

# ETERNITY HAS ITS LIMITS

*by Nechama Stampler*

## Eternity Has Its Limits<sup>1</sup>

*When I call out the Name of Hashem, declare the greatness of our G-d.*

Rashi: The word ki [which can be translated in many different ways, including "because"] in our pasuk means "when." The verse therefore means, "When I call out and mention Hashem's Name, you are to declare His greatness in response, and bless His Name." From this pasuk Chazal therefore derived the obligation of answering Baruch Shem kevod malchuso le-olam va'ed / "Blessed is the Name of His glorious kingdom forever and for all time" in the beis hamikdosh.

Maharal: Rashi seemed utterly reasonable - until his last phrase. If the pasuk calls for a response by people when they hear Hashem's Name, why would it be limited to the beis hamikdosh, rather than anywhere that someone calls out His Name? More accurately, where is there any hint of this in the pasuk? Because Rashi is committed to providing access to the plain meaning of the text - and not to amplify it with halachic tidbits - his comment has to be sourced in the understanding of the text itself.

Rashi's halachic source is the gemara; <sup>2</sup> it states that the Baruch Shem response is limited to the beis hamikdosh, and replaced by the simple "amen" everywhere else. The reason must be as follows. The Name mentioned in our pasuk is the Explicit (i.e. Four-Letter) Name. We know<sup>3</sup> that the Explicit Name was uttered only in the Temple. Everywhere else, we substitute the Name that substitutes the notion of adnus/ mastery for the Ineffable Four-letter Name. The response "Baruch Shem..." is appropriate only after the explicit recitation of Hashem's Name is it is actually written.

Here is why. <sup>4</sup> Our pasuk speaks of declaring His greatness upon hearing His Name called out, or pronounced explicitly. The gemara makes two assumptions about "declaring His greatness." It stipulates that it should come as a berachah/ "blessing." It requires that this blessing be of the kind that can continue "forever."

"Forever," it turns out, is relative. We never pronounce the Four-Letter Name as it is written - other than in the beis hamikdosh. We substitute the adnus-Name. This is not a permanent feature, however. The gemara<sup>5</sup> observes that this substitution is limited to the here and now. In the messianic future, we will all pronounce the Name as it is written. This means that at the moment we have a

disjoint approach to the Name we refer to in the Baruch Shem kevod response. The adnus-Name is a legitimate Name in its own right. It is a Name today, and will always be. Were we to respond to it with the Baruch Shem formula, the "forever and for all time" reference would make complete sense.

But this is not the entire picture. We also use the adnus-Name as a substitute for the Four-Letter Name, which we refuse to explicitly pronounce today. When we use the Baruch Shem formula (as we do in reciting the Shema), we mean something very different when we speak of "forever." We can only mean a passing, temporary eternity - the eternity of the current phase of human civilization. We know about (and look forward to!) a new kind of society, in which under the aegis of Moshiach, we will pronounce the Four-Letter Name as it is spelled, mirroring what will then be a much fuller appreciation of its meaning. When we speak today of His Name evoking our declaration of greatness, we mean a limited "forever" - one that will come to an end with the messianic enlargement of its pronunciation.

Ironically, were we to stand in the beis hamikdosh of old, the "forever" would be a fuller one. The Name is recited there as it is written; this will not change even in the future. Its "forever," therefore, has no expiration date.

The formula "Baruch Shem kevod malchuso" attempts to satisfy our pasuk's requirement of declaring Hashem's greatness upon hearing His Name. As Rashi writes, the declaration is the blessing of His Name. Here, then, is the crucial point. Berachah always implies going beyond the essential. It means surpassing limits, rather than staying within them. [Elsewhere, Maharal observes that the most important legal part of the Torah - The Ten Commandments - begins with the letter aleph, whose numerical value is one. Law is monolithic. It doesn't bend for this individual or that group. It is uniform and predictable. The Creation story, however, begins with the beis of Bereishis. Beis is the first plural number, and therefore a good symbol of plurality, of going beyond. The purpose of Creation is to bring His berachah to the world, and the beis gives it a good start.]

In the beis hamikdosh, where the Name was read and will be read in the future in the same way, without change, the Name can indeed be blessed. Even more of the fuller nature of that Name can be revealed to us. That revelation is the berachah of the Name.

Outside of the beis hamikdosh, however, the Name will not expand but contract. Whenever we read the Four-Letter Name, we substitute the adnus-Name. That component will cease to exist in the future. Our projection for the Name, therefore, is one of limitation and shrinking. Meeting it with a Baruch Shem is therefore inappropriate.

The gemara<sup>6</sup> sees our pasuk as the source of answering Amen in all places outside of the beis hamikdosh. We now understand why. The "greatness" that we are asked to declare cannot come in the form of a berachah like "Baruch Shem." Amen is the best substitution and response.

Sources:

1. Based on Gur Aryeh, Devarim, 32:3,, Pesach 60:8-10
  2. Taanis 16B
  3. Yoma 69B
  4. What follows is R Hutner's explication of the Maharal, but not explicit in his words.
  5. Pesachim 50A
  6. Berachos 21A
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