

Akdamus Milin

Rabbi Dovid Sears

*"Even if the heavens were parchment,
All the trees were quills,
The seas and all waters were ink,
And all inhabitants of the earth were scribes and skilled writers,
His might eternal would remain beyond description.
Alone, the resplendent Master of heaven and earth
Founded the universe and garbed it in mystery..."*

One of the highlights of Shavuos is the responsive chanting in the synagogue of *Akdamus Milin*, written by Rabbi Meir ben Yitzchak of Worms during the 11th century C.E. The hymn begins with these two Aramaic words, which mean "Before I speak..." (The author asks the Creator permission to utter His praise.) However, as a title, *Akdamus Milin* may be translated "Introduction to the Words," meaning the Divine Speech heard at Mount Sinai. Therefore it is usually read on Shavuos morning before the Torah reading, which describes the awesome experience of all Israel hearing the Ten Commandments at the foot of the desert mountain.

Rabbi Noson of Breslov (1780-1844) writes that Rabbi Nachman highly praised *Akdamus*.

"The Rebbe observed, 'Because the Jewish people are so immersed in and habituated to what is truly good, they don't fully appreciate the greatness of the sacred hymn of *Akdamus*, which we recite on Shavuos.'

"He went on to say, 'One who knows the loftiness of this poem of *Akdamus*, together with the melody to which it is commonly sung, realizes that this is something most wondrous and unique.'

"The Rebbe then chanted a few stanzas of *Akdamus*. He added, '*Akdamus* is a song of *cheshek* – of love and desire for God.'

"The Rebbe said all of this on Shavuos, during the dairy meal [traditionally eaten after the morning service]. The second *minyán* was in the middle of their prayers in the synagogue, and the *chazan* was chanting *Akdamus*. That was when the Rebbe spoke with us about the loftiness of this hymn." (*Sichot HaRan* 256)

Rabbi Nachman clearly experienced *Akdamus* as an expression of the mutual love between the Jewish People and G-d. This love and desire is the pre-condition of prophecy, which is the essence of the Torah.

Continuing to expound upon this theme, Reb Noson also discusses the custom of reading *Akdamus* in his masterwork, *Likkutei Halakhos*:

"On Shavuos, we spiritually ascend to the supernal root of *ratzon* (will or desire). [An aspect of the *sefirah* of *Keser* (Crown), *ratzon* expresses the deepest will and desire of the soul for God, and God's corresponding will and desire, so to speak, for creation].

"Through this ascent, all profane wisdoms related to the natural order are transmuted to *ratzon*, due to the power of the revelation of *ratzon* that now becomes manifest. That is, we vividly perceive all existence and all that transpires as only a reflection of the Divine Will.

"Profane or 'natural wisdoms,' by contrast, are derived from the Aramaic tongue. [Aramaic is the language closest to *leshon ha-kodesh*, the 'holy tongue,' which is Hebrew. During the Talmudic period, Aramaic was used for everyday speech and writing.] On Shavuos, however, the aspect of *ratzon* is revealed to such an extent that even the Aramaic tongue, the source of 'natural wisdom,' becomes absorbed into the holy.

"This is why we recite *Akdamus*, which is an awesome expression of praise written specifically in Aramaic – for this transformation of the profane to the holy represents the fullest revelation of *ratzon*."

(*Likkutei Halakhos, Hilkhos Kaddish*, 1)