

Friday Night's Ribon Kol Ha-Olamim— the Second Half of Shalom Aleikhem

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Most observant Jewish homes begin the evening Shabbat meal with the *piyyut Shalom Aleikhem*, a 17th-century poem and prayer marking the angels' visit to the Jewish home at the start of each Shabbat. Though the prayer has long been the subject of controversy,¹ it is now widespread and ubiquitous despite a small number of detractors. Less well known and less

¹ See Yaakov Emden, *Siddur Beit-El* (Altona, 1745), 345a. Emden reports that his father, the Ḥakham Tzvi (1656-1718), did not recite this prayer, not surprising given that the initial publications of *Shalom Aleikhem* only reached Europe in the mid-17th century. Emden has numerous concerns with the prayer: Grammatical concerns, making petitionary requests on Shabbat, reading by candlelight, prayer to angels, among other concerns. He notes that given that the prayer was novel and recent, it is preferable to omit the prayer or abridge it considerably. See the following link:

<<https://hebrewbooks.org/pdfpager.aspx?req=22431&st=&pgnum=692>>.

Rabbi Chaim Volozhin reportedly omitted the prayer, entirely on the basis of the concern of making requests to angels (*Orbot Chaim: Keter Rosh* #93). See <<https://hebrewbooks.org/pdfpager.aspx?req=31446&st=&pgnum=14>>. Not surprisingly, this view is also found in *Tosefet Ma'aseh Rav*, as the view of the Vilna Gaon (entry 128) see <<https://hebrewbooks.org/pdfpager.aspx?req=58364&st=&pgnum=50&hilite=>>>. Lastly, see also *Iggerot Mosheb* 5:43:6.

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widely recited is the expansion, response, rejoinder, or interpretation of *Shalom Aleikhem* which is printed after it in many *siddurim* and *birkonim*, the paragraph beginning with the words *Ribon Kol Ha-Olamim*. The two prayers first appear together, side by side, in the 17th century, and the two prayers are clearly in dialogue with each other, exploring the same themes; they appear to be two parts of one prayer.²

This essay will explain how *Ribon Kol Ha-Olamim* is a vital expansion and interpretation of *Shalom Aleikhem* and that the two prayers go together by necessity. Indeed, the recitation of this lengthy expansion neutralizes many of the objections issued against *Shalom Aleikhem* in the first place! An early change in the text of *Ribon Kol Ha-Olamim* coupled with a 19th-century decision to move the prayer from the home to the synagogue disconnected the two linked prayers. The modern practice to say *Shalom Aleikhem* and not *Ribon Kol Ha-Olamim* further exacerbated this disconnect. Today's Jews consider these two different prayers which exist separately from each other such that you can choose to say one and not the other. Nevertheless, it is evident that the original author intended for *Shalom Aleikhem* to be interpreted and understood within the context of his composition *Ribon Kol Ha-Olamim*, and therefore the two should be recited together as one unit.

Two Aggadot About Two Angels

Shabbat 119a-119b discusses the series of preparations required before Shabbat: food preparations, preparations of the home, and preparations of the body and clothes. Most discussions of *Shalom Aleikhem* begin with a citation of one famous aggadah in this section, although a proper understanding requires us to look at two aggadot that appear one after the other in this section of Talmud. Both aggadot are referenced in *Ribon Kol Ha-Olamim*; the second is also referenced by *Shalom Aleikhem*.

Rav Hisda taught in the name of Mar Ukva: whoever prays on Friday night and recites *Va-Yekbulu* (*Beresbit* 2:1-3), the two angels³ who

² The two prayers first appear in *Tikunei Shabbat* which was first published in 1614. For further discussion of the various editions of this text, see Chaim Liberman "Sefer Tikunei Shabbat" *Kiryat Sefer* 38 (1962), 401-414. The name of the author of this book is unknown, but it is clear that he was a student of Rabbi Isaac Luria. Thus, we do not know who wrote these prayers, although we do know he was a late 16th or early 17th century Kabbalist from the circle of the Ari Ha-Kadosh.

³ See *Maharitz Hayot* (*Shabbat* 119) citing what appears to be Maimonides' *Laws of Mezuzah* 6:13 for a more rationalistic interpretation of what these two "angels" are.

accompany a person place their hands on his head and say to him (*Yeshayahu* 6:7) “And your sin will be removed, and your error will be forgiven.”⁴

We learned in a *Baraita*, Rabbi Yosi the son of Yehudah said: Two angels accompany a person from the synagogue to his home on Friday night, one good and one bad.⁵ When [the angel] comes to his house and finds [1] a lit candle, [2] a set table, and [3] a made bed, the good angel says, “May it be so for the next Shabbat,” and the bad angel answers “Amen” against his will. And if not, the bad angel says, “May it be so for the next Shabbat,” and the good angel answers “Amen” against his will.

The Talmud provides the inspiration for the prayer “*Shalom Aleikhem*,” with the same subject, timing, location, and central action. The subject—angels visiting the home; the timing—on Friday night just after services; the location—at one’s home; and the main action—a blessing granted towards the Jewish Sabbath observer. It is on the basis of this aggadah that *Shalom Aleikhem* is recited at home and not at the synagogue, because the angels give the blessing upon returning to the home. It remains an open question for now if *Ribon Kol Ha-Olamim* should be recited at the same place and time.

One question remains unclear: Are the angels, who lack free will, giving this blessing of their own volition or is it G-d who gives the blessing? Much ink has been spilled on this question, but we will confine ourselves to the answer given in *Ribon Kol Ha-Olamim*. That prayer interprets this Talmudic passage and explains *Shalom Aleikhem*, based on a key Biblical verse, *Tehillim* 91:11.

G-d’s Relationship with His Angels: The Grammar of *Tehillim* 91:11

Tehillim 91 is called the “song of protection from negative situations” (*Shavu’ot* 15b), and is a frequent part of Jewish liturgy, appearing as part of the funeral service, the prayer before bed, and the Saturday night prayer

⁴ How does Friday night relate to forgiveness of sin? *Maharsha* explains that Friday night was the moment when Adam and Eve were forgiven for their sin in the Garden of Eden. *Ritva* explains that the angels express that the human being is not guilty of the crime of withholding testimony, the testimony of the Sabbath and Creation. This is a better reading of the Talmud given the context of the proof-text, *Yeshayahu* 6:3-7.

⁵ There is some confusion as to whether the second angel should be considered “bad”; *Mordekhai* (*Shabbat*, 408) seems to omit these words. See also *Perishah* 262 and *Sfat Emet* to *Shabbat*.

service. One of the central verses is 11; in the funeral service this verse is accentuated by stopping the recitation of the Psalm seven times after the first seven words of the verse (see *Rashbam, Bava Batra* 100b). When translated correctly, the verse reads, “For His angels He will command on your behalf (*yetzaveh lakh*),⁶ to protect you in all of your ways.” G-d commands His angels to protect the Jew; the protection comes not from the angels’ own choice, but as a result of a Divine command.

After reciting *Shalom Aleikhem*, a Jew recites Psalm 91:11.⁷ That verse from *Tehillim* thus serves as an important *interpretation* of the role that the angels play in the aggadah of the return from synagogue on Friday night. G-d gives a command *to* the angels *concerning* the Jew, that they provide protection and blessing for the Jew. They are commanded “on your behalf” to provide peace, but the blessing and peace ultimately come from G-d, and not the angels.

Ribon Kol Ha-Olamim takes the lesson of Psalm 91:11 and weaves the version into a restatement of the aggadah of the Friday night angels. What was implicit in *Shalom Aleikhem* and *Tehillim* is explicit in this expansion. It reads:

Please King, King-of-Kings, command Your angels, the administering angels, ministers that are most high, that they shall remember me with mercy and bless me when they come to my home on our holy day. For I have [1] lit my candles, [2] made my bed, and [3] changed my clothing⁸ for the sake of the honor⁹ of the Sabbath day.

אָנָּא מֶלֶךְ מַלְכֵי הַמַּלְכִּים צַוֵּה לְמַלְאַכְיָהּ מְלַאכֵי הַשָּׁרָת מִשְׁרָתִי עָלֶיךָ שִׁיִּפְקְדוּנִי
בְּרַחֲמִים וּבְרַכּוּנִי בְּבוֹאֵם לְבֵיתִי בְּיוֹם קִדְשֵׁנוּ. כִּי הִדְלַקְתִּי נְרוֹתַי וְהִצַּעַתִּי מִשְׁתִּי
וְהִחַלְפְתִּי שְׂמֹלוֹתַי לְכַבוֹד יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת.

⁶ The two-word phrase “*ye-tzaveh lakh*” contains both the verb “*ye-tzaveh*,” that G-d commands the angel, and the prepositional phrase that the command relates to the Jew, “*lakh*.” The word “*lakh*” is often translated “to you,” indicating an indirect object, but in this verse it means “about you” or “concerning you” because the command has already been given to the angel, and the angel is the indirect object earlier in the verse. The command is *to* the angel, *about* the Jew (*Targum, Ibn Ezra, Radak*). See also E. Kautzsch, *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar* (Mineola, NY: Dover, 2006), 381, for a fuller discussion of the use of the Hebrew prefix “*le*.”

⁷ Many also add *Tehillim* 121:8; see *Avodah Zarah* 11a for why that verse was chosen.

⁸ The idea of changing clothing in honor of Shabbat is found earlier in this Talmudic section on p. 119a, although not in the aggadah of the angels.

⁹ Others translate “changed my clothing into the honored clothing of the Shabbat day” based on *Shabbat* 113a.

This prayer reframes the aggadah in *Shabbat* through the lens of Psalm 91 by deftly quoting the key words of the verse—command and angels. We do not pray to angels to ask them for blessing, we pray to G-d to command the angels to bless us. Our prayer *Shalom Aleikhem* is not a prayer to intermediaries, it is a prayer to G-d to direct the angels to help us. This idea is further conveyed earlier in the paragraph:

Blessed are Your holy and pure angels who *perform Your will*. Master of Peace, King whom the peace is His¹⁰—bless me with peace. And recall me and my entire household and Your entire nation the House of Israel for good life and peace.

וברוכים הם מלאכיך הקדושים והטהורים שעושים רצונך. אדון השלום מלך
שהשלום שלו ברכני בשלום. ותפקד אותי ואת כל בני ביתי וכל עמך בית ישראל
לחיים טובים ולשלום.

The Talmud had mentioned three preparations for Shabbat: candles, table, and bed, possibly based on *Melakhim* II 4:10, and *Ribon Kol Ha-Olamim* is careful to include all three preparations, although it delays one of them until later in the prayer.

Angels of peace—Come in peace! Bless me for peace and say “blessed to my set table.” And go in peace, from now until forever, Amen. Selah!

מלאכי השלום בואכם לשלום. ברכוני לשלום ואמרו ברוך לשלחני הערוך.
וצאתכם לשלום מעתה ועד עולם אמן סלה.

At this point, it should be self-evident that the *Ribon Kol Ha-Olamim* was intended to be recited immediately after *Shalom Aleikhem* as an explanation of the shorter poem. It gives vital context and explanation to demonstrate that *Shalom Aleikhem* conforms with typical Jewish theology and is not heretical in nature, is not a prayer to the angels. Historically, many Jews recited this prayer at a different juncture instead despite this obvious connection, on account of a totally different problem related to the paragraph *Va-Yekhulu* and the first aggadah in *Shabbat*, cited above.

The Recitation of *Va-Yekhulu*

In classical Jewish liturgy, the blessing of Kiddush is preceded by a reading of *Beresbit* 2:1-3 which describes G-d’s initial sanctification of the first Shabbat following Creation. We have already seen the aggadah in *Shabbat* which notes that the angels watch to see if the Jew has recited *Va-Yekhulu*, beyond looking to see if the preparations were made. Typically, Jews recite

¹⁰ For a description of G-d found in the Talmud, and widely used in Kabbalistic literature, see *Shir Ha-Shirim Rabbah* 3:6:1.

this paragraph three times in the Friday evening services, once as part of the Friday night *Amidah* in synagogue, once immediately after the *Amidah* and then a third time right before Kiddush.

The three-time repetition of the paragraph appears to be a later development. *Piskei Ha-Rosh* to *Shabbat* (16:5) entertains the possibility that some did not recite these verses in the *Amidah* at all and so the paragraph would then only be recited twice; this indeed is the text found in Rabbam's *siddur*. In contrast, *Ohr Zarua`* and *Ravya* (*Shabbat*, 196) do stress the importance of repeating it specifically three times, on the basis of their textual version of *Midrash Tehillim*. *Tosafot* to *Pesahim* 106a and *Tosafot Ha-Rosh* to *Shabbat* 119b are aware of the custom to recite *Va-Yekbulu* three times but attribute the repetition to extraneous, *sui generis* reasons such as to enable the family to hear *Va-Yekbulu* or in case the paragraph was omitted one Shabbat; they do not mention a positive desire to repeat the paragraph three times. In any event, by the 17th century, when *Shalom Aleikhem* and *Ribon Kol Ha-Olamim* were written, the three-fold recitation would have already been prevalent in most Jewish communities.

Ribon Kol Ha-Olamim, now established to be a commentary on *Shabbat* 119b, dutifully mentions the three-fold recitation of *Va-Yekbulu*. Below is a translation of the key passage, based on the text found in the 1984 *Art-Scroll Siddur*.

And I have come to Your house [the synagogue] to set forth my

supplications¹¹ before You to remove my anguish.¹² And I will testify that you created every creation in six days, *And I shall repeat it. And I shall a third time testify*¹³ upon my cup in the midst of my happiness,¹⁴ as you commanded me to remember it, and to have enjoyment with my additional soul that you placed within me.¹⁵ With it, I shall rest

¹¹ “*Tehinati*.” In many respects, the prayer *Ribon Kol Ha-Olamim* follows the genre of a *tehinah*, an early modern prayer addition, added to the traditional *siddur*. *Tehinot* request things that are not stressed in the regular liturgy. For example, this prayer stresses health and financial security, and wealth far beyond what is found in typical prayers but which is common in other *tehinot*.

And merit me to accept future Sabbaths with much happiness, and with wealth and honor, and with the diminution of sins. And remove from me and from my household and the entire Jewish people “any sickness, and any illness” (*Devarim* 7:15) and all types of poverty, destitution, and neediness. And give us a good inclination to serve you in truth, and in fear, and in love. And we should be honored in Your eyes and the eyes of all who see us. For you are the honored king, for to you it is appropriate, for to you it is fitting (see *Yirmiyahu* 10:7).

וּזְכַנּוּ לְקַבֵּל שְׂבִיחוֹת מִתּוֹךְ רֹב שְׂמֵחָה וּמִתּוֹךְ עֹשֶׁר וְכִבּוֹד וּמִתּוֹךְ מַעוֹט עֲוֹנוֹת. וְהִסֵּר מִמֶּנִּי וּמִכָּל בְּנֵי בֵּיתִי וּמִכָּל עַמֶּךָ בַּיִת יִשְׂרָאֵל כָּל מִיּוֹנֵי חַלִּי וְכָל מִיּוֹנֵי מַדּוּנָה וְכָל מִיּוֹנֵי דְלוּת וְנַעֲנִיּוֹת וְאַבְיוֹנוֹת. וְתֵן בְּנִי יֵצֵר טוֹב לְעַבְדְּךָ בְּאַמֶּת וּבִירָצָה וּבְאַהֲבָה. וְנִהְיֶה מְכַבְּדִים בְּעֵינֶיךָ וּבְעֵינֵי כָל רוֹאֵינוּ. כִּי אַתָּה הוּא מֶלֶךְ הַכְּבוֹד כִּי לָךְ נִצָּה כִּי לָךְ נִצָּה.

When parts of this prayer were put to music in the modern period, the underlined material requests are omitted from the song, and instead the modern singing emphasizes only the spiritual strivings of the song which obscures its nature as part of the *tehinah* genre.

¹² “*Anhati*.” See previous note; the author may have intended a rhyme or pun between the two words. This word also appears prominently at the end of the first verse of the *piyyut*, *Barukh Kel Elyon*.

¹³ The Talmud stressed the importance of reciting *Va-Yekhulu* but did not call it legal testimony. That view is prevalent in the *rishonim* (see, for example, *Ohr Zarua`* 2:20 regarding standing for the recitation), and may be an alternative textual reading of the Talmud. See *Rosh* and *Korban Netanel*, *Pesahim* 10:15. Later *aharonim* provide halakhic implications of the idea that it is formal testimony; see *Shulhan Arukh* 268 and commentaries.

¹⁴ This is one of two lines which stress happiness in the context of Shabbat. The Torah and Talmud downplay the concepts of happiness on Shabbat, and replace them with “*oneg*,” enjoyment. See Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik “*Kavod Ve-Oneg Shabbat*” in *Shiurum Le-Zeikher Aba Mari*, ז”ל, v. 1 (Jerusalem: Mossad Ha-Rav Kook), 79.

¹⁵ These words, “the soul that you placed within me,” are a quote from the daily prayer thanking G-d for the returned soul (*Berakhot* 60b). However, it has now been poetically applied to the *additional* soul of Shabbat, based on *Beitzah* 16a. *Ribon Kol Ha-Olamim* begins with two titles of G-d that come from the same morning prayer: “Master of all words, Lord over all souls.”

as You commanded me to serve You, and so I will tell Your greatness with glad song. And I imagine Hashem to greet me, that You shall have mercy on me more so in my exile, to redeem me, and awaken my heart to Your love. And then I will guard Your commandments and statutes without sadness, and I shall pray according to rule, as is appropriate, and is correct.

ובאתי לביתך להפיל תחנוני לפניך ששמעביר אנחתי. ואעיד אשר בראת בשה ימים כל היצור. ואשנה. ואש לש עוד להעיד על כוסי בתוך שמחתי, כאשר צויתני לזכרו ולהתענג ביקר נשחתי אשר נמת בי: בו אשבות כאשר צויתני לשרתך וכן אגיד גדלתך ברנה. ושוייתי יי לקראתי שתחמני עוד בגלותי לנאלי. ולעורר לבי לאהבתך. ואז אשמור פקודיך וחקיך בלי עצב ואתפלל פדת פראוי וכנכון.

This translation begs the question when the payer was recited and how many of the recitations of *Va-Yekhulu*, if any, have already taken place when these words are read. Is the speaker in the synagogue at this time? Has he said *Va-Yekhulu* yet even once or not? Part of *Ribon Kol Ha-Olamim* speaks clearly of the angels visiting the home and this suggests recitation after prayers, yet the tense of this passage suggests that the prayers have not yet been recited as the supplicant promises to recite *Va-Yekhulu* three times in the future. A supplication we thought we understood appears to be significantly more complex.

Recitation in Synagogue or at Home?

Because of these concerns, *Siddur Otzar Ha-Tefilot* publishes the prayer in its typical place, after *Shalom Aleikhem*, but endorses the view of Rabbi Yosef of Raszków that the prayer should actually be recited divorced from *Shalom Aleikhem*, in the synagogue after the recitation of *Minh* \square *ab*.¹⁶ This conforms with the grammar of the above passage that the supplicant has not yet recited *Va-Yekhulu* even once, although it tragically separates the prayer from the visit of the angels and the home preparations for Shabbat.

The verbs in this portion of the supplication are in the future tense, as the speaker remarks that he *will* provide testimony that G-d created the world by reciting the *Va-Yekhulu* formula three times—twice in the Friday night prayers and a third time as the introduction to Kiddush, recited while holding a cup of wine. Because of the future tense of the word, (And + I + shall testify = Ve+A+id), Rabbi Yosef of Raszków argued that the supplication is to be recited in synagogue, before the first recitation of *Va-Yekhulu*, separated from *Shalom Aleikhem*. In Mishnaic and liturgical Hebrew, a Hebrew verb is conjugated into the future tense

¹⁶ *Siddur Otzar Ha-Tefilot* (Vilna: Romm, 1928), 626. This view was also later endorsed by Yissachar Ya'akovson, *Netiv Binah*, Vol. 2 (Sinai: Tel Aviv, 1968), 117.

through the addition of a prefix (and sometimes also a suffix) indicating the verb's future tense, in the case of this first-person verb, the letter *alef*. The presence of the *alef* before the root is evidence that the word is intended as a future verb and not as a past tense verb. This is not the case in Biblical Hebrew where an additional *vav*, added as a further prefix (called the *vav ha-bipukeh*) can transform the verb from the future form into the past form, but that grammatical form is typically not used in the prayers and is not used in *Ribon Kol Ha-Olamim*. The separation of *Ribon Kol Ha-Olamim* from *Shalom Aleikhem* is cited and/or followed in a variety of other *siddurim* from the time including Baer's *Siddur Avodat Yisrael*¹⁷ and *Siddur Beit Yaakov* (Lemberg, 1902).¹⁸

Modern *siddurim* return the prayer to its original location but still treat it as a separate prayer, usually with a new section heading, and at times even calling it a separate prayer.¹⁹ Even without going as far as Rabbi

¹⁷ Baer has a slightly different text of the prayer and directs it to be recited after prayers but before returning home, separated from *Shalom Aleikhem*. Among other changes, he omits the mystical start of the prayer (despite the prayer's provenance in mystical circles) and instead begins in the middle of the prayer: "I am thankful to you, Hashem, my G-d and the G-d of my ancestors, for all of the kindness that you have done with me, and that you will in the future do with me (and with the members of my household) and with all of Your creatures (who are members of Your covenant)." The words in parentheses were removed as well, making the prayer more universal in nature.

¹⁸ Although the view there is attributed to Rabbi Yosef of Arskow, possibly a typographical error.

¹⁹ For example, the *ArtScroll Siddur* bolds the initial words of *Ribon Kol Ha-Olamim*, indicating a new prayer, and then remarks "This prayer, too, is of relatively recent origin. Like *Shalom Aleikhem* it was first published..." The language of the footnote treats the two paragraphs as two different prayers, despite ArtScroll's awareness that they were written at the exact same time. ArtScroll writes that they were published in 1641, but this seems to be an error, as the prayer was first published in 1614.

Birnbaum's footnote [Philip Birnbaum, *Ha-Siddur Ha-Shalem* (New York: Hebrew Publishing Company, 1949), 316] that Rabbi Yosef of Raszków wrote only the second half is particularly egregious. Not only is it incorrect, but attributing the second half to a new author further separates the two halves into two prayers. This mistake is also made by the *Alei Tamar* commentary to the third chapter of *Shekalim*.

Birnbaum also takes the first verb to be in past tense and the second and third to be future, which is hard to accept given that the second recitation of *Va-Yekbulu* has already taken place. He translates "twice again will I affirm on my cup" which is obviously not a correct translation. Perhaps he misunderstood the prayer as referring to the Shabbat morning Kiddush as well, although that recitation is not part of the aggadah of *Shabbat* 119b.

Yosef of Raszków, other, more subtle decisions of *siddur* publishers achieved the same effect even if the two prayers were both printed before Kiddush. By separating the two prayers into separate paragraphs, using different fonts or formats, and observing that *Ribon Kol Ha-Olamim* is not widely said, *siddurim* cue the reader that *Shalom Aleikhem* can be understood alone, without its continuation and expansions.

Modern *siddurim* also engage in a creative grammatical transformation to enable the prayer to remain in its original location, although this is almost certainly not the author's original intent. Early twentieth century Yitzchak Shlemovitz²⁰ suggests that the author of *Ribon Kol Ha-Olamim* actually used the *vav-ha-bipukeh* of Biblical Hebrew and not Mishnaic Hebrew, and therefore the words are vowelized with a *kametz* as "Vo-A-Id" and "Vo-A-Shneh" and should be translated 'And I testified' and 'And I repeated,' in the past. However, he notes in a footnote that this is not the version he found in the texts that preceded him. The chart below summarizes his suggested change, which has been adopted in numerous, major modern *siddurim*.²¹

²⁰ Yitzchak Shlemovitz, *Sheloshah Sefarim Niftachim: Minbas Ya'akov, Matteh Yebudah, Pirpei Shoshanim* (Petergof, 1910), 24. The title page indicates that Shlemovitz was from Lodz and Novominsk, two cities near to each other in Poland. The view appears as an editor's gloss on the bottom of the page, but is not found in *Matteh Yebudah* itself, which was written in the early 18th century and does not have a commentary on *Ribon Kol Ha-Olamim*. See

<<https://hebrewbooks.org/pdfpager.aspx?req=19729&st=&pgnum=24>> and <<https://hebrewbooks.org/pdfpager.aspx?req=64956&st=&pgnum=21&highlight=>>>. ArtScroll's *Zemiroth* (Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications, 1979), 49, attributes the view to *Matteh Yebudah* in error.

²¹ Artscroll *Zemiroth* cites the view in a footnote, although strikingly uses the *kametz* vowel for all three verbs though Shlemovitz argues the third verb should have a *patah*. The same error appears in most publications of the *ArtScroll Siddur*, although it has been corrected in the most recent versions. David Hellman, *Birkon Masoret Ha-Rav* (Jerusalem: Koren Publishers, 2016), 13, also follows this view, as do all recent *siddurim* and *birkonim* of Koren publishing house, and also *Siddur Aliot Eliyahu* (Brooklyn NY: Weinreb Publishing, 1993), 247. Despite the prevalence of the view and its creative attractiveness in solving the problem of tense, it must be rejected as it emends the text without evidence and inserts a Biblical grammatical form into a prayer bereft of other examples of that form.

	Pre-Shlemovitz			Post-Shlemovitz			
	Hebrew	Transliteration	Translation	Hebrew	Transliteration	Translation	Type of Vav
First Verb	וְאָנֹכִי	Ve-O-`id	And I shall testify	²² וְאָנֹכִי	Vo-O-`id	And I testified	Hipukh
Second Verb	וְאָנֹכִי	Ve-E-Sh'neh	And I shall repeat	²³ וְאָנֹכִי	Vo-E-Sh'neh	And I repeated	Hipukh
Third Verb	וְאָנֹכִי	Va-A-Shaleish	And I shall a third time	²⁴ וְאָנֹכִי	Va-A-Shaleish	And I shall a third time	Chibur

Two Prayers or One?

The decision to move the *Ribon Kol Ha-Olamim* expansion out of the home and into synagogue separates the prayer and its important commentary from *Shalom Aleikhem*, thereby subtly changing the thematic outlook of the prayer. Whereas *Shalom Aleikhem* is ambiguous as to the relationship between the angels and G-d, *Ribon Kol Ha-Olamim* is not, the former prayer must be understood in the context of the latter. Yet, we have demonstrated that this is not the intention of the original author of the prayers, as can be evidenced in two important ways.

Much can be learned from the original printing of *Shalom Aleikhem* and *Ribon Kol Ha-Olamim* in *Tikunei Shabbat*.²⁵ They are consecutive to each other, intending both to be recited contemporaneously. The two prayers flow one to the other without an indent, change of paragraph, or new instruction to the reader, suggesting that the introductory poem *Shalom Aleikhem* and its longer interpretation *Ribon Kol Ha-Olamim* are actually one prayer.

Moreover, *Tikunei Shabbat's* original text reflects the idea that the two should be recited together more strongly, as its version of the three verbs

²² This word with this exact spelling, vowel pattern, and a similar translation as a first person past tense verb appears in *Tanakh, Nehemiah* 13:15.

²³ This word appears, but without the *vav*, at I Shmuel 26:8. For the vowel pattern associated with the *vav*, see *Devarim* 2:26.

²⁴ See *Shemot* 8:4 and 9:28 for examples of the copular *vav* (*vav ha-hibur*) before the *alef* future-prefix where the presence of the *hataf-patah* under the *alef* changes the vowel under the *vav* into a *patah*.

²⁵ *Tikkunei Shabbat* (Krakow, 1614), 15. For further discussion of the various editions of this text, see Liberman “*Sefer Tikunei Shabbat*,” *Kiryat Sefer* 38 (1962), 408. Liberman discusses this work in his survey on p. 408, no. 3.

indicates that the prayer must be recited immediately before Kiddush. In this version, the three verbs are all in past tense: “And I testified that you created every creation in six days, And I repeated it. And I came for a third time to testify upon my cup in the midst of my happiness.” These verbs indicate that prayer is recited after the first two recitations of *Va-Yekbulo* and immediately before the third, when the cup has already been poured and Kiddush is about to begin. The past tense can be used for the third recitation because the individual stands ready to recite the paragraph and has already come and appeared for the recitation. The chart below shows the verbs as they appear in the original version, although without vowels as the original printing was not vowelized.

	Original			Post-Shlemovitz		
	Hebrew	Transliteration	Translation	Hebrew	Transliteration	Translation
First Verb	והעדו ²⁶ תי	Ve-Ha- `idoti	And I testified	וְאָעִיד	Vo-O- `id	And I testified
Second Verb	ושניתי	Ve-Shiniti	And I repeated	וְאָשָׁנָה	Vo-E-Sh'neh	And I repeated
Third Verb	ושלשתי עוד להעיד	Ve-shi- lashti	And I [came] for a third time furthermore to testify	וְאָשְׁלֵשׁ	Va-A-Shaleish	And I shall a third time

We can summarize the history of changes to the prayer in the following steps:

1. (Original: verbs are past, past, past, and are recited before Kiddush.)
The grammar of the original prayer is specifically tied to the moment where the supplicant is ready to testify for a third time; since he stands for a third time the past tense verb (without the *vav ha-bipukh*) is used all three times.
2. (Early correction: verbs are future, future, future, and are recited before Kiddush.)
Shortly after the prayer's publication, reluctance to use the past tense before the third recitation of *Va-Yekbulo* led to all three verbs shifting to the future tense despite the fact that two recitations of *Va-Yekbulo* have already happened. This begins to separate the prayer from *Shalom Aleikhem* as now it can be recited any time before Kiddush and not immediately before it.

²⁶ This form appears in *Devarim* 4:26, although there it means to warn, not to testify.

3. (Yosef of Raszków: verbs are future, future, future, and are recited before prayers.)
In the 18th century, concerns about the use of the future tense led the prayer to be recited entirely before prayers.
4. (Yitzchak Shlemovitz: verbs are past, past, future, and are recited before Kiddush):
The prayer is now returned to the correct time, and fanciful grammar is used to make some of the verbs past tense and some of the verbs future tense. However, though *Ribon Kol Ha-Olamim* is now printed in the correct spot, printers treat it as a separate prayer as it had been for the previous century.

Despite all these changes, *Ribon Kol Ha-Olamim* should have always remained part of *Shalom Aleikhem* as an explanation and exposition of that prayer in accordance with *Shabbat* 119b, and it should be recited as part of *Shalom Aleikhem*, immediately thereafter.

The Genre of *Ribon Kol Ha-Olamim* and Its Relationship to Jewish Mysticism

Besides the considerations of printing, *siddur* instructions, and verb tense, there is one additional reason why many Jews skip *Ribon Kol Ha-Olamim* but still recite *Shalom Aleikhem*. Though these prayers had their origins in Jewish mystical circles, we have seen how the core prayer is actually a pretty conventional supplication built upon an exposition of *Shabbat* 119b and *Tehillim* 91:11. Even Jews who are not of a mystical bent could recite and feel comfortable with the prayer which feels like a typical *piyyut*, *zemer*, prayer, or aggadah. If we had to choose, we would say its genre is either Talmudic commentary or simple *tehinah*.

Still, *Ribon Kol Ha-Olamim* begins with a litany which echoes the prayers of the mystical tradition, leading some Jews who typically would not recite mystical prayer additions to skip this prayer. The prayer begins with a litany of depictions of G-d following an alphabetic acrostic, with the word *melekh*, king, followed by twenty-two descriptions and praises of G-d's nature. The litany echoes *Heikhalot Rabbati* 24:4, and mostly borrows the descriptions of G-d from that text.²⁷ Later, the song also borrows the alliterative chorus from the *Ki Lo Naeh piyyut* at the Seder: “For

²⁷ In eight cases, the prayer uses the first praise in the litany of *Heikhalot Rabbati* (*Abir*, *Baruch*, *Gadol*, *Hadur*, *Tov*, *Kabir*, *Tzach* [Adapted from *Shir Ha-Shirim* 5:10], *Kadosh*, *Shomeia*), and in three cases the praise appears, but later on the list (*Vatik*, *Podeh*, *Tam*). This litany has many parallels to other similar mystical litanies such

you are the honored king, for to you it is appropriate, for to you it is fitting.”²⁸ The inclusion of these poetic and mystical elements within *Ribon Kol Ha-Olamim* may have also served to distract the modern reader from its core proposition.

Renewed Recitation of a Critical Prayer

Though lengthy and with challenging or unusual language,²⁹ at times mystical, and at some junctures misunderstood, *Ribon Kol Ha-Olamim* contains powerful praise of G-d, thanks to G-d, request from G-d and an exposition of the importance of preparing for Shabbat and testifying towards the truths of creation. The prayer fell out of favor for many years, possibly as it was moved around the *siddur*, and possibly because it was not put to catchy music, but the message still resonates and has not lost its importance.

The true meaning is best brought out by using the original text of the prayer, which to the best of my knowledge appears in none of the *siddurim* presently on the market. Rather than unsettling the reader by using the future tense to refer to things in the past or by using unusual grammar, it

as to the *bakafot* at Simḥat Torah, the *Ki Lo Na'eh piyyut* at the Seder, and the *Adir Hu piyyut* at the Seder. For a discussion of the role of litany in *Heikhalot* literature and the implication for Jewish *piyyut*, see Meir bar Ilan, “Ancient Hebrew poetry in the Talmud, Prayer, and *Heikhalot* Literature” [Hebrew], *Moresbet Yisrael* 15 (2018), 37-78.

²⁸ In *Tanakh* and standard Rabbinic literature, G-d is never called “*Na'eh*” nor “*Ya'eh*,” although in verb form *Yirmiyahu* (10:6) says that it is fitting (*Ya'atab*) for all the nations to fear G-d. *Tehillim* 33:1 says it is appropriate and desired (*na'avah*) for upstanding individuals to praise G-d. Thus, the *piyyut* at the end of the *Haggadah* is the first recorded time that the two verbs are turned into the rhyming nouns “*Na'eh*” and “*Ya'eh*” and applied to G-d together. The word *na'eh* appears often in Rabbinic literature, although usually not applied to G-d and the word *ya'eh* essentially never appears though it derives from Scripture. The presence of the two words in such similar phrases shows that the author of *Ribon Kol Ha-Olamim* was looking at the Seder *piyyut* when writing this prayer. *Ki Lo Na'eh* existed long before *Ribon Kol Ha-Olamim* was written. See *Tashbetz* (89), *Orkhot Haim* (Seder) and even in the *Rokeiach* in the late 12th century and others. Meir Bar Ilan believes that *Ki Lo Ya'eh* was written much earlier based on parallels to other early *piyyutim*, but it is not attested to any earlier than the 12th century. See Meir Bar Ilan, “The Piyyutim of the Haggadah,” *Masoret Ha-Piyyut* 4 (2008), 37-60. That *piyyut* appears to be an expansion or commentary on the *Yishtabah* prayer which precedes it in the Seder and also features the phrase “*Ki Lo Na'eh*” but not the phrase “*Ki Lo Ya'eh*.”

²⁹ Many of the alphabetic praises of G-d are hard to understand and translate. This prayer is also one of the few that refers to humanity as “Children of Adam and Eve.”

uses the past tense to frame a new supplication and intention as part of the Kiddush ritual: “I have already come now and stand a third time ready to testify to the truth of creation.” Using the correct text would grant the prayer its fitting gravitas as a supplication explaining the importance of Shabbat and the importance of Kiddush in the life of the Jew. ❧