

Rosh Hashanah and Yomi Kippur: Mussaf Piyutim

V'Chol Ma'aminim

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We say the *piyyut* of *V'chol ma'aminim* during *chazarat hashatz*, when the chazzan repeats the Shmoneh Esrei of Mussaf on Rosh Hashanah. This is the very first *piyyut* after Kedusha.

The refrain of this *piyyut* is "*V'chol ma'aminim* -- All believe." We constantly state throughout this song that we believe in Hashem. We describe Him as all-knowing, as powerful, as ever-lasting, as just, etc.

This *piyyut* has a double alphabetical structure. Every two lines include the same letter of the Hebrew alphabet. The first line of each verse begins with the letter "ה" the definite article, in which we make a statement saying, "The One who..." For example the first statement is "The One who grasps the Attribute of Justice." And further in the poem the line says, "The One who redeems from death and delivers from *gehenom*," and a few lines down it says, "the One who knows the inclination of all creatures."

The second line of each verse begins with the phrase "*V'chol ma'aminim*" -All believe that He..." For example, a full statement is, "All believe that He is the G-d of faithfulness;" "All believe that he examines thoughts;" and "All believe that he is good to all." This *piyyut* is typically sung in responsive format - the chazzan loudly says the first line and the congregation says the refrain "*V'chol maaminim*."

Rabbi Hershel Schachter reports that Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, would not recite any *piyyutim* during Rosh Hashanah services-- except for this prayer, *V'chol Ma'aminim*. What a powerful prayer this must be! In fact, It is one of the oldest liturgical poems we have, dating to

the times of the Geonim (approximately 500-1000 CE).

What does this *piyyut* of *V'chol Ma'aminim*, in which we state our beliefs, have to do with Rosh Hashanah? On Rosh Hashanah, the theme of the day is *malchus*, the coronation of Hashem as our King. What does establishing Hashem's reign as our King and King of the world have to do with this poem where we sing about our beliefs?

Belief is strongly tied to knowledge and in fact, stems from knowledge. In *Sefer Bamidbar* Chapter 20, the Jewish people cry to and fight with Moshe Rabbeinu and Aharon HaKohen because they are dying of thirst and need water in the wilderness. Moshe and Aharon turn to Hashem, who responds that they should speak to a rock and it will give forth water. Moshe and Aharon gather the people, and the end of this story is well-known: Moshe instead, lifts his staff and hits the rock twice and water flows from it. Immediately Hashem speaks to Moshe and Aharon and says:

Because you did not trust Me enough to affirm My sanctity in the sight of the Israelite people, therefore you shall not lead this congregation into the land that I have given them" (Numbers 20:12).

עַן לֹא־הֶאֱמַנְתֶּם בִּי
לְהַקְדִּישְׁנִי לְעֵינֵי בְנֵי
יִשְׂרָאֵל לְכֹן לֹא תָבִיאוּ
אֶת־הַקֶּהֱלֵל הַזֶּה אֵל־
הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר־נָתַתִּי לָהֶם:

This verse has many commentaries trying to decipher what Hashem actually meant, why He was so upset by this, why Moshe and Aharon were unable to enter Eretz Yisrael because of this, etc. I would like to highlight the phrase

within the verse “you [did not] trust—הֲאִמַּנְתֶּם.” Hashem tells them “you didn’t believe in Me!” Rabbeinu Chananel points out that Moshe and Aharon’s mistake was that they told the Jewish people “listen up, from this rock you will get water” and they did not say, (which they should have said) “Hashem will bring forth water from this rock. They should have given the people the knowledge that Hashem is the one who is behind this action and behind this miracle. This is similar to the previous chapters when the Jewish people complained about the lack of food and Hashem brought down the quails for them to eat. Moshe and Aharon said “Hashem will give you meat.” In that case they publicly announced that Hashem was bringing this miraculous bounty of fresh meat. But in this scene in Chapter 20, known as *Mei Meriva* (bitter waters), Moshe and Aharon did not publicly acknowledge Hashem. *Emunah* is about that public acknowledgement.

Furthermore, Hashem continues to speak and does not simply say “you didn’t have faith in Me, you didn’t acknowledge Me.” He says “לֹא לְאִמַּנְתֶּם בִּי לְהַקְדִּישׁ אֶת שְׁמִי לְעֵינֵי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל” meaning, “you did not have faith in me to sanctify my name in the sight of the Jewish people.” In this verse we see the direct connection and relationship between faith and publicly sanctifying Hashem’s name. Acknowledging Hashem and publicly having faith in Hashem is how we sanctify His name.

And this is what we are doing in the *piyyut* of *V’chol Ma’aminim*. We are listing statement after statement that we are believers, and what we believe in. In this way we are sanctifying Hashem’s name through this prayer. And what better day to do this, than on Rosh Hashanah, the day when Hashem is being proclaimed as our King!

In the first chapter of *Sefer Emunah V’Bitachon*, the Chazon Ish, Rabbi Avraham Yeshayahu Karelitz, writes on *emunah* (faith) and discusses the human body. He describes how each of our

limbs and body parts serve a wonderful and wondrous purpose and enable us to be human. He writes that that is what *emunah* is about - recognizing what we have, how we are created, and how Hashem created us. It is the knowledge of the human body, even on a superficial level, that gives us the source and foundation of faith in Hashem. The Chazon Ish continues, “*emunah* is the general approach of the believing person and *bitachon*/trust is the person’s approach to himself, with faith being the theory and trust being the practice.” What the Chazon Ish describes is exactly what we are doing when we sing the prayer of *v’chol ma’aminim*. We are stating the theories of faith, and this is an essential part of the proclamation of the day.

Within the Rosh Hashanah Mussaf prayer service there are three sections: *Malchuyot*, *Zichronot*, and *Shofrot*. Each section has prayers and Biblical verses related to that theme. The *piyyut V’chol Ma’aminim* is placed in the *Malchuyot* section of Shmoneh Esrei. This is a fitting location because we accept Hashem as king by stating and proclaiming our *emunah* and faith in Him and all of His attributes. For example, we state, “We believe He is the G-d of faithfulness who probes and examines hidden archives,” “Hashem is the sole judge and that He is the true judge;” “He is patient and we believe He forgives.”

There is a rabbinic expression “אין מלך בלא עם--there is no king without a people.” We illustrate this during the recital of this *piyyut*. We are stating we are His people and we believe in Him and the attributes that we state. As mentioned earlier, this *piyyut* is said responsively. The chazzan initiates a phrase, and the congregation recites the statement “*V’chol ma’aminim*,” which the chazzan then repeats. This *piyyut* is written in a way that the chazzan’s statement prompts the congregation to complete the phrase and initiate a new phrase, and then the chazzan responds before initiating another new phrase. Thus, even the way we sing the *piyyut* unites us. We sing this *piyyut* as a nation

together because “אין מלך בלא עם-- *there is no king without a people.*” As a nation together we proclaim and coronate Hashem by stating our belief in Him in this liturgical poem.

To contrast, consider the formulation of the Rambam’s Thirteen Foundations of Belief that some have the custom to recite at the end of praying on a daily basis during the year. They are just stating the fundamental beliefs in Judaism as a creed. We state “I believe that Moshiach is coming;” “I believe that Hashem is everlasting;” “I believe that Hashem created everything.” The

purpose of those statements is to remind the one praying what they believe in.

This is very different than the *piyyut V’chol Ma’aminim* we say on Rosh Hashanah. In this *piyyut* we are stating our belief in G-d and His greatness through a description of His characteristics as we know them. In essence we are saying on a personal level, “Hashem, we accept You as King because we acknowledge what characteristics define You.” Through reciting a long list of our beliefs in Hashem’s greatness on Rosh Hashanah we are ultimately accepting Him as King to judge us on the *Yom HaDin*.