

# “Long Live the King” — That’s You!

Category: Devarim, Ki Setzei

*Who is a king in Jewish tradition, and what is his role?*

## “The Queen of England”

The entire world is mourning the death of the Queen after seventy years of reign.

The English Jewish community is also participating in the mourning. The Queen was known for her good relationships with the Jews of her nation. One of the more interesting associations is the fact that she invited an Orthodox mohel to circumcise the new king — Charles III — when he was born. In this, she continued a tradition of many years in which they would invite a Jewish mohel to circumcise the members of the royal family.

In 2005, when the world marked the sixtieth anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, the Queen invited a group of Holocaust survivors to the palace, and she listened to their stories. Even as the time allotted for the visit was over, she continued to listen to them; the aides tried to remind her that their time was up, but she continued until the last of the survivors finished his story.

English Jews returned her love; every Shabbat, in the synagogue, they would recite a special prayer for her, asking G-d to protect her and give her good health.

The Queen also recognized Chabad’s contribution to English society; by knighting the chief emissary of Chabad in England, Rabbi Nachman Sudak o.b.m.,

## What is a Monarch’s Role?

An event of this magnitude always provokes a discussion as to whether the institution of the monarchy is still relevant. Is it time to abolish it? What is, after all, the role of the king?

For us, the Jewish people, this event reminds us of our own monarch: Whenever we recite a blessing, we begin with the words: “Blessed are you, L-rd our G-d, King of the universe.” We define the Almighty as our “King.” We are approaching Rosh Hashanah; we all know the prayer, “Avinu Malkeinu, Our Father—our King.” In fact, the entire Rosh Hashanah revolves around this idea that G-d is the “King of the universe.”

Now, the role of an English queen is mostly symbolic (at least as far as I know). But what is the true role of a king?

We know the role of the people: it is the citizen’s obligation to obey the king’s directives. But what, exactly, are we supposed to expect from him?

The answer to this question is found in a prayer almost everyone knows — “Ashrei,” which we sing together during the prayer service.

The Talmud says that this is an important prayer; whoever recites it three times a day will earn a portion in the world to come (Berachos 4b). Rashi explains that we recite it three times to correspond with the three daily prayers. Indeed, it was incorporated three times into the prayers: twice in the morning prayers — once toward the beginning and once towards the end — and one at the start of the afternoon prayers.

The first thing that makes Ashrei unique is that it praises G-d in all 22 letters of the Aleph Bet, starting with the first letter Aleph — Ashrei, continuing to the letter Bet - Bechol Yom, and so on. In other words, we praise G-d from A to Z.

Well, the Talmud asks: There are other Psalms in which G-d is praised in all twenty-two letters; chapter 119, for example, where each letter has not only one verse of praise, but rather eight. What is unique about Ashrei?

The Talmud answers that there is another virtue in Ashrei: it includes a very important verse: “*Poteach et yadecha* — You open your hand and you satisfy the desires of every living thing.” G-d satisfies not only our needs, but also our desires; as we all know, we desire far more than we actually need...

This verse is considered very important. When we come to this verse, we are instructed to focus carefully on our words, because this is the verse in which we ask G-d to provide for the entire universe.

Now, in this Psalm, G-d is mentioned as king at least five times. In other words, it is telling us what the role of the king is — to make sure that all his subjects have their needs provided for.

## Why Not at Night?

During one of his talks, the Rebbe discussed another question regarding Ashrei: if reciting Ashrei three times corresponds to the three daily prayers, why don't we recite it for the third time in the evening prayer?

The Rebbe cited the Zohar's explanation: we say Ashrei at Shacharit and Minchah because that is when we pray for sustenance. This is done only twice a day, in the morning and in the evening (mincha), corresponding to the manna: "G-d gave you meat in the evening to eat and bread in the morning to satiate yourselves" (Exodus 16:8).

But the question still remains: If Ashrei is recited three times to correspond to three prayers, why can't we recite it in the evening as well?

The Rebbe cites another Zohar: We don't say Ashrei at night because after sunset is a time of judgment; it's not a good time to ask for mercy. For the same reason, the Ashrei of Mincha is said *before* the Amidah, when "the face of the king is still shining." (Sichos Kodesh 5738 vol. 3 pg. 194). (Perhaps we recite it twice in the morning to make up for the missing one in the evening).

## The Fallen

There is another special thing about Ashrei:

If you look through the verses, you'll discover that there is one letter that has no verse — the letter Nun.

Why not?

The Talmud answers that the letter Nun begins the word "*nofel*—falls," and there is a negative verse in the Bible that begins with that letter, "*naflah*—fallen, not to rise again, is the maiden Israel..." (Amos 5:2). Therefore, in a chapter where we praise the Almighty for being our King, there is no place for such a letter, and

King David omitted it. In fact, this is indicated in the letter which follows, Samech: “*Somech*—G-d supports all those who fall.”

What we learn from this chapter is that the king’s role is to open his hand and fulfill the desire of every person that is dependent on him. Moreover, his role is to make sure that there are no “fallen” — that no one loses hope.

Nowadays, so many people walk around broken and depressed; the role of the King of Kings, the Almighty, is to strengthen them, encourage them and support them.

But what about a Jew who doesn’t recite Ashrei three times a day? What about those who don’t even recite it once a day? Does he not deserve G-d’s blessings?!

The Rebbe once cited a teaching of the Baal Shem Tov on the verse, “*Ashrei tivchar uskarev*— Happy is the man You choose and bring near...” (Psalms 65:5). “Ashrei,” says the Baal Shem Tov, is the initials of “*Amen Yehei Shmei Raba*.” When a Jew answers the kaddish with the words, “*Amen Yehei Shmei Raba*—May the name of G-d be blessed...,” then, G-d “chooses” him and “brings him near.” This is something that every Jew can be part of (Toras Menachem 5714 vol. 3 pg. 28).

## **Be a King**

The Talmud says that “Every Jew is a prince” (Bava Metziah 113b). The Rebbe would also always quote the Zohar which says, furthermore, that all of Israel are kings themselves (introduction to Tikunei Zohar). That is, because G-d is the King of the world, and we are a part of G-d so-to-speak.

As we said, what is the role of a king? To fulfill the desire of every living being; to provide for every person, and to make sure that nobody is “fallen.” And if someone is fallen, the king’s job is to raise him up and support him.

When we fulfill our role, we will be surely granted an “Ashrei” — a happy and blessed new year.