

From Within the Tent: The Festival Prayers



From Within the Tent: The Festival Prayers

מתוך האוהל
תפילות יום טוב

Essays by the
Rabbis & Professors of Yeshiva University

Rabbi Daniel Z. Feldman
and Dr. Stuart W. Halpern, Editors

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*Dedicated by
Marvin and Dassie Bienenfeld
In memory of their parents
Gertrude and Morris Bienenfeld and Minnie and Leon Usdan*



*In honor of Rabbi Hershel Schachter
From his devoted student, Dr. David Arbesfeld*



*Dedicated by
Elliot and Debbie Gibber
In memory of our parents
Isidore and Ruth Gibber
Charles and Kate Goldner*

Contents

- Editors' Introduction* xi
- Foreword: Reflections of a Lay Ba'al Tefillah* 1
President Richard M. Joel
- Tehillim Chapter 27 ("Le-David"): The Benefit of the Doubt* 5
Dr. Shira Weiss
- Selichot: An Alternative Mode of Prayer* 13
Rabbi Dovid Miller
- Mizmor 51: David as Model of Repentance* 19
Rabbi Hayyim Angel
- The Thirteen Attributes: A Lesson in Atonement* 29
Dr. Moshe Sokolow
- Enhancing the Yamim Nora'im Prayers through Synagogue
Chant: The Significant Role of the Sheli'ach Tzibbur* 41
Cantor Bernard Beer
- The Sounds of Teshuvah* 57
Rabbi Etan Schnall

Contents

- Approaching Hashem with Fear and Trepidation:
A Textual Analysis of the Hineni Prayer* 63
Mr. Paul S. Glasser
- Musaf of Rosh Ha-Shanah: Talking to God – and to Ourselves* 71
Rabbi Menachem Penner
- U-Netaneh Tokef: Will the Real Author Please Stand Up* 75
Rabbi Dr. Kenneth Brander
- Birkat Kohanim: Mitzvah as an Antidote to Extremism* 87
Rabbi Ozer Glickman
- Tashlikh: A Multifaceted Ritual* 97
Rabbi Dr. David Shabtai
- Altering States: Of Fathers and Children, Kings and Servants* 107
Rabbi Mark Dratch
- Kol Nidre: Homiletic Perspectives* 113
Rabbi Daniel Z. Feldman
- Yizkor: Origins and Practices* 123
Rabbi Michael Zylberman
- The Avodah at O'Hare* 131
Rabbi Dr. Meir Y. Soloveichik
- Eileh Ezkerah: Remembering Martyrs and Shoes* 135
Rabbi Meir Goldwicht
- Ne'ilah: The Call to Greatness* 153
Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks
- What Is Special in the Amidah for Shacharit on the Festivals?* 159
By Rabbi Yosef Blau
- Hoshanot: Origins and Perspectives of an Enigmatic Ritual* 163
Rabbi Elchanan Adler
- "And return her to Your Land...": Kah Keili as an Introduction to Musaf* 187
Rabbi Yaakov Taubes

- The Relationship Between the Tamid and the Musaf* 193
Rabbi Ari Zahtz
- Wrestling with Angels: Kedushah for Yom Tov* 197
Dr. Aaron Koller
- Tefillat Geshem: A Prayer for the Right Kind of Rain* 203
Dr. Jill Citron Katz
- Ya'aleh Ve-Yavo: Embracing the Greatness and
Aspiration of Jewish Holidays* 207
Rabbi Yaakov Glasser
- Two Hallel* 211
Rabbi Shalom Carmy
- Barkhi Nafshi* 217
Dr. Deena Rabinovich
- The Berakhot of the Chanukah Candles: Words that Transform* 233
Rabbi Daniel Z. Feldman
- Shoshanat Yaakov: A Rose by Our Name* 239
Rabbi Yona Reiss
- What is Dew to You? An Examination of Tefillat Tal* 249
Dr. Stuart W. Halpern
- Reciting Le-Sheim Yichud Prior to Reciting Sefirah* 255
Rabbi Yitzchok Cohen
- The Recitation of Akdamut* 257
Rabbi Michael Taubes
- Aneinu: Atonement through Unity* 273
Rabbi Eliav Silverman
- Tefillat Nacheim* 283
Rabbi Dr. Jacob J. Schacter
- Contributors* 299

Editors' Introduction

In recent years, we have had the privilege of presenting before the learning community the first four volumes of *Mitokh Ha-Ohel* (“From Within the Tent”). Those volumes endeavored to display the breadth and depth of the profoundly special “tent” that is Yeshiva University, a tent that faithfully maintains the structure and the form of that of Yaakov *avinu*, the prototypical Jewish study hall, and is a “big tent,” of diversity, complexity, and the integration of interdisciplinary wisdom. They did so by bringing together the multi-faceted voices of Yeshiva University, as represented by our rabbis and professors, in a collection of essays that addressed all of the *parashiyot* of the Torah, and then all of the *haftarot* of the year, and, most recently, the weekday and Shabbat prayer books.

Now, we are fortunate to have a new opportunity before us, to turn our attention to the Festival prayers. Like that of Shabbat, prayer on the Festivals is a wholly different experience from that of the weekday. This is true as a matter of quantity – there is an entire additional service, the *Musaf* prayer, among many other additions – and it is true as well as a matter of text, as the words themselves are varied in so many ways from the weekday recitations. However, the differences run deeper than that, and go to the nature of the prayer experience.

Editors' Introduction

Daily prayer is, according to most authorities, a rabbinical obligation; with the notable exception of the Rambam, most assume that the Torah does not mandate the expression of prayer on a daily basis. The Festival prayer, however, is in a different class. According to a number of rabbinic writers (see *Peri Megadim*, O.C. 106, *Eishel Avraham* 3), there is a Torah obligation motivating prayer on the Festivals, together with Shabbat.

There are at least two possible sources for this obligation. One is found in the Ten Commandments: “Remember the Shabbat day to sanctify it,” according to some *Rishonim*, such as the *Behag* and the *Semag*, asks us to do so through prayer. In the view of some authorities, the obligations of this verse extend to the Festivals as well.

Another possibility is found in the verse that refers to the Festivals as “*Mikra’ei Kodesh*” (*Vayikra* 23:2). The Ramban in his commentary (also quoted in the *Beit Yosef*, O.C. 487) understands this concept to mean that the Jewish people will gather together on these days in the house of God to publicly sanctify the day with prayer and praise.

In this volume, we hope to represent both themes. First, we endeavor to remember the Festivals through intense and serious study of their themes and values, which are given such poignant expression in its liturgy. Further, this volume is a *mikra kodesh* – it is a bringing together of many people into one house, one tent, to focus on the prayers and the praises of the day.

As the prayers we recite on the Festivals are built upon the *Chumash*, *Nevi'im*, and *Ketuvim*; the *Mishnah*, the Talmud, and the *Midrash*; history, philosophy, and poetry; foundations and directives of *Halakhah*, *hashkafah*, and *minhag*; the Yeshiva University family, which comprises experts and specialists in all of these fields, is uniquely positioned to assume this task.

Thus, the present volume represents a particularly rich opportunity for those who devote their careers to transmitting the tradition and cultivating the characters of the next generation of the Jewish people. In offering their unique perspective on the words and themes of our Festival prayers, these educators display the breadth and the depth of Yeshiva University in a way that complements and yet is different from the previous volumes of *Mitokh Ha-Ohel*.

We are gratified that, while there are many returning contributors in this volume, we are able to include many contributors in this publication who are new to the *Mitokh Ha-Ohel* series. As with the earlier volumes, this volume includes contributions from the faculty and administration across Yeshiva University's undergraduate, graduate, rabbinical, and high schools. These essays range from textual analysis to homiletic exposition to halakhic analysis to academic exploration and to all points in-between. What they share in common is the goal of bringing a wide range of approaches towards the honoring, elucidating, and exploring of the Festival siddur.

All of the essays in this book are appearing for the first time in print. We are profoundly grateful to our teachers and administrators for the time and effort they have invested towards this project. Their schedules are full and their hours are long, constantly called upon to balance consistency and creativity, *keva* and *chiddush*, and yet they made the time to produce new contributions to the world of scholarship specifically for this endeavor. We are thankful for the enthusiastic support of President Richard M. Joel, Rabbi Yona Reiss, and Rabbi Menachem Penner for their counsel and insight, as we welcome to our tent the incoming president of Yeshiva University, Rabbi Dr. Ari Berman. This publication is made possible by the support of the Michael Scharf Publication Trust of Yeshiva University Press, which for many decades has played a vital role in the production of Torah scholarship under the auspices of Yeshiva University. We also thank Matthew Miller, Rabbi Reuven Ziegler, and the entire staff at Maggid Books for their wonderful work in bringing this work to the reading public, as well as Nechama Unterman for copyediting.

Most importantly, we express our profound gratitude to the *Ribono Shel Olam*, for allowing us to dwell within the tent and to express its character through this publication. The Talmud teaches that "tents" have the ability to cleanse and to purify, just as the purification of the *mikveh* (*Berakhot* 16a). May it be His will that we successfully honor the Torah's tradition, and through unity and commitment accomplish some small measure towards hastening the Redemption. As we begin our daily prayers proclaiming, "How goodly are your tents, O Yaakov," may our tent find favor in the eyes of Him who hears our prayers.

Editors' Introduction

A Note on Transliteration and Spelling: We have tried to strike a balance in this work between consistency of spelling and language and maintaining the distinct voice of the individual authors. As that entails much subjectivity and compromise, we hope the readers will indulge the results of that effort.

Rabbi Daniel Z. Feldman
Dr. Stuart W. Halpern

President Richard M. Joel

Foreword: Reflections of a Lay *Ba'al Tefillah*

I recall the very first time I stepped up to the *bimah* in the Glueck Beit Midrash to lead our Yeshiva in prayer on the first night of *selichot*. I recall how the soft velvet covering felt as my hands came to rest on the podium. I recall the crinkling sound that the pages made as I found the starting place in my *machzor*; the cacophony of hushed yet excited voices as hundreds of *talmidim* primed themselves for an intensive evening of supplication. I recall the electricity of that moment and the seriousness with which I signaled the cue to commence to all those assembled in that house of worship:

Ashrei yoshvei veitekha, od yehallelukha selah.

I have always found the very notion of prayer itself a magnificent and somewhat mind-boggling proposition. Three times daily, we take advantage of the audacious yet Torah-ordained directive to confront the Almighty in the second person, to beseech Him directly and to spill our hearts and our minds: *Barukh atah Hashem*. How frighteningly exhilarating!

Foreword

And yet, I find the task of representing the congregation in prayer an *even more* daunting and humbling experience. Those words of the introductory *Hineni* prayer, “*af al pi she-eini kedai ve-hagun le-kakh*” – “even though I am not worthy of this,” always cause me to pause for a moment’s reflection on the daunting representational task at hand. For much of my adult life, I have served as *sheli’ach tzibbur* for the services on the *Yamim Nora’im*. For me, though, that experience never became more real than when I assumed the presidency of Yeshiva University. Only then did I truly grasp the profound paradox of the whole experience: in a singular moment, I harbor a sense of extreme intimacy with the Almighty as well as an acute awareness of my duty as a representative of the larger community and of my own limitations in my eyes and in the eyes of God.

The finest part of serving as a *ba’al tefillah* is in striking this delicate but crucial balance: he must allow the prayers to resonate with him on a personal level so as to maintain the authenticity of his prayers, and yet he must realize that the experience is ultimately not *at all* about him. The job of *sheli’ach tzibbur* is not to accrue honor for himself or to showcase his vocal acrobatics or even to beseech God regarding his personal needs. The role of the *chazan* is to create a space for the community to succeed in their collective encounter with the Transcendent. He may rally them through his own stature, he may inspire them with his soft falsetto, he may rouse them with the outward sincerity of his own prayers; but ultimately, his focus must be on both the personal and the communal, on the public and the intimate.

Focus on the “communal” extends to even the most basic of human concerns: an effective *sheli’ach tzibbur* must remain cognizant of the duration of the services, the temperature in the room, and whether his singing elevates the congregation or amounts, in fact, to a *tircha de’tzibura*, an unwanted burden upon them. But the *sheli’ach tzibbur* assuredly tends to higher order concerns as well. Essentially, he must generate a space that the congregation can own – he must fill that otherwise ordinary space with the sort of melodious spirituality which allows others to feel elevated and lifted to another place altogether. And, of course, all of this with an acute awareness of the historical context of that particular Divine encounter amongst the span of generations. Perhaps the most powerful moments in the service for me is when I

think of my own grandparents of years past and my own grandchildren of years present and future and how those same prayers which bind us truly transcend time.

In many ways, the role of the *ba'al tefillah* resembles that of the *Kohanim*, who served as both *shluchoi didan*, messengers of the people, as well as *shluchoi d'rachmana*, messengers of God. A *sheli'ach tzipbur* serves as a *shali'ach* of the congregation as he pleads on their behalf, as well as a *shali'ach* of the *Ribon Shel Olam* as he steers the congregants themselves towards a more sensitive and meaningful prayer experience.

Truthfully, and while certainly distinctive to prayer, the above description could be said about effective leadership. At Yeshiva University, we often urge our students and community members to view themselves as a *mamlekhet Kohanim ve-goi kadosh*. Regardless of actual priestly lineage, we believe that it is the responsibility and the privilege of every Jewish man and woman to both know and own their stories, and to share that knowledge with the wide world around them as the leaders of tomorrow.

In the same vein, regardless of vocal talent or performative prowess, we must all view ourselves as *shluchoi tzipbur* of *Kelal Yisrael*: on the one hand, we must constantly develop ourselves and our personal connection to God with seriousness and sincerity. And yet we must recognize that our true sense of wholeness and will only arise out of a dedication to others, a recognition of the needs of *Kelal Yisrael*, and through the fulfillment of our mandate to matter to the world at large.

In the concluding blessing of the *Amidah* service, we beseech God for *shalom*. To which sort of *shalom* does the blessing refer? Certainly it cannot merely indicate “peace,” as in the absence of war. Rather, *shalom* speaks to a sort of meaningful wholeness which we seek, the filling of an empty space that we so often sense in our own souls. And therefore we say in the blessing of *shalom*, “*barkheinu avinu kulanu ke-echad*” – “bless us, our Father, all of us as one,” and express our desire as individuals to merge in the most meaningful way as a singular entity of *Kelal Yisrael* – not merely those electrically charged *Yamim Nora'im*, but throughout the year. The Jewish people know full well that this sort of meaningful wholeness can only stem from a focus on the personal *and* communal. And we recognize that only through the *kehillah* may we reach the concluding blessing, *Ha-mevarekh et amo Yisrael ba-shalom*.

Dr. Shira Weiss

Tehillim Chapter 27 ("Le-David"): The Benefit of the Doubt

Tehillim chapter 27 (commonly referred to by its opening word, "Le-David"), recited at the conclusion of morning and evening prayers from the first of *Elul* through *Shemini Atzeret*,¹ expresses the struggles within man's relationship with God. The psalmist describes the oscillation between faith and doubt that results from man's dialectical awareness of God's presence and elusiveness. During the period

1. The Sages interpret the opening words of chapter 27 to refer to Rosh Ha-Shanah and Yom Kippur. "My light" (v. 1) alludes to Rosh Ha-Shanah, which is the Day of Judgment, as it is written, "He shall bring forth your righteousness like the light, and your judgment like the noon." "And my salvation" (v. 1) refers to Yom Kippur, "when He saves us and forgives us for all of our sins." "He will hide me in His shelter" (v. 5) is a reference to Sukkot, since once we are forgiven, God shelters us from danger as He protected Israel in the desert. Thus, we conclude the recital of the *mizmor* at the end of the holiday (*Midrash Tehillim*).

Tehillim Chapter 27 (“Le-David”)

of introspection in preparation for the *Yamim Nora'im*, this is a particularly poignant, honest, and hopeful *mizmor* which reflects the natural religious tensions experienced by humanity.

The progression of chapter 27 reflects the duality of man's stance before God, as the *mizmor* can be divided into two sections which differ in form and substance. The first half (vv. 1–6) evokes an absolute trust in God, a feeling of closeness to Him and a firm belief, unmediated by any doubt. “The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear?” (v. 1). He has only one request of God and is certain it will be fulfilled: “One thing have I asked of the Lord, that will I seek: That I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life” (v. 4). Man's confidence in God's protection and in his future triumph over his enemies is described in present tense: “For He shall hide me in His tabernacle on the day of evil And now my head shall be lifted over my enemies who surround me” (vv. 5–6). Certain of such victory, the psalmist concludes the first half of the *mizmor* by describing his thanksgiving sacrifices to God, accompanied by song and praise that he will present upon His salvation: “And I will offer in His tabernacle sacrifices with trumpet-sound” (v. 6). Reflecting his conviction, he speaks about God in the third person, with no urgent need to appeal to God directly.

Man's relationship with God shifts dramatically in the second half of the *mizmor* (vv. 7–13), however, as the psalmist calls out to God in distress: “Hear, O Lord, my voice as I cry out; be gracious to me and answer me” (v. 7). No longer feeling a sense of security, the psalmist pleads with God in the second person: “Do not hide Your face from me. Do not turn Your servant away in anger Do not abandon me and do not forsake me Do not deliver me to the desire of my enemies” (vv. 9, 12). The latter verses describing God's anger, remoteness, and abandonment of man seem antithetical to the former which express God's compassion, concern, and salvation, as the psalmist's imminent triumph seems no longer so assured.

Despite the desperate pleas, all hope in God is not lost in the second half of the *mizmor*: “For my father and my mother have forsaken me, but the Lord will gather me in” (v. 10), metaphorically alludes to the psalmist's placement of trust in God as if he was a helpless and rejected child with no other form of protection. The psalmist maintains

a semblance of hope in God which he articulates in an enigmatic manner: “Had I not believed that I would see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living...” (v. 13). This conditional negative is understood as a positive: I do believe that I will see the goodness of God while I am yet alive, for were this not so... The psalmist leaves the statement open-ended for the reader to complete, implying that a conclusion would be ineffably horrific.² In other words, were it not for his trust in God and in His goodness, through which he gained the strength to endure, he would have perished.³

The final verse of the *mizmor* serves as a conclusion to the entire text. It is distinct from the previous verses in that the psalmist is no longer talking about himself in first person, but appeals to the reader/listener to hope in God in both confident and distressful times, as alluded to in the repetitious language: “Have hope in the Lord; be strong and He shall give courage to your heart;⁴ and hope in the Lord” (v. 14). Rashi interprets the unique meaning of each of the repeated phrases, “‘hope in the Lord’: hope to God, and if your prayers are not fulfilled, return and hope again.”⁵ Robert Alter comments, “This last exhortation – whether of the speaker to himself or to an individual member of his audience – is an apt summary of the psychology that informs this psalm. It begins by affirming trust in God and reiterates that hopeful confidence, but the trust has to be asserted against the terrors of being overwhelmed by implacable enemies,” whatever, or whoever, those enemies may be.⁶

2. R. Elchanan Samet interprets this verse consistently with the formulation of other similar statements in *Tehillim*, including “Unless the Lord had been my help, my soul would have rested in silence” (94:17); “Had Your Torah not been my delight, I would have perished in my sorrow” (119:92); “Were it not for the Lord who was with us, when men rose up against us, they would have swallowed us up alive” (124:2–3). See “The Lord is My Light and My Salvation,” *Sefer Tehillim Shiurim*, Virtual Beit Midrash (<http://vbm-torah.org/archive/tehillim69/01tehillim.htm>).
3. Amos Chakham, *The Bible: Psalms with the Jerusalem Commentary* (Jerusalem, 2009).
4. The words between the repetitious phrase “Hope in the Lord” recall the words of Moshe to Yehoshua as he transferred his leadership to his protégé (*Devarim* 31:7). Yehoshua was to be strong as God would protect and save him as he led the nation to the Promised Land.
5. Rashi, *Tehillim* 27:14.
6. Robert Alter, *The Book of Psalms* (New York, 2007), 94.

Tehillim Chapter 27 ("Le-David")

Man's relationship with God often wavers between overwhelming faith when God's presence seems clear and inevitable doubt when experiencing the harsh realities of life that cause one to feel abandoned by God. Man's religious feelings are complex as he struggles to maintain a sublime faith in God in spite, at times, of God's seeming hiddenness by crises, enemies, or man's own inclinations. Perhaps the psalmist is trying to convey that doubt is inevitable in religious experience; however, such uncertainty need not be consciously avoided, but rather, it can be sublimated in a constructive manner to strengthen faith.

Many modern theologians recognize the existence of doubt and the important role it plays within religious consciousness.

[The] best kind of religious faith is dynamically involved with doubt; faith needs a kind of healthy skepticism to be genuine. An absolutely certain faith is a dead faith, a static faith, unable to move forward or improve itself. For it is by means of doubts and questions, honestly faced, that the believer moves to a more mature, stronger position of faith.⁷

Faith and doubt do not essentially contradict each other. Thus, Paul Tillich defines faith as the "continuous tension between itself and the doubt within itself."⁸ While this tension does not always manifest in a struggle, it is consistently latent. The tension between faith and doubt is represented by

... the oscillation between closeness and distance, ardor and bitterness. It is an integral part of man's relation with God, his deepest religious experience, and neither can nor should be removed... It is they – the trust – correlatives of certainty and doubt – that constitute the dynamism and the very essence of the genuinely religious man's spiritual biography.⁹

7. Stephen Davis, *Faith, Skepticism and Evidence* (Cranbury, 1978), 196.

8. Paul Tillich, *Biblical Religion and the Search for Ultimate Reality* (Chicago, 1955), 60.

9. Norman Lamm, *Faith and Doubt: Studies in Traditional Jewish Thought* (New York, 1972), 24.

R. Soloveitchik explains that religious experience is, in essence, a struggle and is not devoid of “the pangs and torments that are inextricably connected with the development and refinement of man’s spiritual personality.”¹⁰ He rebukes the ignorance of those who seek to escape reality and find comfort in religion. The religious individual, he argues, does not find tranquility in religion, but rather confronts an environment filled with doubts and fears, contradictions and refutations.

That religious consciousness in man’s experience which is most profound and most elevated, which penetrates to the very depths and ascends to the very heights, is not that simple and comfortable. On the contrary, it is exceptionally complex, rigorous and tortuous. Where you find its complexity, there you find its greatness.... The ideas of temporality and eternity, knowledge and choice (necessity and freedom), love and fear (the yearning for God and the flight from His glorious splendor), incredible, overbold daring, and an extreme sense of humility, *transcendence and God’s closeness* [my italics], the profane and the holy, etc., etc., struggle within his religious consciousness, wrestle and grapple with each other.... The pangs of searching and groping, the tortures of spiritual crises and exhausting treks of the soul purify and sanctify man, cleanse his thoughts, and purge them of the husks of superficiality and the dross of vulgarity.¹¹

The religious individual emerges from such struggles with a “powerful spiritual enthusiasm”¹² as he achieves a more perceptive understanding of his surroundings. Thus, human life is essentially characterized by incompleteness, striving, and growth, in which doubt is an inherent component.

A mature faith, therefore, develops out of doubt, which is a substantive feature in religious growth. The truth affirmed by faith “is not given to us for the price of mere assent,” but “is the prize for which we

10. Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *Halakhic Man*, trans. L. Kaplan. (Philadelphia, 1983), 140, n. 4.

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid., 143.