

## ***“Praying with Fire”***

### **“Adon Olam”**

Origin: Adon Olam is believed to have been composed by either R' Shlomo ibn Gavirol, **Shlomo Ben Judah** Andudalucian Hebrew poet and Jewish philosopher.. He was born in Málaga about 1021; died about 1058 in Valencia, or Rav Hai Gaon, **Hai ben Sherira**, was a medieval Jewish theologian, Rabbi and scholar who served as Gaon of the Talmudic Academy Of Pumbedita he was born in 939 and died on March 28, 1038. He received his Talmudic education from his father, Sherira ben Hanina, and in early life acted as his assistant in teaching. In his forty-fourth year he became associated with his father as "*ab bet din*," and with him delivered many joint decisions. The last of the Geonim from Bavel who was niftar in the 11th century. He is also credited with formulating the Pessach Hagaddah.

Adon Olam consists of ten lines: the first 6 express the Jewish concept of what Hashem is and the last four tell how a man of faith relates to the Creator, the trust he feels in Him. The last words of the hymn, "Hashem is with me, I shall not fear," are taken from Tehillim 118:6, and is one of the passages of Hallel.

Adon Olam begins the daily Shacharis (morning) service and is also the last tefilla of the kriyas Shema that we say before going to sleep each night.

There are two questions posed about this tefilla. 1. Why does Shacharis begin with Adon Olam? And 2. The opening line of the tefilla says Adon olam asher malach - Master of the world Who rules - why refer to Hashem as Adon and not Melech - why Master and not King?

The answer to both is Avraham Avinu. During the time of the Bais Hamikdash the daily avodah (service) began with a discussion as to whether the light of the sun had reached the city of Chevron (Hebron). Only when the sun had risen over Chevron could the avodah take place. Why? To remind Hashem of Avraham and his sons who are buried there in the hope that their merits would lead Hashem to be receptive to that day's avodah. Shacharis today takes the place of that daily avodah and so we begin with a reminder of Avraham as well.

(...) He [Abraham] was given over to Nimrod. [Nimrod] told him: Worship the Fire! Abraham said to him: Shall I then worship the water, which puts off the fire! Nimrod told him: Worship the water! [Abraham] said to him: If so, shall I worship the cloud, which carries the water? [Nimrod] told him: Worship the cloud! [Abraham] said to him: If so, shall I worship the wind, which scatters the clouds? [Nimrod] said to him: Worship the wind! [Abraham] said to him: And shall we worship the human, who withstands the wind? Said [Nimrod] to him: You pile words upon words, I bow to none but the fire - in it shall I throw you, and let the God to whom you bow come and save you from it!

How does Adon olam remind Hashem of Avraham? Avraham was the first person to ever refer to Hashem as Adon - as a master (Bereshis 15:2). In the time in which Avraham lived there was a strong belief that while there was a Creator, He did not demean Himself by coming to deal with the daily trivialities of human life. They believed that he relegated those tasks to messengers. Avraham however understood differently. He saw that Hashem was an active master in the world He had created. He saw that not only could Hashem affect nature, he saw that Hashem chose to effect nature. This was shown to him most clearly when he was placed in the kivshan haish - the furnace of fire. This understanding that he could call out to Hashem in his time of need and be answered is the basis of tefilla.

And so the Vilna Gaon explains that we begin with Adon olam to remind Hashem of the specialness of the relationship that existed with Avraham in the hopes that our tefillos will be accepted.

Adon olam places great emphasis on the greatness of Hashem - Creator and Ruler over all creation. Hashem existed before there was any form to the world. Hashem is ein sof - infinite, without end. R' Yishayah Horwitz better known as the Shlah, The *Shelah Hakadosh* was born in Prague and died in Tzfat, Israel. During his life the *Shelah Hakadosh* was a wealthy and active philanthropist, supporting Torah learning especially in Jerusalem. After serving as rabbi in many prominent cities in Europe, he left Frankfurt - following the Fettmilch pogroms - and assumed the prestigious position of rabbi of Prague. The *Shelah Hakadosh* died in Tiberia and is buried near *Rambam*.

In his many Kabalistic, homiletic and halachic works, he stressed the joy in every action, and how one should convert the Yetzer Hara (evil inclination) into good, two concepts that impacted on Jewish thought through to the eighteenth-century, and greatly influenced the development of the Chassidic movement. He was the author of the medieval work *Shnei Luchot Habrit*, writes that the words adon olam have the same gematria as the words ein sof (adon = ein, and olam = sof).

In addition, he writes that whoever contemplates this (the fact that Hashem is infinite) while reciting Adon olam in the morning is guaranteed not to have any misfortune befall him on that day.

The tefilla also teaches us that with all the greatness and magnitude that is the Master of the world, He is also keli - He is my God, in a very personal and private way. Rabbi Abraham J. Twerski relates that tefilla is the way in which we make Hashem a reality in our lives rather than an abstract concept. Focusing on the tefilla of Adon olam and on the nature of our relationship to our God is a great way to begin understanding that reality.

In his book "Growing Each Day", Rabbi Twerski discusses the words "Master of the world, Who reigned before anything was created" and says:

"Adon Olam's being both the opening and closing prayer is similar to the practice of beginning the reading of Berashis on Simchas Torah immediately after concluding the

last chapter of Devarim. There, we indicate that Torah is infinite; like a circle, it has no beginning or end. So it is with prayer, which represents our relationship with God. Since God is infinite, we never reach a finite goal in relating to Him.

Indeed, the cyclical natures of prayer and Torah not only indicate that there is no end, but also that there is no beginning. Secular studies have levels of graduation that indicate that one has completed a certain level. In Torah studies, we do not complete anything. Indeed, each volume of the Talmud begins with page two rather than page one, to teach us that we have not even begun, let alone ever finish.

Growth in spirituality has no limits. The symbolism in the cyclical format of Torah and prayer is that we cannot say that we have even reached the halfway mark in spiritual growth, much less the end. This realization should excite us, not depress us, because our potential is infinite."

In Alei Shur, Rav Wolbe shlita, discusses methods of growth in practical avodah. He stresses that just as important as the growth is that it not lead one to any level of pride or arrogance at one is accomplishing. One of the methods he discusses is learning to daven a proper Adon Olam - of truly understanding the words of this tefilla.

On a personal note I can say that even though my mind still wanders sometimes during davening, I try very hard to focus on the words of this tefilla and specifically on the phrase, *biyadoo afkid ruchi* - into His hands I entrust my soul. The idea that Hashem holds me in the palm of His hands gives me a not only a tremendous feeling of security, but reinforces the idea of the Master being my God. It helps me to see both sides of the relationship - part with my King, my Ruler, and the other with my Creator, my Father. It also enables me to go through my day knowing that whatever happens, there is a solid foundation holding me up.

What is so special about Adon, it took ten generations before Avraham came and called Hashem Adon, my master, what did the tzadikim do before this like Noah, Shem V'ever. We see that the Avot and Emahot valued the words of these Tzadikim, Yitzchak goes to study in the Beit Midrash of Shem and Ever, Yaakov also study's there. When Rifka was pregnant with Yaakov and Eisav it is Ever who tells her she has two nations in her womb and one is ruler the other slave and vice versa.

How did they refer to Hashem? They refer to Hashem as Melech Haolam, the King of the Worlds.

A master has a personal relationship with his servant. Whenever the servant fulfills his duties his directly serving his master, by way of contrast a King has only a very general relationship with his subjects, because he has an entire nation to govern and very few people know him personally. We refer to Hashem, as Melech Haolam in all of our Brachot, We start each Berarcha with "Baruch Atta Adonai" that we recognize Hashem as our master, before referring to him as King of the Universe. So when addressing Hahem, we recognize first that He is my personal Master, with whom I have a very

personal relationship. He knows me! Then we acknowledge that my master is the King of the Universe.

So while the earlier great Tzadikim recognized Hashem as Melech H'olam, the Universal King, It was only Avraham who recognized that the Adon of the world is really Adonai each individual's personal Master. He taught that while Hakadosh Baruch Hu is the Melech Haolam, nevertheless, he is aware of each individual, akin to the relationship of a servant to master, thus each individual has a personal relationship with Hashem.

The personal relationship of Hashem applies not only to human beings but also to the universe as a whole. We are aware that there are billion of stars in the cosmos, yet Hashem has a personal relationship with all of them.

This is the meaning of the words, He counts the number of the stars, to all of them he assigns names. He has a personal task for each one. Rabbi **Samson Raphael Hirsch** (1808, –1888) was the intellectual founder of the Torah im derech Eretz., he would point out that while Adon Olam describes the unfathomable eternity and omnipotence of Hashem, it nevertheless makes reference to him in a very personal way, Vehu E'li, He is my G-d, Each person in his tefillah says: I have a personal relationship with Hashem, He is my personal G-d.

So when a person says Adonoi, no matter how small or insignificant he feels or seems he is in direct contact with Hashem.

I remember sitting in the Beis Knesset and feeling really tired and My Rosh Hayeshiva asked me what was wrong, so I answered, Rebbi I am tired today, I seem to be on a very spiritual low, my Kavannah (intent) is challenged and my mind is wandering. He confessed that it happened to him, but he related to me a story his father told him, his father was in very much the same predicament and his Rebbi told him, "If we focus on the Bracha, and you pause for a few seconds after you say Hashem's name there is no way your Kavannah cannot be strong. So now we can understand why we start our day with this tefillah and we close our day with this tefillah. No matter how small or meaningless we are, we have a right to approach Hashem. So if Iyun tefilah teaches us nothing but what to think when we say Baruch Atah Adonai, and to say it with meaning, the ensuing tefillah will result *"These are the precepts whose fruits a person enjoys in this world but whose principle a person enjoys in the world to come."*

Let's see the Beracha:

Let's Look at the Adon Olam:

It immediately strikes us that the first three lines are based on the familiar words: Hashem reigns; Hashem reigned; Hahem shall reign for all eternity.

In the first line we have Master of the Universe Who Reigned:

In the Second; then as “King” is his name proclaimed:

And In the third, He the Awesome One, will reign alone.

So right away we are affirming our emunah that Hashem always did, and does now, and will always, reign over the universe. He is eternal and not limited to time and space.

So the last part of what I just said causes a problem, before any form was created. Over whom did he reign? How can there be a Melech Haolam, a king without anything over which to reign?

To explain Kabbalistic Concept:

The Chachmei Hakkaballah explains that there are four distinct worlds:

### **Olam Ha’asiyah**

This is our world, the known Universe. The word Oseh always connotes putting the finishing touches on something which has been previously been made.

God completed.....which he had done.

***“And on the seventh day God finished His work which He had made; and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had made.”***

On the Next Level, there is Olam Hayetzirah.

### **Olam Hayetzirah**

This is the world of in “formation” , where Hashem structures and forms the things that will eventually exist in the Olam Ha’asiyah.

### **Olam Heberiyah**

This is the world of creation from nothing, the world of yeish mei’ayin. In physical terms, this is the beginning of existence.

We refer to Olam hayetzirah and Olam Haberiyah in the words, *Master of the Universe*; He reigned even before the existence of Olam hayetzirah and Olam Haberiyah. This refers to his reign over the highest “world” as follows:

The fourth level, which is the highest world, and is something of which we have no understanding, is called the Olam Ha’atzilus. This is the world before creation, the world which is eitzel, adjacent to Hashem. We see in sefer Bamidbar, the book of Bamidbar, “*I will cause the Sanhedrin to share some of your ruach Hakodesh.*”

Some understanding of this concept can be derived from Rav Hirsch's explanation on the second word of the Torah, bara. He explains that this word has the general meaning of bringing something from the inside to the outside, from non-existence to existence. So the meaning of Bersheit Bara Elokim, In the beginning of Hashem creating, is that before Hashem created anything, before Yeish mei'yin, he had what we would call, in Human terms, "a plan" of what to create. This "plan" was brought forth from his "mind" This is what the Torah calls bara, creating. This revelation (bara) is what brought the Olam Ha'atzilus into existence.

In Kabbalistic Terms this "plan" or first revelation of Hashem is called "Chochmah" (infinite "wisdom").

He revealed firstly that He exists. Without this revelation his existence would be unknown. He also revealed what is called his "binah" as well as a combination of "Chochmah" and "Binah" which is "Daas". Now in order to bring something forth, to reveal it, there must be something to which it can be revealed, a receptacle. It is this completely spiritual "receptacle" which is called Olam Ha'atzilus, to whom He revealed His existence and his "plans for creation". He thus reigned before "Yetzir Nivrah" any form was created, before he brought anything into existence Yeish meyin from the inside into the outside.

The revelation by Hashem of his plan for creation to the spiritual forces of Olam Ha'atzilus is called Torah and it is this which is meant by the statement that "Torah was created before the creation of the world. Furthermore we find in the Midrash that Hashem looked into the Torah and created the world. Here too Chazal, (Sages) are referring to the blueprint of the world, which is called Torah.

These plans were then implemented through the asarah ma'amaros, the then utterances during the six days of creation and resulted in the world we know today.

**Then, when everything was done according to His will,** when our world, the Olam Ha'asiah, came into existence, **He could be called Melech,** first by the malachim, angels and then by human beings.

**And after everything comes to an end, He will reign alone.** Rav Hirsch explains that at any moment, Hashem could put an end to all existence, but He himself would remain the same as He was before.

The word Yimloch, refers to the Olam Hatechiah the future of Resurrection of the dead, about which we know almost nothing about. *"All the prophets prophesied only about the Messianic Era but as for the world to come No eye except yours, O God, has seen.* After this world ends, there will be a new world; it is over this future world, the Olam Hatechiah, that **He alone will reign.**

**It is He who was, He who is, and He who shall remain, in splendor.** The Shulcahn Aruch says that we are forbidden to pronounce the (YKVK), the name of Hashem, and instead we use the name of Adonai, which means the Master of everything. See handout.

**He is one alone.** After affirming our emunah in the eternity of Hashem, we here affirm His absolute Oneness, **which** is called Achdus Hapeshutah. The Oneness of Hashem absolute nothing comparable exists.

We see this in the Aseret Hdibrot, (10 commandments), *I am Hashem your G-D, Do not recognize the G-ds of others..*

**There is none other to compare to Him, to declare his equal.** Hashem is not definable. Nor does he share His Divinity.

**He has no beginning and no end.** He is infinite.

**To him belong all Power and Supremacy.** To the Human mind, infinity, something without a beginning or end, by definition, is nothing. Yet Hashem is Infinite and has supreme power over everything. He gave free choice to human beings to rebel against his will, and they do so nevertheless, He alone is the supreme ruler of destiny.

**He is my G-d, my living redeemer,** The concept of goel. If not we move on.

**He is the Rock of my pain in time of Distress.** He gives me the strength to be able to bear and accept my suffering.

**He is my banner and my refuge:** He is my cause of victory; however, if I lose he is my comfort.

**He is the portion in my cup, on the day I call** The concept of fate does not exist, instead we have the concept called Hasgacha Pratit. The Cup is out to be filled some days it its overflowing, some days it is bitter, some days sweet, Some people receive a rough deal. Some days Hashem answers my tefillot in a way I understand, some days to confusion. However, he hears me and he works my pleas into his plan. The end result, I am a cog in the machinery of life. I have a purpose. "All is in the hands of Heaven, except for the fear of heaven.

**I entrust my spirit into His hand when I go to sleep and when I wake.** We have all heard the adage "Relax and leave the driving to us" I am in his hands and he will do the best for me.

**And with my spirit, my body, Hashem is with me, I shall not fear.** I ask Hashem, that my bitachon in Him, my personal relationship with Him, shall be so secure that I have will not have any fears. The real proof of bitachon is that one is unafraid. One cannot talk of "having bitachon" if he/she is fearful in the face of danger.

It is with this thought of complete bitachon in Hashem that we move on to our daily tefillot.

This Wednesday at Bagel Haven Dairy Restaurant  
800 STEELES AVENUE WEST  
BATHURST & STEELES (FOOD BASIC'S MALL)  
8:00 P.M.

We will look at “Birchat Al Netilat Yadayim”, Birchat Asher Yatzar, Birchat Elokei Neshama, Birchat Hashachar”.

Please keep in mind these are my notes that use for the class, they are not detailed. If you help with some of the concepts, do not understand something or need more information. Please email me [torontojs@rogers.com](mailto:torontojs@rogers.com) or call 416-829-1761.

Thanks

Yitzchak