

AKDAMOS: FIRST DAY OF SHAVUOS

אקדמות

After the Kohen is called up for his aliyah, but before starting the Krias HaTorah, the following Aramaic piyut/poem is said responsively. It is ninety verses (forty-five stanzas) long. The first forty-four verses are a double aleph-beis acrostic, and the next forty-six spell out the words **מֵאִיר בֵּיר כְּבִי יִצְחָק יִגְדֵל בְּתוֹרָה**—Meir, son of Rabbi Yitzchak, may he grow in Torah and in good deeds. Amen. Be strong and have courage. The author, Rabbi Meir, was a contemporary of Rashi and lived in Worms.

The language of Akdamos is terse and complicated, and it is full of references to various Midrashim, Gemaros, and parts of the Kabbalah. Each line has ten syllables (thus the sing-song tune used in all shuls) and concludes with the syllable “ta” (תא), which is spelled with the last letter and first letter of the Hebrew alphabet. The message here is that Torah guides us in all areas of our life, from aleph to tav. As well, one never stops learning! When one finishes (ת), one must start anew again (א). Clearly it is an appropriate introduction to the reading of the Aseres Hadibros and reliving Hashem’s Revelation at Sinai to the entire Bnei Yisrael.

Summary of the piyut: First, the paytan asks permission to even attempt to praise Hashem, which is really beyond our ability. Then, the paytan describes how all the different kinds of angels praise Hashem. He points out that though their praise is obviously very powerful and lofty, it is not daily and consistent. On the other hand, Bnei Yisrael are more beloved by Hashem because we say the Shema twice daily! Then, the paytan describes the attempt by the nations of the world to lure us away from our mission on earth by promising us honor and beautiful coexistence instead of the difficulties of our galus. Bnei Yisrael rejects their “offer” by describing the Era of Mashiach and the reward we will receive by not compromising our principles. He then describes the beautiful reward for the tzaddikim at the End of Days (the “banquet” for tzaddikim of the Livyasan and Shor Habor—concepts that we cannot really fathom now) and a brachah that we should all merit to participate in that banquet!

This translation/explanation: There are many works that delve into all the Midrashic and Kabbalistic allusions contained in Akdamos and offer multiple possible explanations and lessons of each stanza. Here, we will give a very simple running explanation of the basic points of each stanza based on how various the commentaries explain them, trying to stick to the meaning of the words themselves as much as possible.

The first stanza is said by the baal korei, and we say the second stanza; he says the third, and we say the fourth, and so on. The last stanza is said all together.

The paytan is asking permission to even attempt to praise Hashem, Who is beyond any human’s ability to describe.

Before reading the Aseres HaDibros
and attempting to praise Hashem,
I ask permission from Him,

אֶקְדָּמוֹת מִלֵּין, וְשָׁרִיית שׁוּתָא:
אִלָּא שְׁקִילָנָא, הֶרְמֵן וְרִשׁוּתָא:

With these opening two or three stanzas that I say with great trembling of the One Who created the world and has sustained it from the beginning.

בְּבִי תִרִי וְתִלֵּת, דְּאַפְתַּח בְּנִקְשׁוֹתָא:
בְּבִי דְבִרִי וְטִרִי, עָדִי לְקִשְׁשׁוֹתָא:

Hashem has infinite power that is impossible to describe. If all the skies were parchment, and all the forests pens,

גְּבוּרָן עֲלָמִין לִיה, וְלֹא סִפֵּק פְּרִישׁוֹתָא:
גִּיל אֱלוֹ דְקִיעִי, קִנִּי כָל חוֹרְשׁוֹתָא:

And all the oceans and water everywhere ink, and every person on earth was a scribe and writer,

דִּיו אֱלוֹ יָמִי, וְכָל מִי כְנִישׁוֹתָא:
דִּיִּירִי אֶרְעָא סְפָרִי, וְרִשְׁמִי רִשׁוֹתָא:

It would still be impossible to describe the glory of Hashem Who rules heaven and earth, Who alone created the universe in ways we cannot understand.

הֶדֶר מְרִי שְׁמַיָא, וְשִׁלִּיט בִּיבְשׁוֹתָא:
הָקֵם עֲלָמָא יְחִידָאִי, וְכַבְּשִׁיה בְּכַבְּשׁוֹתָא:

And without any “effort,” He perfected the world by simply using the letter hei (ה), which is pronounced with just a breath of air and has no substance.

וּבְלֹא לֹאוֹ שְׁכַלְלִיה, וּבְלֹא תַשְׁשׁוֹתָא:
וּבְאִתָּא קְלִילָא, דְלִית בָּהּ מְשִׁשׁוֹתָא:

He established all His work in six days, *or*: in honor of the sixth of Sivan, i.e., Shavuot, and then He “sat” on His throne of fire (*on Shabbos*).

זְמַן כָּל עֲבִידְתִּיהּ, בְּהֶךָ יוֹמֵי שְׁתָּא:
זְהוּר יְקָרִיהָ עָלֵי, עָלֵי כּוֹרְסִיהָ דְאַשְׁתָּא:

The myriads of various kinds of angels created by Hashem praise Him according to their categories, but that praise is not daily.

Hashem created countless angels to serve Him, and every morning more angels are created ready to serve and praise Hashem.

חֵיל אֱלֹף אֱלָפִין וְרַבּוּא, לְשִׁמְשׁוֹתָא:
חֲדָתִין נְבוֹט לְצַפְרִין, סְגִיָּאָה טְרִשׁוֹתָא:

And greater than those angels are the fiery six-winged Serafim, who stay silent until they are given permission to praise Hashem.

טְפִי יְקִידִין שְׂרָפִין, כְּלִיל גִּפִּי שְׁתָּא:
טֵעִם עַד יְתִיב לְהוֹן, שְׁתִּיקִין בְּאִדְשׁוֹתָא:

They give each other permission to proclaim together and without delay: “Hashem’s glory fills the entire earth.” They say “kadosh” three times (...קדוש קדוש קדוש).

יְקַבְּלוּן דִּין מִן דִּין שְׂוִי, דְלֹא בִשְׁשׁוֹתָא:
יְקַר מְלִי כָל אֶרְעָא, לְתִלּוּתֵי קְדוּשָׁתָא:

Then, like the sound of “thunder” from Hashem, like the roar of the ocean’s waves, the Chayos Hakodesh facing the Ofanim rise up thunderingly.

כָּקֵל מִן קֶדֶם שָׁדִי, כָּקֵל מִי נְפִישׁוֹתָא:
כְּרוֹבִין קֶבֶל גִּלְגָּלִין, מְרוֹמָמִין בְּאַשְׁתָּא:

To glance quickly (*at the glory of Hashem*) as the blink of the eye or the shooting of the arrow, and then go on their mission quickly and with trembling,

לְמַחֲזִי בְּאַנְפָּא עֵין, כְּפֹת גִּירֵי קִשְׁתָּא:
לְכָל אֲתֵר דְּמִשְׁתַּלְחִין, זְרִיזִין בְּאַשְׁתָּא:

And pronounce in all languages: בְּרוּךְ Hashem’s glory is the source for everything, מִמְּקוֹמוֹ, and there is no need to search for Hashem, since He is everywhere!

מְבָרְכִין בְּרִיךְ יְקָרָהּ, בְּכָל לָשׁוֹן לְחִישׁוֹתָא:
מֵאַתֵּר בֵּית שְׁכִינְתָּהּ, דְּלֹא צָרִיךְ בְּחִישׁוֹתָא:

Then the entire “Cheil Marom” respond with great sounds and trembling: הָ, Hashem’s rulership will be recognized by all forever and ever.

נְהִים כָּל חֵיל מְרוֹמָא, מְקַלְסִין בְּחִישׁוֹתָא:
נְהִירָא מַלְכוּתָהּ, לְדֹר וָדֹר לְאַפְרָשְׁתָּא:

Their praise of Hashem is organized (*they say* בְּרוּךְ, יְמִלוּךְ), but when their time for shirah passes, they do not praise Hashem again!

סְדִירָא בְּהוֹן קְדוּשַׁתָּא, וְכֵד חֲלָפָא שְׁעָתָא:
סְיוּמָא דְּלַעֲלֵם, וְאוּף לֹא לְשִׁבּוּעָתָא:

But we are more beloved than the angels, since we praise Hashem and say Shema twice a day, and we study His Torah!

But Bnei Yisrael, Hashem’s chosen people, are more beloved by Hashem than the angels, because daily they praise Hashem (*by saying the Shema*) every morning and evening!

עֲדָב יְקָר אַחֲסִנְתָּהּ, חֲבִיבִין דְּבִקְבָּעָתָא:
עֲבִידִין לִיה חֲטִיבָא, בְּדִנְח וּשְׁקָעָתָא:

Bnei Yisrael are chosen and separated (*from all the nations*) to be His dedicated servants and constantly speak of His wonders and praises.

פְּרִישָׁן לְמִנְתָּהּ, לְמַעַבְד לִיה רְעוּתָא:
פְּרִישׁוּתָהּ שְׁבַחָהּ, יְחוּוֹן בְּשְׁעוּתָא:

Hashem desires that they put their energies in learning Torah, and that way their tefillos will be heard and their requests granted.

צְבִי וְחֲמִיד וְרִגִּי, דִּילָאוֹן בְּלָעוּתָא:
צְלוּתָהוֹן בְּכוֹן מְקַבֵּל, וְהֵינָא בְּעוּתָא:

Their tefillos are tied to the “crown” of Hashem Who is eternal, they are secured for eternity at the most honored spot—by Hashem’s tefillin!

קְטִירָא לְחֵי עֲלְמָא, בְּתַגָּא בְּשִׁבּוּעָתָא:
קֶבֶל יְקָר טוֹטְפָתָא, יְתִיבָא בְּקִבְעוּתָא:

And it is written in Hashem's tefillin that the greatness of Bnei Yisrael is that we proclaim Hashem's oneness when we say the Shema.

רְשִׁימָא הִיא גּוּפָא, בְּחֻמְתָּא וּבְדַעְתָּא:
רְבוּתֵהוּ דִּישְׂרָאֵל, קְרָאִי בְּשִׁמְעָתָא:

The nations try to lure Bnei Yisrael away from serving Hashem.

I am pleased to openly and clearly praise Hashem, Master of the world, to all the kings of the earth.

שְׂבַח רַבּוֹן עֲלֵמָא, אֲמִירָא דְכּוֹתָא:
שִׁפּוֹר עָלֶיהָ לְחַוּיָהּ, בְּאַפִּי מַלְכוּתָא:

They (*all the nations*) gather like the waves of the ocean and ask Bnei Yisrael about the wonders and miracles (*that we have experienced throughout our miraculous history*).

תָּאִין וּמִתְכַּנְשִׁין, כְּחִיזוּ אֲדוּתָא:
תַּמְהִין וְשִׁי'לִין לֵיהּ, בְּעֶסֶק אֲתוּתָא:

"You beautiful one, Bnei Yisrael, for Whom have you chosen to suffer in galus, and even be killed as if in the lion's den?

מִנָּן וּמָאן הוּא רְחִימָה, שְׁפִירָא בְּרִיּוּתָא:
אֲרוּם בְּגִינָה סְפִית, מְדוּר אֲרִיּוּתָא:

"It would be so much better for you to merge with us and accept our rulership. We would grant your every wish and even appoint you to high positions!"

קְרָא וַיֵּאָה אֶת אֵין, תַּעֲרָבִי לְמַרְוּתָא:
רְעוּתֵךְ נַעֲבִיד לֵיהּ, בְּכָל אֲתִרוּתָא:

Bnei Yisrael respond to the nations of the world.

With wisdom, Bnei Yisrael respond by telling just a small portion of Hashem's glory: "If you really wanted to be wise and understand Hashem clearly,

בְּחֻמְתָּא מְתִיבְתָּא לְהוֹן, קִצֵּת לְהוֹדְעוּתָא:
יִדְעָתוֹן חֻכְמִין לֵיהּ, בְּאַשְׁתְּמוּדְעוּתָא:

"Then you would realize, 'of what value is the glory and honor you could offer me compared to all that Hashem will do for me when the time of Mashiach arrives?!"

רְבוּתְכוֹן מָה חֲשִׁיבָא, קָבֵל הֵהִיא שְׂבַחְתָּא:
רְבוּתָא דִּיעֲבִיד לִי, כִּד מְטִיא שְׁעָתָא:

"Then Hashem will shine on me the light of the Geulah, and you will be embarrassed (*for all the evil you have done*); and Hashem's glory and might will be revealed to all!

בְּמִיתִי לִי נְהוּרָא, וְתַחֲפִי לְכוֹן בְּהָתָא:
קְרִיָה כִּד אֲתַגְלִי, בְּתוֹקְפָא וּבְגִבוּרָתָא:

"Then Hashem will punish His enemies and the wicked all over the world; and reward His beloved Bnei Yisrael for all their good deeds."

יְשַׁלֵּם גְּמֻלָּא, לְסֻנְאֵי וְנִגְוָתָא:
צְדָקָתָא לְעַם חֲבִיב, וְסֻגִּיא זְכוּתָא: