

## KIVYACHOL as a term for Radical Anthropomorphism

The basic pericope used by many scholars to elucidate this term is Sifre Deut 346:

וַיְהִי בִישׁוּרוֹן מֶלֶךְ בְּהִתְאַסֵּף רִאשֵׁי עַם יִשְׂרָאֵל:

“Then He became King in Jeshurun, When the heads of the people assembled, The tribes of Israel together.”

Duet 33:5

יחד שבטי ישראל - כשהם עשויים אגודה אחת, ולא כשהם עשויים אגודות אגודות; וכן הוא אומר (עמוס ט) הבונה בשמים מעליותיו ואגודתו על ארץ יסדה

. ר' שמעון בן יוחי אומר: **משל** לאדם שהביא שתי ספינות וקשרם בעוגנים ובעשתות, והעמידן על גביהם ובנה עליהם פלטירים. כל זמן שהספינות קשורות - פלטירין קיימים. פרשו ספינות - אין פלטירים קיימים!

**כך** ישראל כשעושים רצונו של מקום- עליותם בשמים. וכשאין עושים רצונו של מקום - ואגודתו על ארץ יסדה.

כיוצא בו אתה אומר (שמות טו) זה אלי ואנוהו: כשאני מודה לו - הוא נאה; וכשאין אני מודה לו - **כביכול** בשמו הוא נאה.

כיוצא בו אתה אומר (ישעיה מג) ואתם עדי נאם ה' ואני אל. כשאתם עדי - אני אל; וכשאין אתם עדי - אין אני אל.

כיוצא בדבר אתה אומר (תהילים קכ"ג:א') אליך נשאתי את עיני היושבי בשמים: אלמלא אני - לא הייתי יושב בשמים.

אף כן אתה אומר: יחד שבטי ישראל - כשהם עשויים אגודה אחת, ולא כשהם עשויים אגודות אגודות - יחד שבטי ישראל:

"together, the tribes of Israel" — when they constitute one unit, and not when they are divided into many factions, as it is written (Amos 9:6) "Who builds His heights in the heavens and His bond on earth endures." — R. Shimon b. Yochai says:

(**Mashal**) This is analogous to one's bringing two ships, connecting them with anchors and iron bars, and building stately edifices (palaces) upon them. So long as the ships are bound, the edifices endure; once the ships separate, the edifices no longer endure.

(**Nimshal**) So, with Israel: if they do His will then “He builds his upper room in the Heavens” (Amos 9:6); yet, when they do not perform the will of the All-Present —so to speak—“His band is bound to (*yesadah*) the Earth” (Am.9:6).

*Similarly, (Shemoth 15:20) "This is my G-d and I will extol Him ("ve'anvehu"):* זה אלי (שמות טו) ואנוהו

When I acknowledge Him, He is "beautiful" ("naveh, as in ve'anvehu"), and (even) when I do not acknowledge Him, **kivyachol** " He is "beautiful." The vav of ואנוהו is no longer "therefore" but "despite".

Similarly, (Isaiah 43:12) "And you are My witnesses, says the L-rd, and I am G-d ("Kel")":

(ישעיה מג) ואתם עדי נאם ה' ואני אל

"you are My witnesses, I am G-d, and if you are not My witnesses, **kivyachol** I am not G-d". Here the vav of ואתם is not "and" but "depending upon" whether you will be My witnesses.

Similarly, (Psalms 23:1) "To You I have raised my eyes, Who dwells in Heaven."

אומר (תהילים קכ"ג:א') אליך נשאתי את עיני היושבי בשמים

If not, **kivyachol** I would not dwell in heaven.

Here, too, "together, the tribes of Israel" — when they are one bond (*agudah*), and not when they are of many *agudoth* (factions).

Thus, "together the tribes of Israel."

The pericope will expound the verse יְהִי בִישְׂרָאוֹן מְלֶכֶךְ בְּהִתְאַסַּף רְאִשֵׁי עַם גִּזְדוֹ שְׂבָטַי יִשְׂרָאֵל: In which it will focus on the word יְהִי the unity of the tribes of Israel that will somehow be the condition for the crowning of the king/King.

The literary unit brings an intertext from Amos 6:9

ו הַבִּוּנָה בַשָּׁמַיִם מֵעֲלוֹתָו, וְאֶגְדָּתוֹ עַל-אֲרֶז יִסְדָּה; הַקָּרָא לְמִי-הַיָּם, וַיִּשְׁפְּכֵם עַל-פְּנֵי הָאֲרֶז- יְהִנֶּה שְׁמוֹ-	6 It is He that buildeth His upper chambers in the heaven, and hath founded His vault upon the earth; He that calleth for the waters of the sea, and poureth them out upon the face of the earth; The LORD is His name.
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Which will end up proving the homily: if they fail to perform His will then, "His band is bound to (*yesadah*) the Earth" (Am.9:6).

The radical implication of a divine human partnership is furthered by the fictional narrative of the mashal.

The parable evokes two ships side by side connected by anchors and irons upon which a palace can be built because of their connection and support. If the ships are disconnected the entire edifice collapses. The implication moves the homily beyond a mere return of the divine to the heavens and a withdrawal from human interaction, it raises the stakes by suggesting the entire palace where the interaction took place collapses making each "ship" an equal partner in

maintaining the iron bond. This allows for the radical theological notion that the divine is dependent upon the human enterprise. If Israel fails to perform the will of the divine then He is unable to build His palace in heavens, and he is bound (chained?) to the earth.

The midrash stretches this further with three other referents before ending with the need for unity as a condition for the King's crowning.

*1. Similarly, (Shemoth 15:20) "This is my G-d and I will extol Him ("ve'anvehu"):*

*When I acknowledge Him, He is "beautiful" ("naveh, as in ve'anvehu"), and (even) when I do not acknowledge Him, **kivyachol** " He is "beautiful." ( He is lovely in name only)<sup>1</sup>*

Here His beauty is independent upon my acknowledgement...

*2. Similarly, (Isaiah 43:12) "And you are My witnesses, says the L-rd, and I am G-d ("Kel")": When you are My witnesses, I am God, and if you are not My witnesses, **kivyachol** I am not God"*

*3. Similarly, (Psalms 23:1) "To You I have raised my eyes, Who dwells in Heaven." If not, **kivyachol** I would not dwell in heaven. (were it not for me, You would not be dwelling in heavens).*

These three exempla push the narrative further by supporting verses from Exodus, Isaiah and Psalms, each mis-read midrashically to suggest the divine is dependent upon mankind for its beauty, location and even existence.

Finally all are brought to bear on our proof-text:

וַיְהִי בִישׁוּרוֹן מֶלֶךְ בְּהִתְאַסְּףָה רָאשֵׁי עַם יִשְׂרָאֵל: שְׁבִטֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:

“Then He became King in Jeshurun, When the heads of the people assembled, The tribes of Israel together.”

And here, too, you can say: “*Together* are the tribes of Israel” (Dt.33:5)—

**when they are bound into a *single band*,  
but not when they are broken into several bands!**

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Jaffe Sifre Deut <https://jewishstudies.washington.edu/book/sifre-devarim/chapter/pisqa-346/>

