

Iyun Tefillah and Kavanah - U'Vakhen

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The "*U'V'khen*" addition to the *Amida* (central standing) prayer during the High Holy Days recognizes God as God of all creation and all that was or will be created. It also assumes a special relationship between God and the Jewish people. For us this may seem to be an inherent contradiction. However, in the vision of *U'V'khen* there is ultimately no contradiction because it envisions a future in which all humanity will form an *aguda ekhat*, one unified collective to do God's Will. There is a progressive order to this vision. Firstly, all humanity will form this unified collective that recognizes the truth contained in "*Hear o Israel-Adonai is our God, Adonai is One.*" We are all created in God's Image. Therefore, God's Oneness makes us all one. It is this unified and universal collective that will bring honor to the Jewish people and joy to our land. The righteous will rejoice, evil will dissipate, and *memshelet zadon* (The rule/regime of evil/maliciousness) will disappear from our world.

True, this vision can be interpreted to mean that all the inhabitants of the world will accept Judaism, or at least that we will dictate the terms of this universal collective. However, traditionally Judaism doesn't aspire to convert the entire world. Rather Judaism speaks of the "*seven Noachide commandments.*" There is a sort of natural law we expect of all. Not everything is relative. But, neither do all need to be exactly like us to serve God. Furthermore, how can it be that the God of all existence is only concerned for one people? In the future all will recognize the one God, but there will be room for various cultures and various ways to serve God. It is like the six blindfolded people who touch different parts of an elephant and therefore have very different conceptions of what an elephant is, until they remove their blindfolds and realize that each of their separate truths are parts of a greater truth.

To those who believe that God is primarily concerned with the welfare of the Jewish people and that in the end of days all humanity will accept our rule, the justification for the continuation of the Occupation is obvious. Those who do not wish to reduce the God of all creation to a tribal god, and for whom the concept of a universal collective is much more inclusive, understand that it is wrong to continue to rule over another people.

Before all humanity can truly be one collective, we must be able to see that what unites us and makes us *reim* (Usually translated as our neighbors, but actually meaning those who are essentially like us.) is greater than what divides us. If we as the Jewish people can contribute to such a consciousness, we will make an additional contribution to our purpose on this earth. We will bring honor to our people and joy to our land.

Perhaps we need to change the order. After having suffered from powerlessness for 2,000 years, it is very difficult for us to give up sovereignty. The Zionist movement involved a decision not to wait for God to return us to our homeland. History taught us to fear situations in which sovereignty is not in our hands. We also learned to view the entire outside world as hostile enemies. We, a good and decent people, legitimately fearful for our security, created a malicious rule over others. Some have given this religious/national sanction.

If we can recognize the truth of the *U'Vakhen* prayer that true sovereignty is in the hands of God Who created all of humanity, that Palestinians are also created in God's Image and also with them we are one universal collective, and if we succeed in ending our malicious sovereignty over another people, we can help all humanity to understand that we must be God's partners in ending all evil, maliciousness, exploitation and injustice from the world.

A kavanah (Prayerful Meditation) before the praying U'Vakhen:

Our God and God of our ancestors, long years of oppression have taught us to rely only on power and sovereignty. Help us to remember that true power and sovereignty are in Your Hands. Open our eyes to see Your Image in every human being and every people, so that we may form one great universal collective to do Your Will. We, a people who strive to do justly, began to rule over another people because we thought it was necessary to defend ourselves. Almost without our realizing, our rule has become malicious. Rather than fearing and believing in You, we fear from what will happen if we relinquish sovereignty. We have convinced ourselves that our sole sovereignty over the entire Land of Israel is Your Will. Have mercy on our fears. Reveal to us the way to both protect ourselves and banish malicious sovereignty from the Land. Open our eyes to the true way to bring honor to our people, joy and security to our Land.

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