

## **ADONAI/ELOHIM (Yom Kippur 1991)**

Baruch atah Adonai Elohenu melech ha olam. Blessed art Thou Lord our God King of the universe. Who is the Thou addressed? The Thou is modified by two names of divinity that are distinct but inseparable. Adonai and Elohim, two aspects of the same divinity.

Shma Israel. Hear Israel Adonai-Elohim is One.

In what sense One? For many the two names of God rub against each other. For Judah Halevi in the eleventh century, as for Blaise Pascal in the seventeenth century, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Adonai) is not the God of Aristotle (Elohim). Elohim governs and manages the universe "without any change in His nature, without feelings of sympathy with one or anger against another" (Kuzari chapter 4). Elohim guides the world neutrally and according to the axiom of the prophet Zephaniah 1:12 "will do no good, neither will He do evil".

Elohim is the ground of creation and His name alone is heard throughout the first chapter of Genesis. Elohim creates all: the lion and the lamb, the wolf and the sheep, the bacteria and the infant. When Elohim saw everything that He had created He called it "very good" and the sages comment that "this goodness refers to death as well as to life, to the evil desire as well as to the good desire, to the dispensation of suffering and the dispensation of happiness, to Gehenna and Paradise, to the angel of death and the angel of life, to the dispensation of punishment and the dispensation of reward, to the kingdom of earth and the kingdom of heaven" (Genesis Rabbah 9).

Elohim is the metaphysical ground of all being, beyond the normal meaning of good and evil as humans understand it. Elohim needs no friendship with humankind and enters no covenant

with human beings. Elohim is independent of his creation. As understood by Halevi, Elohim "neither benefits nor injures nor knows anything of our prayers or offerings, our obedience or disobedience". Elohim is wholly transcendent.

Elohim is the reality principle. One cannot pray responsibly without keeping Elohim in mind. Elohim remembered keeps our prayers sober, sane, anchored in reality. Elohim instructs us that we cannot pray for matters beyond logical possibility or contrary to natural laws. We cannot pray that time should be reversed or that the dead lying before us be resurrected or that the amputated grow limbs.

We cannot pray without Elohim. We cannot pray with Elohim alone. We do not pray "Baruch atah Elohim". Full throated prayer includes Adonai, the power that is discovered in the potentiality of reality. Adonai is the power that stretches reality to its limits and transforms it. Adonai is the ideality principle. Adonai first enters biblical recognition with the elevation of man who is charged with cultivating the earth (Genesis 2:5-8).

Before there was man, there was Elohim. After man, Elohim will be. But Adonai is Adonai only with man and woman. Human beings call for Adonai and Adonai calls for human beings. Adonai is correlated with humanity. It calls upon human beings to be co-creators and co-sanctifiers with Adonai.

One cannot pray Adonai without calling upon the petitioner himself or herself. One cannot pray to Adonai for peace with folded arms, locked legs and muted voice. One cannot pray to Adonai for health without responsibility toward the body and the spirit of the self who prays.

In crises beyond human control religious wisdom turns to Elohim and counsels acceptance. In crises within human control religion calls to Adonai and calls for transformation.

Elohim and Adonai are one. Without Elohim, prayer is fantasy. Without Adonai, prayer is submission to fate. So the first ten verses introducing the binding of Isaac (Genesis 22) refer exclusively to Elohim. This is the way of the pagan world to sacrifice the child. It is only with the introduction of the angel of conscience, malach Adonai, that the knife is let loose. Abraham experiences the internal change from Elohim to Adonai, from passive acceptance to active transformation. And Abraham called the name of the place in which this transformation took place Adonai-yireh, Adonai sees.

The God of Abraham and the God of the philosophers are one. As the heart and mind are one. The God of Aristotle and the God of Judah Halevi are not opposing forces, they are sacred complements of divinity toward whose unity we strive. On that day the Lord God shall be One and His name One.

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