Bowing to the Glory of Yerushalayim

We find these two aspects once more when we shake the lulav during Hallel on Sukkot. When one shakes the lulav, he must bow forward a little. We shake and bow once as we say וְהִשְׁתַּחֲווּ הַר קָדְשׁוֹ, and once as we say, “Please, G-d, save now” – bakasha.

The fact that these two aspects of hishtachavaya appear in so many places is a sign of their great importance. Chazal tell us that every geula, individual or communal, is only in the merit of hishtachavaya: Avraham merited to return from Har HaMoriah, Geulat Mitzrayim was only in the merit of hishtachavaya; the Torah was given, Chanah was remembered, future exiles will be ingathered and the Beit HaMikdash will be built and the dead will come back to life only in the merit of hishtachavaya.

As we approach Yom Yerushalayim, we must recognize G-d’s kindness and give thanks, but at the same time we must beseech G-d for the future, Monte בְּנֵה בֵיתְךָ כְַבַּתְּחִילָה וְכֹנֵן בֵּית מִקְדָּשְׁךָ עַל מְכוֹנוֹ לַהֹדוֹו כִּי טוֹב כִּי לְעוֹלָם חַסְדּוֹ. “Build Your house as it once was beautiful, and establish Your Temple upon its foundation.” It is not enough just to give abundant thanks – the Mishnah teaches that we silence one who says, “Your House is ruined, and You are silent” (Berachot 5:3).

However, in order for our bakasha of “Please, G-d, save now” to be accepted, we must show we are deserving. Therefore, it is incumbent upon us to remember – today more than ever – that what makes Yerushalayim so special is that it is the place where we are no longer connected to the Beit HaMikdash; its glory is not over. Yet, Hashem’s glory will come forth once again when the Beit HaMikdash will be restored and the entire world will be raised to redemption. For the glory Hashem will reveal in Yerushalayim is not only in the merit of a past or present miracle.

The very first time we find explicit mention of Har HaMoriah in the Torah is in the Akeidat Yitzchak. Avraham actually ended up performing two acts there: he bowed and he brought a korban.

Since that moment, every time we go up to Har HaMoriah, we are commanded to perform these two acts.1 Today there is unfortunately no Mikdash and no kohen, so we pray to return to the way things were, in Mussaf of the Shalosh Regalim.

The hishtachavaya (bowing) in the Beit haMikdash has two parts. One aspect is hoda’a, thanking G-d for all of the good He has done for us. The second is bakasha, asking G-d to show us mercy, and save us for the sake of His Name.

These two aspects of hishtachavaya appear in Kabbalat Shabbat too. The first is נְפִלָּת עַדְּמָיו, “Exalt Hashem, our L-rd, and bow to His footstool” – is bakasha; and the second is מְכוֹנוֹ לַהֹדוֹו, “Exalt Hashem, our L-rd, and bow to His holy mountain” – is hoda’a.

On the eve of the Six-Day War, the Jerusalem Municipality, together with the chevra kadisha, prepared tens of thousands of coffins in the event that they would need to bury a large number of casualties in a short period of time. In His abundant mercy, G-d ensured that these coffins would be used to build sukkot in Yerushalayim. If you are united, G-d says, I will sit you all together in a sukkat shalom. Every one of those burial coffins was turned into wood of life.

Yom Yerushalayim always falls one week before Kabbalat HaTorah, one week before HASHANAH B’EL/register. If we elevate Yerushalayim and establish it as our top priority, achieving that which Yerushalayim requires of us and demands of us, we will merit not only to return to the Kotel, but to once again ascend the mountain itself, Har HaMoriah.

1 Hilchot Be’echirah 1:1.

Summarized by a student of Rabbi Goldwicht.

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