp. 340, 424, 468, 518.