

Ashrei

Tefillah Notes

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December 12, 2015

Page 96, *Siddur Sim Shalom for Shabbat and Festivals*

Preliminary Service | 9 to 9:30am

P'sukei D'zimra

אֲשֵׁרֵי יוֹשְׁבֵי בֵיתְךָ. עוֹד יִהְלֹךְ סְלָה:
אֲשֵׁרֵי הָעַם שְׂפֹכָה לוֹ. אֲשֵׁרֵי הָעַם שֶׁה' אֱלֹהָיו:
תְּהִלָּה לְדָוִד.
אֲרוֹמְמְךָ אֱלֹהֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ. וְאֶבְרַכְּךָ שְׂמֹךְ לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד:
בְּכָל יוֹם אֶבְרַכְךָ. וְאֶהְלֵלְךָ שְׂמֹךְ לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד:

Blessed are they who dwell in Your house; they shall praise You forever.

Blessed the people who are so favored; blessed the people whose God is Adonai

A Psalm of David.

I glorify You, my God, my Sovereign; I praise You throughout all time.

Every Day do I praise You, exalting Your glory forever...

Psalm 84:5, 144:16, 145:1-2

Or Chadash Commentary on Siddur Sim Shalom, 1998

Commentary

Since every single time that Psalm 145 appears in the prayer book it is preceded by these two *ashrei* verses (*Ashrei yoshvei veitekha* and *Ashre ha'am shekakhah lo*), most people think that they are part of the psalm itself. But that is not so. The first of these two verses, which speaks of dwelling in god's house, is taken by the Rabbis to refer to a synagogue. A synagogue is a sacred space. Entering it is assumed to evoke some acknowledgement by the person entering. This verse provides the opportunity for such an observation.

Judith Hauptman, My People's Prayer Book, Volume 3, page 118

The addition of the two introductory verses was linked to another Talmudic teaching to the effect that before one begins to pray, one should “linger for an hour in the synagogue,” the idea being that before the main statutory prayers, one should prepare oneself spiritually. The Talmud cites Ps. 84:5 as proof for that lesson. “Happy are they who dwell in your house! they will ever praise You”- that is, before we “praise you” in the Amidah, it is necessary to “dwell in your house,” meaning “in the synagogue” for a while.

Lawrence Hoffman, My People's Prayer Book, Volume 3, page 122

It is possible that these two introductory verses highlight the alphabetical structure of Psalm 145 by reiterating for us the first letter, alef, since ashrei, begins with that letter. Each alef is vocalized with a patach (the “ah” sound), formed by opening one’s mouth. That sound is considered reminiscent of a form of “stuttering,” as when we grope for a word and cannot find it, so say only, “Ah, ah, ah...” The sense of stuttering to find the right word to praise God leads dramatically to the full articulation of praise that Psalm 145 contains.

Daniel Landes, My People's Prayer Book, Volume 3, Page 121

Personal Thoughts and Reflections

The majority of Ashrei is comprised of Psalm 145, which begins the traditional acrostic. The opening two lines of Ashrei, come from Psalms 84 and 144 and provide a strong introduction to this prayer. Ashrei is held in such high regards that anyone who says it three times a day is guaranteed a spot in the world to come.

The commentaries above help me to understand the importance of preparing for prayer. Before arriving at the heart of the prayer, we have to acknowledge where we are and how we will best praise God. We acknowledge the well being of those dwelling in God’s sanctuary and highlight our communal stutter. We embrace our hesitation through the inclusion of these lines and hope that through the rest of the prayer we are able to find the right words of praise for God.

That little Ah sound in the opening lines of the Ashrei gives us a second to pause, think, and physically say those words. Interestingly enough, many people who stutter do not experience the same difficulties when singing. We sing so often in our services because we understand that the flow between our words is stronger when we enter into the rhythm of the melody. I am comforted knowing that our liturgy actually acknowledges that sometimes, we have to process where we are, we don’t know the right words to say, and gives us a sound and an extra second to help set us on the right path.