

## The השיבנו אבינו of the ברכה of the נוסח

The נוסח of the ברכה of השיבנו אבינו has a mysterious history. Its history begins and ends with the ברכה having the same wording. What transpired in the middle is hard to explain. Let us begin with the wording as it is found in the סידור רב עמרם גאון (?-875):

השיבנו אבינו לתורתך וקרבתך מלכנו לעבודתך והחזירנו בתשובה שלימה לפניך. ברוך אתה ה' הרוצה בתשובה.

The נוסח of the ברכה then changes in the סידור רב סעדיה גאון (882-942):

השיבנו אבינו לתורתך ודבקנו במצותיך וקרבתך לעבודתך והחזירנו בתשובה שלימה לפניך ברוך אתה יי' הרוצה בתשובה.

The סדר תפילות נוסח ברכות התפילה- (ה) השיבנו אבינו לתורתך ודבקנו במצותיך וקרבתך מלכנו לעבודתך והחזירנו בתשובה שלימה לפניך. ברוך אתה ה' הרוצה בתשובה.

סדר תפילות נוסח ברכות התפילה- (ה) השיבנו אבינו לתורתך ודבקנו במצותיך וקרבתך מלכנו לעבודתך והחזירנו בתשובה שלימה לפניך. ברוך אתה ה' הרוצה בתשובה.

The מחזור ויטרי (11-12th Century) follows the נוסח of the רמב"ם but changes the order of the words:

סימן פט ד"ה ברוך אתה- השיבנו אבינו לתורתך וקרבתך מלכנו לעבודתך ודבקנו במצותיך והחזירנו בתשובה שלימה לפניך. בא"י הרוצה בתשובה:

The סידורים that were compiled after the מחזור ויטרי omit the words: ודבקנו במצותיך.

Why these words were added and why the inclusion of the words ceased are not explained.

We can add to the mystery by noting that in its history אהבת עולם / אהבה רבה also underwent changes that surrounded the word ודבק:

- אשכנז-אבינו האב הרחמן המרחם רחם עלינו ותן בלבנו להבין להשכיל לשמוע ללמוד וללמד לשמור ולעשות ולקיים את כל דברי תלמוד תורתך באהבה. והאר עינינו בתורתך ודבק לבינו במצותיך ויחד לבבנו לאהבה וליראה את שמך ולא נבוש לעולם ועד.
- סדר רב עמרם גאון - אהבה רבה אהבתנו וכו' ותלמדנו חוקי חיים כן תחננו, אבינו אב הרחמן וכו'. והאר עינינו במצותיך ודבק בלבנו תורתך ויחד לבבנו ליראה את שמך וכו'.
- מחזור ויטרי- אבינו מלכינו אב הרחמן רחם עלינו ותן בלבנו להבין להשכיל לשמוע ללמוד וללמד לשמור ולעשות ולקיים את כל דברי תלמוד תורתך באהבה. והאר עינינו במצותיך ודבק לבינו ביראתך ויחד לבבנו לאהבה וליראה את שמך.

Can we find a clue by tracing the origin of the word "דבק" to two פסוקים in the תורה?

בראשית פרק ב'- (כד) על כן יעזב איש את אביו ואת אמו ודבק באשתו והיו לבשר אחד. דברים פרק ד'- (ד) ואתם הדבקים בה' אלקיכם חיים כלכם היום.

Is it a clue that תשובה is mentioned in the same context as the root word: "דבק"?

רמב"ם הלכות תשובה פרק ז', הלכה ז' – גדולה תשובה שמקרבת את האדם לשכינה שנאמר שובה ישראל עד ה' אלקיך, ונאמר ולא שבתם עדי נאם ה', ונאמר אם תשוב ישראל נאם ה' אלי תשוב, כלומר אם תחזור בתשובה בי תדבק, התשובה מקרבת את הרחוקים, אמש היה זה שנאווי לפני המקום משוקץ ומרוחק ותועבה, והיום הוא אהוב ונחמד קרוב וידיד, וכן אתה מוצא שבלשון שהקב"ה מרחיק החוטאים בה מקרב את השבים בין יחיד בין רבים, שנאמר והיה במקום אשר יאמר להם לא עמי אתם יאמר להם בני א-ל חי, ונאמר ביכניהו ברשעתו כתבו את האיש הזה ערירי גבר לא יצלה בימיו, אם יהיה כניהו בן יהויקים מלך יהודה חותם על יד ימיני וגו', וכיון ששב בגלותו נאמר בזרובבל בנו ביום ההוא נאם ה' צב-אות אקחך זרובבל בן שאלתיאל עבדי נאם ה' ושמתוך כחותם. הלכה ז' – כמה מעולה מעלת התשובה, אמש היה זה מובדל מה' אלקי ישראל שנאמר עונותיכם היו מבדילים ביניכם לבין אלקיכם, צועק ואינו נענה שנאמר כי תרבו תפלה וגו' ועושה מצות וטורפין אותן בפניו שנאמר מי בקש זאת מידכם רמוס חצרי, מי גם בכם ויסגר דלתים וגו', והיום הוא מודבק בשכינה שנאמר ואתם הדבקים בה' אלקיכם, צועק ונענה מיד שנאמר והיה טרם יקראו ואני אענה, ועושה מצות ומקבלין אותן בנחת ושמחה שנאמר כי כבר רצה האלקים את מעשיך, ולא עוד אלא שמתאווים להם שנאמר וערבה לה' מנחת יהודה וירושלם כימי עולם וכשנים קדמוניות.

The connection between the אהבת עולם / אהבה רבה and השיבנו אבינו of ברכה lies in the fact that both speak of the relationship between Man and the אב / רבנו של עולם as

תשובה and אבינו: The טור (1269-1343) explains the connection between the title:

אורה חיים סימן קטו – המישית, השיבנו; ומה ראו לומר תשובה אחר בינה? דכתיב: השמן לב העם הזה ואזניו הכבד ועיניו השע פן יראה בעיניו ובאזניו ישמע ולבבו יבין ושב ורפא לו; הרי שהבינה מביאה לידי תשובה. ויש בה ט"ו (15) תיבות כנגד ט"ו תיבות שבפסוק (ישעיה נה) יעזוב רשע דרכו; וכן בפסוק (יחזקאל יח) ובשוב רשע; וכן (ישעיה ו') בפסוק ועוד בה עשיריה. וגדולה תשובה שמגעת עד כסא הכבוד; ומן הארץ לרקיע מהלך ת"ק (500) שנה ועוביו של רקיע מהלך ת"ק שנה; וכן כל אויר שבין רקיע לרקיע, נמצא שבעה אוירים ושבעה רקיעים, ולמעלה מהם כסא הכבוד שהתשובה מגעת שם הרי ט"ו. והברכה מתחלת ב"ה"י ומסיימת ב"ה"י הרי י', כנגד י' ימים שבין ראש השנה ליום הכיפורים שמזומנים לבעלי תשובה. ומה שתיקנו לומר אבינו בברכת השיבנו ובסלה לנו מה שאין כן בשאר הברכות היינו טעמא שאנו מזכירין לפניו שהאב חייב ללמד לבנו על כן אנו אומרים השיבנו אבינו לתורתך. ובסלה לנו משום הא דכתיב וישוב אל ה' וירחמהו ואל אלקינו כי ירבה לסלוח על כן אנו מזכירין רחמי האב כדכתיב כרחם אב על בנים שירחם עלינו ויסלה לנו.

Inadvertently, the טור may have provided the reason that the words: דבקנו במצותיך were deleted; i.e. so that the ברכה of השיבנו would contain only 15 words.

## TRANSLATION OF SOURCES

Great is Teshuva because it brings a person close to G-d as it is written: Return Israel to G-d your G-d; and it is written; and you have not returned to Me so declared G-d; and it is written: If Israel shall return, declares G-d it is to Me that they will return. This means that if a person does Teshuva, he begins to cling to G-d. Teshuva brings close those who are distant. Yesterday he was hated before G-d, detested, distant and an abomination. Today after doing Teshuva, the same person is loved, adored, close and a good friend of G-d. Similarly one finds in the same text in which G-d states that He feels distant from sinners that G-d brings close Himself those who repent, whether they are individuals or groups as it is written: And instead of G-d saying that you are not His people, G-d will say: you are the sons of a living G-d. It is written concerning King Yichonyahu in his evil doings: As I live, says the Lord, if Choniah the son of Jehoiakim King of Judah was the signet upon my right hand, I would tear him off. Yet when Choniah repented while in exile, G-d said: On that day, says the Lord of Hosts, I will take you, O Zerubbabel, my servant, the son of Shealtiel, says the Lord, and will make you like a signet ring; for I have chosen you, says the Lord of Hosts. How great is the power of Teshuvah-yesterday the person was separated from G-d, the G-d of Israel, as it is written: your sins act as a barrier between you and G-d; you call out and you are not answered as it is written: even if you increase the amount of your prayer, etc. and you follow the commandments, the value of your deeds is negated as it is written: When you come to appear before Me, who has required this at your hand, to trample My courts. O, that were one among you who would shut the doors that you might not kindle fire on My altar in vain! I have no pleasure in you, said the Lord of Hosts, nor will I accept an offering from your hand. And yet today he is clinging to G-d as it is written: and you are attached to your G-d. He calls out and he is immediately answered as it is written: and just as he calls out to Me, I respond to him. He performs a commandment and I accept it graciously and with joy as it is written: because already G-d accepts your deeds. Not only that but G-d looks forward to your deeds as it is written: Then shall the offering of Judah and Jerusalem be pleasant to the Lord, as in the days of old, and as in former years.

The fifth Bracha of Shemona Esrei is Hasheiveinu. Why did Chazal place the Bracha concerning Teshuvah after the Bracha which concerns Binah? Chazal did so based on the verse: Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and return, and be healed. From this we can conclude that Binah (intelligence) leads to Teshuva. This Bracha contains within it 15 words representing the fifteen words in the verse (Isaiah 55) An evil one will abandon his ways; and in the verse: (Yechezkel 18) the return of the evil one; and in the verse (Isaiah 6) And if one-tenth remain in it. Great is Teshuva because Teshuva travels through the heavens until

it reaches to G-d's seat of Honor. The distance from the Earth to the heavens is a distance of 500 years and the distance of the heavens is 500 years and the distance between each layer of the heavens is like seven atmospheres and seven heavens. Above all that comes G-d's seat of Honor to which Teshuva travels totalling 15. The Bracha of Hasheiveinu begins with the letter "Hay" and ends with the letter "Hay" which equals ten. The Bracha is a reference to the Ten Days of Repentance which fall between Rosh Hashonah and Yom Kippur. They are days which are set aside for those who are eager to do Teshuva. The reason that Chazal included the words: "Our Father" within the Brachot of Hasheiveinu and Silicha but did not do in other Brachot is that a father is required to teach his son Torah. That is why Chazal included the words: "our father" in the Bracha of Haseheiveinu. Chazal included the word in the Bracha of Silicha because of the verse: And he will return to G-d and G-d will comfort him and he will turn to G-d who will forgive him. That is why we mention G-d's trait of fatherly compassion as it is written: in the same manner that a father has compassion for a son, G-d should have compassion for him and forgive him.

## SUPPLEMENT

### חסידים אשכנז

Only a movement that was very popular could have caused the removal of the words: **וּדְבַקְנוּ בַּמִּצְוֹתַיךְ** from the **בְּרַכָּה** of **הַשִּׁיבֵנוּ**. Such a movement existed in the 12th and 13th Century and is reflected in the words of the **טוֹר** that are quoted in the newsletter. The following excerpt from the book: *Jewish Liturgy, A Comprehensive History* by Ismar Elbogen demonstrates the steps that led to the development of such a movement.

### §44 The Influence of Mysticism on the Synagogue Service

(1) "A prayer without inner devotion is like a body without a soul." This maxim locates the source of prayer's vitality in devotion of the heart; where this devotion is absent, prayer loses its point and can deteriorate into sacrilege. Public worship was originally instituted because of the believer's need to lift his heart up to his Creator, and every conscious innovation and change in the liturgy that occurred in later times flowed from the desire to intensify and deepen the service of the heart. Thus at the early stages of prayer or of a particular liturgical form, matters of inward piety are not dwelt upon, but taken for granted. Only when prayer becomes routine, when prescribed prayers are instituted to be recited at specified times, does the possibility arise that they will become a formality. Because no religious community can dispense with such canonization, every religious community is periodically threatened by the danger that its prayers will turn into a pedantic ritual of mere lip service. It was the task of religious instruction to fight the formalization of the liturgy with every possible means. And in fact, alongside the rich literature dealing with the origin of the external form, there is a no less ramified literature on the mental attitude and reverence requisite for prayer. The same two demands are nearly always found side by side in the same texts, but the doctrine of the service of the heart is not usually codified and was not the subject of study in the academies. Instead it was emphasized in a thousand popular books that circulated among the masses and became their common property. The admonitions of the prophets and the psalmists against the formalization of the liturgy echoes throughout the rabbinic literature; everywhere the first demand made of the worshiper is for **בְּוִנָּה**, "devotion in prayer." "Devotion in prayer means that one should clear his heart of every thought and see himself as if he were standing in the presence of God."

(2) Alongside the demand for devotion, obvious even to sober, rationalistic teachers of religion, there are also aspirations toward religious ecstasy that seek to achieve their highest effect by means of worship. All the schools influenced by mysticism see prayer as one of the most powerful and effective means to bring about the desired state of unmediated

mystical union between man's soul and the divinity. Judaism never lacked for sects of a more or less definitely mystical character, and each had its influence on the liturgy: some by devising special techniques to enhance devotion, and others, the majority, by introducing new prayers or even new types of prayers that were filled with their enthusiastic ideas. These mystical sects were not always successful to the same degree; at times mysticism achieved but slight recognition from official circles or none at all, while at other times it received their enthusiastic approbation. But always it won the hearts of the masses, in whom man's natural longing for the divine was not neutralized by intellectual cultivation. For this reason, the synagogue could never long deny mystical ideas access to itself.

(3) The oldest example of mystically inclined pietists in the post-biblical period are the Essenes and the Therapeutai, who embodied a powerful spirit of inner devotion and religious contemplation. Modern scholars have often asserted that the basic structures of the Jewish liturgy were created by the Essenes. We have no reliable data on this subject, and the hypothesis is unlikely. A significant argument against Essene origin is the tranquil joy of the Jewish prayers and the complete absence of ecstasy in them. But not all pietists were untouched by this spirit, and even among the Pharisees and the later rabbis there was no lack of worshipers who strove in all their devotions toward the inner experience of the godhead. Among them were the **הסידים הראשונים**, "early pietists," or the **ותיקין**, "pious," who watched for the moment of sunrise so that they could immediately recite the proclamation of faith in the one and unique God, who would spend an hour in reverent preparation and pious withdrawal before praying. We meet with individual visionaries and ecstasies throughout the talmudic period. The talmudic sages are not always the dry formalists so well known to us; among them were numerous adherents of the doctrine according to which prayer depends upon special preparations and accompanying gestures in order to bring the worshiper near to God. They saw to it that the debates and laws applying to the external order and formalities of prayer did not gain the upper hand.

(4) Only in the post-talmudic period do we encounter the mystics as a unified group with uniform goals. Reacting against the one-sided preoccupation with religious law and against the excessive esteem accorded studies that leave the heart cold, the movement of the *Merkava* (chariot) mystics arose. These were mystics who observed fasts on consecutive days and hung their faces to the ground as they murmured all sorts of hymns in order to become filled with the divine. They called this "descending to the *merkava*" and in the tannaitic period *merkava* was the generic term for all esoteric speculation. "The events in heaven, particularly those that occur in the immediate vicinity of God, the court of heaven with its troops and ranks, and especially the varied panegyrics with which the angels praise the hidden Creator -- all these are the subject of the *Merkava*." The thoughts and goals of these mystics are set forth in the *hekhalot* literature, in the description of the seven chambers of heaven filled with angels, which the mystic believed he could see and among whom he could walk. The oldest *hekhalot* book that has reached us, *Hekhalot rabati*, is composed for the most part of Kedushah hymns, "strange fantasy-pieces of varying length,

each ending with the trishagion (קדוש, קדוש, קדוש). The hymns lack any real thought-content, but occasionally they are suffused with a passionate fantasy carried on top of a surging wave of words." The main subject of these books is the angels, their song, and their praise of God. To designate God, a rare and mysterious name is used. At the book's end are hymns intended for the highest level of ecstasy, including האדרת והאמונה, "The splendor and the faithfulness," which has entered nearly all prayer books and is composed of that abundance of half-intelligible words typical of the prayers of these mystics. The intense veneration of God is expressed through the heaping-up of words that are equivalent in meaning and similar in sound, but that say little and do not advance the train of thought. These hyperbolic hymns are by preference placed in the mouths of the angels, who are introduced and brought forward in troops and camps. In all this they differ considerably from the sober piety of the Bible, the Talmud, and the ancient prayers, which were oriented rather toward the psalmists' proverbial words, "to You silence is praise." In the mystics' zeal to disseminate their ideas, it is not surprising that they had great influence on the liturgy. Even in the statutory prayers there are passages where the abundance of the vocabulary bears no relationship to the content, and where, by contrast to other passages, the angels play a significant role. This is clearest in the Kedushah, the favorite prayer of the members of these circles, who saw themselves as divinely charged to cultivate and disseminate it, and who expected God's grateful recognition in return. The Kedushah of "Creator" (קדושה דיוצר) has all the earmarks of this group, to which it owes its acceptance into the weekday Morning Service. Likewise, the variety of formulas introducing the Kedushah of the *Amida* and connecting its biblical verses arose only thanks to their activity. Above all the idea of the "crown" placed on the head of God simultaneously by the heavenly hosts and by Israel is authentically mystical. Besides the Kedushah, the Kaddish is also one of the prayers favored by the ecstasies. The passage יתברך וישתבח, "May it be blessed and praised...", which follows the core-line "May His Great Name be blessed," contrasts with the rest of the prayer by being in Hebrew and does not advance the theme. It probably originates from the same source. Similar heaping-up of synonyms is found in such prayers as "True and Certain" (אמת ויציב) and "May Your name be praised" (ישתבח שמו). It is noteworthy that the number of words is identical in both cases. Nor did the liturgical poetry remain untouched by these mystics' influence. The Kedushot of Kallir, with their detailed descriptions of angels, so reminiscent of the *bekhalot*, are clear evidence. The dissemination of the piyyut itself may have occurred as a consequence of the demand for hymns aroused by the mystics; certain fixed formulas that frequently recur in them (like ובכן נעריצך, "And so, we revere You," and ובכן נקדישך, "And so, we sanctify You") make this likely.

Samuel the Pious b. Kalonymus the Elder, born in Speyer in 1115, and his son Judah the Pious b. Samuel the Holy, who died in Regensburg in 1217, were the founders of mysticism among the German Jews. This movement was a reaction to the dominance of the study of *Talmud* as it was developed at that time by the casuistic system of the tosafists. But these

two "pietists" are not to be seen as opponents of the *Talmud*, for both were authorities on religious law; they simply desired to give the longings of the heart their due and to bring to realization a profound ideal of piety and morality. Both went their own ways, consciously and decidedly deviating from the tendency of their times. What concerns us here is their opinion about prayer and the synagogue service. The talmudists held that piety must be expressed first and foremost in the study of Torah; accordingly, they reduced as much as possible the amount of time to be devoted to prayer. But the mystics emphasized that prayer is the highest expression of piety: Not satisfied merely with the received form of public worship, they demanded ecstatic intensity in relation to G-d, which the soul can attain only through contemplation and abnegation of the things of the world. Since true prayer is the ascent of the soul to G-d, one can only pray properly in a state of ecstasy. With this attitude as their starting point, these two pietists revealed to their contemporaries the hidden meanings of prayer, till then the secret heritage of their family. Samuel's father, who died while Samuel was still young, transmitted the "order of prayers and their secret meaning" to Eleazar the Precentor (שליה ציבור) in Speyer, so that he could transmit them to Samuel when the latter would be old enough. Samuel then cultivated these doctrines with all the strength of his rich imagination and deep spiritual life, and transmitted them through his own son. The contents of these mysteries can be learned from the commentaries on the prayer book that these two composed, though these have been distorted by reworking and later additions, and by their opinions on the meaning of prayer found in *Sefer Hasidim* and in the writings of their disciple, Eleazar of Worms. They demand full spiritual concentration in prayer, and the direction of all of the thoughts of the heart to heaven. Conduct in the synagogue must be appropriate to the sanctity of the place where we approach the Lord of the world; strong words and harsh rebukes are addressed to the people of the age for neglecting to apply themselves to the cultivation of such conduct. One should pray only in a language that he understands, for prayer requires proper intention, which is impossible unless the contents are understood. The highest moral demands are made of the precentor: moral purity, humility, and unselfishness; he must be generally liked and not at odds with the community. He must understand his prayers, and must not seek to display his beautiful voice, but rather to awaken the heart of the congregation with his prayer. His prayer must be grounded in sincerity and emotion. One who is not actually suffering hardship or one who has a personal interest in the inflation in food prices may not serve as precentor on a fast day on account of drought. One who is not moved to tears should not recite *selibot* before the congregation that depict the worshiper as weeping. Artistic poetry in which the author has laid stress on externals, like "non-Jewish" rhyme, is rejected. The pietists do not oppose liturgical poetry on principle, but they find a large number of poems objectionable. They themselves composed religious poetry. Samuel the Pious wrote the *boshana* בהושעת אב המון צב-אות, "As You saved the father of the multitude of troops," of which only two lines together with the biblical verses appended to it have been preserved in the prayer books. Several prayers are also attributed to Judah, but we cannot speak definitely about them. Like all mystics, they were fond of



hymns; thus one of the longest and noblest hymns in the prayer book, שיר היחוד, "The Song of Unity," is attributed to the father, while its conclusion, שיר הכבוד, "The Song of Glory," is attributed to the son. Since the doctrine of the Divine Glory is at the center of Judah's theosophy, there is no reason to cast doubt on this tradition; at the very least the poem may have emanated from the circle of his disciples. Other hymns must have been lost, for *Sefer Hasidim* speaks explicitly of newly composed prayers. But the main point continued to be to achieve devotion in the recitation of the traditional prayers. All of mysticism is colored by a conservative spirit; its intention is not to set aside the tradition but to fill it with the spirit of piety that it demands in prayer. The means for elevating the soul to the state of ecstasy is addressing the angels, who populate the entire world and with whom the worshiper is in constant contact; the use of the mysterious names of G-d; and the use of artificial alphabetical acrostics. The letters have profound significance, for there is not a single unnecessary letter in the prayers, nor is a letter lacking; their number and order have mystical meaning. Therefore, the Ashkenazic pietists used to count the words and letters in each of the benedictions of the *Amida*; they asserted repeatedly that one may not add or drop a single one, for the whole structure was erected for a particular purpose, and whoever changes a word in the "most holy" prayers will have to render account to G-d. What the earliest pietists only hinted, their disciple Eleazar b. Judah stated plainly and in great detail in his book *Roqeah*. He turned Ashkenazic pietism into a popular movement, and made the art of "removing the wall from before the eyes of the soul in order to behold the godhead" widely known. The hosts of visionaries and the longing for visions increased. On the other hand, there were plenty of sober thinkers who denounced the forcible inducing of ecstasy, not only because this state is not always attained, but because even when it is, the soul afterwards sinks back into a state of confusion. In fact this whole movement was one of unhealthy extremes; the period was deficient in clear and prudent thinking, and a great deal of superstition became part of the mixture. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that what was being taught here was an ideal of uncommonly pure and profound piety. This ideal long dominated the Jews of Germany, affording them spiritual uplift even in times of the greatest hardship. In prayer they could forget themselves and their troubles, and could feel themselves completely at one with their Father in heaven.

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