סידור קורן אני תפילה • מנהג ארם צובה

The Koren Ani Tefilla Siddur • Minhag Aram Soba

THE ISADORE SHAMAH EDITION

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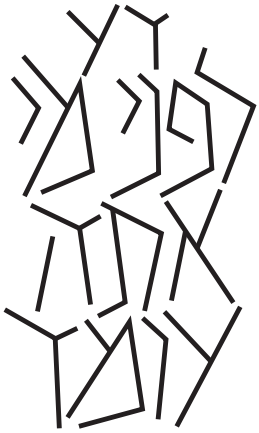
THE KOREN ANI TEFILLA SIDDUR

MINHAG ARAM SOBA



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AND COMMENTARY BY

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Isadore "Izzy" Shamah

Beloved father, grandfather,
and great-grandfather

He will be remembered by us
for the humanity, humility, integrity and honesty
he exhibited in his personal and business life,
and toward his community.

We dedicate this book
in honor of his blessed memory.

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PREFACE

It is with great excitement that we present to you the ISADORE SHAMAH EDITION of *The Koren Ani Tefilla Minhag Aram Soba Siddur*, an engaging and thoughtful siddur for the inquiring high-school student and thoughtful adult alike. This siddur is part of the Educational Series of appropriately designed siddurim for students from first to twelfth grade, and beyond. Each siddur has been created to inspire and develop connections to prayer and to God. These goals are achieved through encouraging personal reflection, spiritual and emotional connection, and cognitive learning.

It is always a privilege to collaborate on a project with those who share our commitment and enthusiasm for bringing out the beauty of *tefilla*. We are grateful to Alan Shamah for his critical support and encouragement, and for enabling the creation of this and all the volumes in the series. On behalf of the students who will use this siddur, we are forever in your debt.

We are fortunate to benefit from a world-class Educational Editorial Board assisting us in the building of this program. We would like to thank the Board's Chairman, Dr. Scott Goldberg of Yeshiva University; Rabbi Adam Englander of the Hillel Day School of Boca Raton; Rabbi Dr. Jay Goldmintz of the Azrieli Graduate School; and Rabbi Boruch Sufrin of the Harkham Hillel Hebrew Academy of Beverly Hills. Their broad knowledge and experience provided the framework to structure the program.

We note the wonderful contribution of the late Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks *zt"l* for his superb INTRODUCTION TO JEWISH PRAYER and translation. Rabbi Joseph Beyda and Joseph Harari were critical in ensuring the correct Minhag Aram Soba for this edition. Special thanks go to Rabbi Dr. Jay Goldmintz who provided the vision for this siddur, and its exceptional commentary. The small but highly professional team at Koren was led by Rabbi Dr. Daniel Rose, Director of Educational Projects, and included Rabbi David Fuchs and Rabbi Ḥanan Benayahu, who reviewed the *tefillot*; Esther Be'er who designed and typeset the text, and Caryn Meltz who managed the project.

◂ It is our sincere

It is our sincere hope and prayer that this siddur will provide a platform for the educational and spiritual growth of present and upcoming generations of committed Jews.

Matthew Miller, Publisher
Jerusalem 5784 (2024)

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

There is an inherent tension that exists in our form of worship. On the one hand, we are encouraged to pour out our hearts to Hashem in a very personal way, to carry on a private dialogue with Him, to acknowledge His role in our own lives, to confide in Him, to ask for help and support – it is what the Rabbis called *aboda shebalev*, service of the heart – emotional, spontaneous, heartfelt.

On the other hand, for a variety of reasons, prayer has also become a ritual, a standardized fixed text with a myriad number of rules associated with it: what exactly one must say, when one should bow, when to stand or sit, when to speak and when not. At times, it can feel for some like it is entirely *aboda* – service, to be sure, but not a lot of heart.

But the truth is that, as the name indicates, *aboda shebalev* is supposed to be a combination of the two. The text is one that has developed over millennia. It contains unique contributions from almost every major Jewish community in Jewish history, as well as different elements of Jewish philosophy, history, language, law and custom. It is made up of prayers that we are all supposed to say both because of the importance of those contents and because prayer is not only an individual activity but a communal one as well. There is added power, effectiveness and holiness when a community prays together in a single voice. That's the "we're-all-together-on-the-same page" aspect. How, then, does one make one's prayer more personal?

Aside from adding one's own prayers, which one is indeed encouraged to do, one solution lies in the standardized text itself. Certainly, the words of the prayers are supposed to be understood literally but, at the same time, their meaning need not end there. Rather, the words can have almost whatever additional meaning we give them. This is because although the words themselves may not change, we do. Sometimes we are more tired, sometimes more awake, sometimes more in need, sometimes more thankful. Each of us comes to *tefilla* with different experiences and backgrounds, at different stages of our lives and our development, at different times of the day with different needs, moods and desires. The prayer does not change, but the pray-er does.

◂ And so this

And so this commentary and guide has been designed to help you create your own meaning. The prayer book has a particular path that leads to a personal and communal encounter with Hashem – that is why it is called a siddur, from the Hebrew word *seder*, which means order or pattern, making sure that we all get to the same destination together as a community. Each one of the legs of the journey has its own function and style, its own theme and rhythm. But how we experience it along the way, what meaning we take from it or bring to it, is up to each and every one of us.

The commentary for this siddur is thus divided into different sections, each designed to help connect to the text in a different way. Even so, some of the comments do not easily lend themselves to precise categorization, as the fixed and the fluid, the past and the present, the intellectual and the emotional can meld together as different sides of the same coin.

TRANSLATION

There is first and foremost the accessible and elegant translation of Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, which has been included because gaining fluency in the meanings of words is but one prerequisite for more meaningful prayer.

BIUR TEFILLA – ביאור תפילה

The *Biur Tefilla* helps in gaining a thorough understanding of the text and context of the prayers. It examines the micro-understanding of a specific word or phrase in the text of the *tefilla*, as well as presenting a wider understanding of the historical background of the *tefilla*, and its place in the context of the overall structure of the service.

IYUN TEFILLA – עיון תפילה

Iyun Tefilla explores the deeper meaning behind the *tefillot*, taking a broader approach to the text. It presents a macro-understanding of the prayers, including philosophical and theological approaches to *tefilla* in general and the text in particular.

HILKHOT TEFILLA – הלכות תפילה

This section ensures that one is aware of the ritual requirements surrounding the miṣva to pray. These comments are interspersed throughout the

siddur as well as concentrated in an appendix at the back which focuses on the laws of daily prayer and changes that need to be made during the course of the year.

ANI TEFILLA – אני תפילה

The expressed aim of the *Ani Tefilla* sections is to encourage connection to the *tefillot* in a direct and personal way. It is hoped this will be achieved through encouraging the reader to consider the prayers in an experiential way through inspiring and thought-provoking quotes and narratives, as well as through a process of personal creative thinking.

The name for this section derives from a statement made by King David in Psalms 109:4 which says: וַאֲנִי תְפִלָּה. This could be translated as "I pray"; but it could also mean "I am prayer." At its best, prayer is an extension of the person who says it. It is shaped by who you are and what thoughts, emotions, memories, moods, feelings and expression you bring to it. The words of the siddur, then, are not only to be taken literally; they are also signposts to help generate the range of thoughts and emotions and associations that reside within you on any given day. Think and feel beyond the words.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

In addition, I have appended a section on frequently asked questions about *tefilla* that I have heard from students and adults over the years (although adults are unfortunately often much more shy about asking difficult questions). The answers to these questions are purposely brief. They should be considered introductions rather than comprehensive and complete. As Hillel said to the person who wanted to learn the entire Torah at once, "*Tzeh ulmad*, go and learn" (*Shabbat* 30a). For rest assured that during the last two thousand years, you are not the only one to have these questions, and others have no doubt come up with more if not better answers than I.

SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR ENHANCING ONE'S KAVANA

Despite our sincere attempts to make the words more meaningful, there can be times when the demands and distractions of everyday life can make it difficult to focus. One needs to find ways to recharge one's spiritual batteries. This section contains some practical suggestions from over

the ages, for the challenge is not a new one. It faces everyone, even the most practiced and well-intentioned.

TORAH READING

We read the Torah twice a week in order to learn it together anew as a community and to relive the Sinai experience. Unfortunately, in the rush to move on with our day, the message can sometimes get lost. And so, for each *aliya*, I have added a question for your consideration. Sometimes it is to highlight a fact, sometimes the goal is to trigger further thought. Always, the purpose is to help one focus a little more on this, our *Etz Ḥayyim*, our Tree of Life.

AMIDA

This particular prayer is the climax of any service and so it deserves special attention. Especially when one knows the prayer by heart or one is in a particular rush, the words can fly by without getting much consideration. In an attempt to get one to slow down, each blessing has been placed on its own page to encourage greater focus on the words, themes and meaning than one might otherwise apply. Recognizing, too, that one might want to approach this experience in different ways on different days, we have designed three different formats. In *Shaḥrit*, the text appears with a full commentary. In *Minḥa*, the page is otherwise left blank, without commentary, in order to encourage you to direct your own thoughts either through reflection or by actually writing them down or posting them on the page. In *Arbit*, we have provided a traditional continuous format for someone who wishes to say the prayer with greater fluency. Each format can be used for any service although one must be careful to make the appropriate changes when necessary. Ribbons have been supplied to help you keep your place.

AUTHORS CITED

The commentary draws on numerous sources, some traditional, some not. Brief biographies of the authors cited are appended in order to give one a sense of the person in his or her historical context. Every effort has been made to provide proper attribution. If there have been omissions or errors, please let us know.

◀ BIBLIOGRAPHY

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Numerous books and articles have been written on the siddur and on *tefilla*. It would be impractical to list them all. Instead, a brief list of some noteworthy books has been added for those who wish to continue learning on their own.

Finally, it is important to note that the comments found throughout this siddur are not intended to be the only possibilities for understanding or interpretation. Some are my own, some are selected from the numerous commentaries that have been written on or about the siddur. Ultimately, it is our hope and prayer that you will write your own commentary every day.

> *Tefilla* is expressed in the personality of the individual. If you wish to know something of a person's character – watch him at prayer. (Rav Yehuda Amital, Rosh Yeshivat Har Etzion)

A NOTE ON THE CURRENT EDITION

This is essentially a weekday siddur, intended to help enhance one's prayers on a daily basis, day in and day out. Even so, the lines of demarcation of what constitutes weekday cannot be drawn so precisely since there are so many occasions throughout the year when the text changes to accommodate the Jewish calendar. There have therefore been requests for a siddur that contains these many changes (e.g., Ḥol HaMo'ed, *Seliḥot* and the like), even though they appear infrequently, in order for the siddur to be a steadier companion throughout the year. For now, however, the commentary is focused primarily on the regular daily prayers.

Acknowledgments

I am filled with gratitude and humbled by the reception that earlier versions of the weekday and Shabbat siddur have received from around the world. When the siddur was first envisioned, it was taken as a given that there would be a Sephardic version as well, and while it took much longer than any of us anticipated, it makes the publication of this volume particularly exciting and rewarding. My thanks go to Rabbi Joseph Beyda, to his colleagues and community, for helping to bring us to this day.

◂ It is especially

It is especially important to acknowledge the debt owed to Rabbi Dr. David Eliach *z"l*, master teacher and educator, former Principal of Joel Braverman Yeshiva of Flatbush, and one of my first graduate school professors, who introduced me to a new way of thinking about *tefilla* education more than forty years ago.

In addition to the former students, friends and colleagues whom I acknowledged in the original edition of this work, I wish to make special mention once again of Daniel Rose, Director of Educational Projects at Koren who served as *ḥavruta*, colleague and now friend throughout the process and beyond. Matthew Miller, the publisher of Koren, has made a lasting contribution to the world of Jewish books and I am indebted to him for giving me the opportunity to join in that venture. In the process, I have been fortunate to get the support of an amazing team of professionals over time. Rabbi David Fuchs showed meticulous care in reviewing and correcting portions of the commentary as did Rabbi Ḥanan Benayahu in the present edition. The rest of the Koren team made contributions in a variety of ways, some visible and some not, but all critical: I thank Rabbi Avishai Magence, Rachel Meghnagi, Esther Be'er, Caryn Meltz, Debbie Ismailoff, Nachum Goldstein, and Eliyahu Misgav. I would also like to especially thank Rabbi Yossi Pollak who has been an avid supporter in both material and spiritual ways since *Ani Tefilla* first appeared.

May the prayers that emanate from this siddur's use be a merit for all of the people in need of a speedy recovery, for ailments both physical and spiritual, and may *HaKadosh Barukh Hu* fulfill all of our heartfelt wishes for the good, ימלא ה' את כל משאלותינו לטובה.

The work is dedicated to our children and grandchildren, each of whose lives in their own way attest to the reality that one's prayers are answered. And, above all, to Linda whose belief and faith continue to inspire and support us all. As Rabbi Akiva said of his own wife, "What's mine and yours is really hers."

Rabbi Jay Goldmintz Ed.D.
Teaneck, NJ, 5784 (2024)

EDITOR'S LETTER
FOR ANI TEFILLA SIDDUR MINHAG ARAM SOBA

Judaism ascribes great significance to prayer, one of the primary ways we connect with our Maker. In prayer, we communicate directly with Hashem, utilizing our faculty of speech and giving verbal expression to the emotions which run deep within our souls. Despite this universally acknowledged importance, there is a major gap in the educational efforts to develop this foundational religious ability.

It starts off well. From the age when children begin to read, they are taught the technical aspects of how to recite traditional prayers as well as other logistical aspects of the services: when to stand or sit, what to say out loud and what to recite silently, melodies that enhance the beauty of prayers, and the idea of offering prayers toward Jerusalem. A visit to an elementary school can be inspiring; children are generally engaged and highly motivated.

When students reach their teenage years, however, they require a more sophisticated and nuanced understanding of this sacred art. It is precisely at this point that education for prayer tends to be neglected in many if not most Jewish educational institutions. When blossoming adolescents are ready and willing to delve into the meaning of prayer, to make it personal for themselves, our educational system offers them little. It is no surprise that many teens find praying either confusing, out of reach, philosophically troubling, uninspiring, or a combination of the above.

Into the breach jumped one of the most outstanding educators in contemporary Jewish education, Rabbi Dr. Jay Goldmintz. Based on his extensive classroom experience educating Jewish teens toward meaningful Jewish prayer, he compiled a commentary on the siddur entitled *The Koren Ani Tefilla Siddur*. Through a wide variety of insights and pointed questions on the text of the siddur, Rabbi Goldmintz produced a masterpiece that enables Jewish teens to connect to their prayers in a personal way. Published by the world-class Koren Publishers, led by Matthew Miller, *Ani Tefilla* achieves the highest level of artistic standards and includes the elegant and illuminating translation of Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks *z"l*. Rabbi Goldmintz's commentary is multifaceted: it explains

◂ words and

words and phrases, provides broad and deep insights, and clarifies the laws of Jewish prayer. A somewhat unique aspect of *Ani Tefilla* is the inclusion of numerous thought-provoking questions encouraging students to create a personal connection to the prayers. Other distinguishing features include a section which delineates frequently asked questions (and answers) about *tefilla* and a section which provides suggestions for enhancing one's *kavana*. Finally, Rabbi Goldmintz has attached thoughtful questions to the Monday/Thursday Torah readings, which students can consider as they follow along. *The Koren Ani Tefilla Siddur* has been well received; since 2014, it has been a staple in many Jewish high schools in English-speaking countries.

As a Jewish educator of Sephardic descent, I both marveled at the quality of the *Ani Tefilla Siddur* and rued the fact that it was primarily geared toward Jews of Ashkenazic heritage. Teenagers of Sephardic backgrounds found it difficult to benefit from *Ani Tefilla* because the core text Rabbi Goldmintz's commentary accompanied was different from their own.

When I noticed the publication of this magnificent work, I saw an opening to incorporate the minhag of Aram Soba. Together with David Catton from the Sephardic Heritage Foundation, we were able to work with Koren on this project.

In preparing this siddur for publication, we took a number of important steps. The most painstaking and significant task was to align the *Ani Tefilla* commentary with minhag of Aram Soba, the style of prayer originating in Aleppo, Syria. Next, we included the essay "Understanding Jewish Prayer" by Rabbi Sacks. Certain comments of particular relevance to the Sephardic tradition were added to the commentary and some of the original comments by Rabbi Goldmintz were revised to reflect differences between Sephardic and Ashkenazic custom. Finally, the section of halakhot was rewritten to reflect Sephardic accepted law and custom.

I am particularly gratified that this edition was sponsored by my good friends, Alan Shamah and his son, Joey, in memory of Isadore "Izzy" Shamah *a"h*. Countless institutions and individuals are indebted to Izzy for his generosity and for his wisdom, which he dispensed with kindness and dignity. He was a giant of character who stayed far from the limelight. He cared deeply for the success of the next generation. He would be

◂ thrilled

thrilled to know that this siddur will guide teens and blossoming adults as they seek a stronger connection to Hashem.

There are a number of people to whom appreciation is due for their support in bringing this project to fruition. Mr. Catton of the Sephardic Heritage Foundation jumped at the idea and pushed to make sure it was completed. He follows in the footsteps of his legendary grandfather, Sam Catton *a"h*, whose sacred work he continues. Rabbi Yitzchak Rosenblum, a longtime colleague at the Yeshivah of Flatbush Joel Braverman High School was instrumental in conceiving the idea for this project. Rabbi Goldmintz was gracious in supporting the project. Caryn Meltz and Esther Be'er of Koren Publishers dedicated countless hours and contributed numerous wise insights in taking the project to completion. Rabbi Joseph Dana's work on the Halakha section was outstanding, as was his inclusion of Mr. David Tawil for input. Joshua Brunnlehrman's editing skills were critical in bringing this book to production. Finally, I am thankful to my wife, Yvette, and our wonderful children, whose unwavering support is the firm bedrock that allows me to pursuse efforts in the name of the service of Hashem and the Jewish people.

Rabbi Joseph Beyda
Elul 5784 (August 2024)

UNDERSTANDING JEWISH PRAYER

By Rabbi Jonathan Sacks זצ״ל

1. Introduction

Prayer is the language of the soul in conversation with God. It is the most intimate gesture of the religious life, and the most transformative. The very fact that we can pray testifies to the deepest elements of Jewish faith: that the universe did not come into existence accidentally, nor are our lives destined to be bereft of meaning. The universe exists, and we exist, because someone – the One God, Author of all – brought us into existence with love. It is this belief more than any other that redeems life from solitude and fate from tragedy.

In prayer we speak to a presence vaster than the unfathomable universe, yet closer to us than we are to ourselves: the God beyond, who is also the Voice within. Though language must fail when we try to describe a Being beyond all parameters of speech, language is all we have, and it is enough. For God who made the world with creative words, and who revealed His will through holy words, listens to our prayerful words. Language is the bridge joining us to Infinity.

Yehuda HaLevi, the great eleventh-century poet, said that prayer is to the soul what food is to the body. Without prayer, something within us atrophies and dies. It is possible to have a life without prayer, just as it is possible to have a life without music, or love, or laughter, but it is a diminished thing, missing whole dimensions of experience. We need space within the soul to express our joy in being, our wonder at the universe, our hopes, our fears, our failures, our aspirations – bringing our deepest thoughts as offerings to the One who listens, and listening, in turn, to the One who calls. Those who pray breathe a more expansive air: "In the prison of his days / Teach the free man how to praise" (W. H. Auden).

The siddur is the choral symphony the covenantal people has sung to God across forty centuries, from the days of the patriarchs until the present day. In it we hear the voices of Israel's prophets, priests and kings, its sages and scholars, poets and philosophers, rationalists and mystics, singing in calibrated harmony. Its libretto weaves together texts from almost every part of the vast library of Jewish spirituality: Torah, the Prophets,

◂ the Writings

the Writings, the classic compendia of the Oral Law – Mishna, Midrash and Talmud – together with philosophical passages like Maimonides' "Thirteen Principles of Faith" and extracts from the *Zohar*, the key text of Jewish mysticism.

There is space in Judaism for private meditation – the personal plea. But when we pray publicly, we do so as members of a people who have served, spoken to, and wrestled with God for longer and in more varied circumstances than any other in history. We use the words of the greatest of those who came before us to make our prayers articulate and to join them to the prayers of others throughout the world and throughout the centuries.

Almost every age and major Jewish community has added something of its own: new words, prayers, customs and melodies. There are many different liturgies: Ashkenazic, Sephardic, Oriental, Yemenite, Italian, those of Rabbi Isaac Luria and the Vilna Gaon and others, each with its own subdivisions. Each tradition has a character of its own, to which Jewish law applies the principle *nahara nahara ufashteh*: "Every river has its own course." Each of the historic traditions has its own integrity, its own channel through which words stream from earth to heaven.

This introduction tells of how prayer came to take its present form, the distinct spiritual strands of which it is woven, the structures it has, and the path it takes in the journey of the spirit.

2. Two Sources of Prayer

The best-known phrase about Jewish religious worship is: "If you serve the LORD your God with all your heart (Deut. 11:13) – what is [the sacrificial] service of the heart (*aboda shebaleb*)? This is prayer" (*Sifrei* to Deuteronomy, 41). Behind these simple words lies a remarkable story.

Throughout the Hebrew Bible, we find two quite different forms of religious worship. One is prayer. Outside the book of Psalms there are some 140 references to people praying; in ninety-seven cases we are told the words they said. Abraham prays for the cities of the plain. Yaakob prays for deliverance before confronting Esav. Ḥana prays for a child. These prayers are direct, simple and spontaneous. They have no fixed formula, no set text. Some are very brief, like Moshe's five-word prayer for his sister Miriam: "Please, God, heal her now." Others are long, like

◂ Moshe's

Moshe's forty-day prayer for forgiveness of the people after the sin of the Golden Calf. There are no general rules: these prayers have no fixed time, place or liturgy. They are improvised as circumstance demands.

The other form – generally known as *aboda*, "service" – is sacrifice. Sacrifice could not be less like prayer. As set out from Exodus to Deuteronomy, the sacrificial service is minutely specified. It has its prescribed order: which offerings should be made, when, and by whom. It has a designated place: the Tabernacle in the wilderness, and later, the Temple in Jerusalem. There is no room for spontaneity. When two of Aharon's sons, Nadab and Abihu, make a spontaneous offering of incense, they die (Lev. 10:1–2). The Mosaic books contain two set texts associated with the Temple: the Priestly Blessing (Num. 6:24–26) and the declaration made when bringing the first fruits (Deut. 26:5–10). Certain sacrifices, such as sin-offerings, involved verbal confession. Psalms were sung in the Temple, and the Mishna details the prayers said there. But the sacrificial act itself was wordless. It took place in silence.

So we have two quite different traditions, prayer and sacrifice: one spontaneous, the other rigorously legislated; one that could be undertaken anywhere, at any time, by anyone; the other which could only happen in a set place and time in accordance with detailed and inflexible procedures. How did these two forms of worship become one?

The answer lies in the national crisis and renewal that occurred after the destruction of the First Temple by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 BCE. Psalm 137 has preserved a vivid record of the mood of near-despair among the exiles: "By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept as we remembered Zion… How can we sing the LORD's songs in a strange land?" In exile in Babylon, Jews began to gather to expound the Torah, articulate a collective hope of return, and recall the Temple and its service. These assemblies (*kinishtu* in Babylonian, *knesset* in Hebrew) were not substitutes for the Temple; rather, they were reminders of it. The book of Daniel, set in Babylon, speaks of threefold daily prayer facing Jerusalem (Dan. 6:11). The loss of the Temple and the experience of exile led to the emergence of regular gatherings for study and prayer.

The next chapter in this story was written by Ezra (fifth century BCE) who, together with the statesman Neḥemya, reorganized Jewish life in Israel after the return from Babylon. Ezra ("the scribe") was a new type

in history: the educator as hero. The book of Nehemiah (8:1–9) contains a detailed description of the national assembly Ezra convened in Jerusalem, where he read the Torah aloud, with the help of the Levites who explained it to the people.

Ezra and Neḥemya were disturbed by the high degree of assimilation among the Jews who had remained in Israel. They knew that without a strong religious identity, the people would eventually disappear through intermingling with other nations and cultures. To guard against this, they set in motion far-reaching initiatives, including a national reaffirmation of the nation's covenant with God (Neh. 10). One of the most important developments was the first formulation of prayers, attributed by the sages to Ezra and the Men of the Great Assembly. Maimonides suggests that one of their motives for so doing was to reestablish Hebrew as the national language: at that time, "Half of their children spoke the language of Ashdod, or the language of the other peoples, and did not know how to speak the language of Yehuda" (Neh. 13:24; Maimonides' "Laws of Prayer" 1:4).

One of the results of this religious renewal was the birth, or growth, of the synagogue. During the Second Temple period, priests were divided into twenty-four groups, *mishmarot*, each of which served in the Temple for a week in a rotation. They were accompanied by groups of local laypeople, *ma'amadot*, some of whom accompanied them to the Temple, others of whom stayed in their towns but said prayers to coincide with the sacrifices. Whether the synagogue developed from these *ma'amadot*, or whether its origins were earlier, by the time the Second Temple was destroyed in 70 CE, it was a well-established institution.

The synagogue was "one of the greatest revolutions in the history of religion and society" (M. Stern). It was the first place of worship made holy, not because of any historic association, nor because sacrifices were offered, but simply because people gathered there to study and pray. It embodied one of the great truths of monotheism: that the God of everywhere could be worshipped anywhere. After the loss of the Second Temple it became the home-in-exile of a scattered people. Every synagogue was a fragment of Jerusalem. And though the destruction of the Temple meant that sacrifices could no longer be offered, in their place came an offering of words, namely prayer.

◂ The transition

The transition from sacrifice to prayer was not a sudden development. A thousand years earlier, in his speech at the dedication of the Temple, King Shlomo had emphasized prayer rather than sacrifice (1 Kings 8:12–53). Through Yeshaya, God had said "My House shall be called *a house of prayer* for all peoples" (Is. 56:7). The prophet Hoshe'a had said: "Take words with you and return to the LORD… Instead of bulls we will pay [the offering of] our lips" (Hos. 14:3). Sacrifice was the external accompaniment of an inner act of heart and mind: thanksgiving, atonement, and so on. Therefore, though the outer act was no longer possible, the inner act remained. That is how sacrifice turned into prayer.

What had once been two quite different forms of worship now became one. Prayer took on the highly structured character of the sacrificial service, with fixed texts and times. The silence that had accompanied the sacrifice was transmuted into speech. Two traditions – prophetic prayer on the one hand, priestly sacrificial service on the other – merged and became one. That is the remarkable story behind the words "What is the [sacrificial] service of the heart? This is prayer."

There is a series of arguments, spanning the centuries, about the nature of prayer. According to Maimonides, daily prayer is a biblical commandment; according to Nahmanides it is merely rabbinic. Two third-century teachers, Rabbi Yose son of Rabbi Ḥanina, and Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi, disagreed as to the origin of the prayers, the former holding that they were instituted by the patriarchs – Abraham initiating the morning prayer, Yiṣḥak the afternoon, and Yaakob the evening service – while the latter held that they corresponded to the sacrifices. Centuries earlier, Rabban Gamliel and the sages differed as to which was primary, the silent Amida or the Ḥazzan's Repetition. Each of these debates ultimately hinges on the question as to which of the two sources of prayer – the improvised prayers of the figures of the Bible or the sacrificial service of the Tabernacle and Temple – is the more fundamental.

In truth, there is no answer: prayer as we have known it for two millennia draws on both traditions. More remarkably, we honor both, because *each Amida is said twice*, once silently by individuals, a second time aloud and publicly by the ḥazzan. The silent Amida recalls the prayers of individuals in the Bible, while the Ḥazzan's Repetition recalls the sacrifice: hence there is no repetition of the evening Amida, since there was no

◂ sacrifice

sacrifice in the evening. In prayer, two great streams of Jewish spirituality met and became one.

3. Structures of Prayer

The Hebrew word for a prayer book, *siddur*, means "order." At its height, prayer is an intensely emotional experience. The wonder of praise, the joy of thanksgiving, the passion of love, the trembling of awe, the broken-heartedness of confession, the yearning of hope – all these are part of the tonality of prayer. Yet Judaism is also, and supremely, a religion of the mind – for untutored emotion, like a river that bursts its banks, can be anarchic and destructive. The opening chapter of Genesis, with its account of creation, evokes a sense of order. Each day has its task; each life-form has its place; and the result (until the birth of sin) was harmony. Jewish prayer, therefore, has an order. Like a choral symphony, it has movements, each with its moods, its unfolding themes, its developmental logic. In this section, I analyze some of these structures.

The siddur as it exists today is the result of some forty centuries of Jewish history. Yet the result is not mere bricolage, a patchwork of random additions. It is as if the composition of the prayer book has been shaped by an "invisible hand," a divine inspiration that transcends the intentions of any particular author. Specifically, form mirrors substance. The shape of the prayers reveals the basic shape of the Jewish spirit as it has been molded by its encounter with God. These are some of the structural features of the prayers:

A. FROM UNIVERSAL TO PARTICULAR

In general, sequences of Jewish prayer move from the universal to the particular. Grace after Meals, for example, begins with a blessing thanking God "who in His goodness feeds *the whole world*." The second blessing moves to particularities: Israel, liberation from slavery, "the covenant which You sealed in our flesh," Torah and the commandments. We thank God "for the land [of Israel] and for the food." The third is more narrowly focused still. It is about the holy city, Jerusalem.

The same pattern exists in the two blessings before the *Shema* in the morning and evening service. The first is about the universe (God gives light to the earth, creates day and night), and the second is about Torah,

◂ the specific

the specific bond of love between God and the Jewish people. Look and you will find many more examples in the siddur. (The one exception is *Alenu*, whose first paragraph is about Jewish particularity and whose second is a universal hope. Regarding this, see section B. MIRROR-IMAGE SYMMETRY.)

This movement from universal to particular is distinctively Jewish. Western culture, under the influence of Plato, has tended to move in the opposite direction, from the concrete instance to the general rule, valuing universals above particularities. Judaism is the great counter-Platonic narrative in Western civilization.

Moving from the universal to the particular, the prayer book mirrors the structure of the Torah itself. Genesis begins, in its first eleven chapters, with a description of the universal condition of humankind. Only in its twelfth chapter is there a call to an individual, Abraham, to leave his land, family and father's house and lead a life of righteousness through which "all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

There are universals of human behavior: we call them the Noahide Laws. But we worship God in and through the particularity of our history, language and heritage. The highest love is not abstract but concrete. Those who truly love, cherish what makes the beloved different, unique, irreplaceable: that is the theme of the greatest of all books of religious love, *the* Song of Songs. That, we believe, is how God loves us.

B. MIRROR-IMAGE SYMMETRY

Many Torah passages are constructed in the form of a mirror-image symmetry, technically known as *chiasmus*: a sequence with the form ABCCBA, where the second half reverses the order of the first. A precise example is the six-word commandment that forms the central element of the Noahide covenant (Gen. 9:6):

> [A] Who sheds [B] the blood [C] of man [C] by man [B] shall his blood [A] be shed.

This is more than a stylistic device. It is the expression of one of the Torah's most profound beliefs, namely, the reciprocal nature of justice. Those who do good are blessed with good. Those who do evil, suffer evil. What happens to us is a mirror image of what we do. Thus, form

◂ mirrors

mirrors substance: mirror-image symmetry is the literary equivalent of a just world.

Some prayers have a mirror-image structure. Most of the paragraphs of the Amida, for example, finish the same way as they begin ("at the end of a blessing one should say something similar to its beginning," *Pesaḥim* 104a). So, for example, the sixteenth blessing begins, "Listen to our voice" and ends "who listens to prayer." The eighteenth begins, "We give thanks to You" and ends "to whom thanks are due." The Amida as a whole begins with a request to God to help us open our mouths in prayer. It ends with a request to God to help us close our mouths from deceitful speech.

According to Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik, the first and last three blessings of the Amida stand in a mirror-image relationship. The last uses the same key words as the first: kindness (*ḥesed*) and love (*ahaba*). The penultimate has the same subject as the second: the gift of life and the hidden miracles that surround us constantly. The seventeenth and third are both about holiness. Thus the end of the Amida is a mirror image of its beginning.

This explains why *Alenu* – the prayer with which most services end – is constructed in a sequence opposite to all other prayers. Others move from the universal to the particular, but *Alenu* reverses the order, beginning with a hymn to particularity ("Who has not made us like the nations of the lands") and ending with one of the great prayers for universality, when *"all* humanity will call on Your name." *Alenu* gives each service a chiastic structure. Previous prayers have been A–B (universal–particular); *Alenu* is B–A (particular–universal).

As we will see, many of the other structuring principles are three-part series of the form A–B–A.

C. PRAISE, REQUEST, THANKS

The sages ruled that the Amida – prayer par excellence – should follow a basic pattern of praise (*shebaḥ*), request (*bakasha*), and acknowledgment or thanks (*hodaya*). This is how Maimonides puts it: "The obligation of prayer is that every person should daily, according to his ability, offer up supplication and prayer, first uttering *praises* of God, then with humble *supplication and petition* asking for all that he needs, and finally offering praise and *thanksgiving* to the Eternal for the benefits already bestowed on him in rich measure" (Laws of Prayer 1:2).

The Amida is constructed on this template. Of its nineteen blessings, the first three express praise. The middle thirteen on weekdays are requests (we do not make requests in the Amida on Shabbat or Yom Tob, which are times dedicated to thanking God for what we have, as opposed to asking Him for what we lack). The final three are acknowledgments. The same pattern can be seen in the blessings over the Torah at the beginning of the morning service (see section G. FRACTALS).

D. PREPARATION, PRAYER, MEDITATION

Prayer requires intense concentration, and this takes time. It is impossible to move directly from the stresses and preoccupations of everyday life into the presence of eternity. Nor should prayer end abruptly. It must be internalized if it is to leave its trace within us as we move back into our worldly pursuits. Maimonides writes that because prayer needs mental focus,

> one should therefore sit awhile *before* beginning his prayers, so as to concentrate his mind. He should then pray in gentle tones, beseechingly, and not regard the service as a burden that he is carrying and which he will cast off before proceeding on his way. He should thus sit awhile *after* concluding the prayers, and only then leave. The ancient saints used to pause and meditate one hour before prayer and one hour after prayer, and spend an hour in prayer itself. (Laws of Prayer 4:16)

In the morning service, the Verses of Praise (*Pesukei DeZimra*) are the preparation. In them, our thoughts gradually turn from the visible world to its invisible Creator. The *Shema*, Amida and their surrounding blessings are prayer as such. The remainder of the service is our meditation as we leave the orbit of heaven and reenter the gravitational field of earth.

E. DESCRIPTION, EXPERIENCE, RECOLLECTION

It is one thing to describe an experience, another to live it. One of the striking features of the weekday morning service is its threefold repetition of the *Kedusha* ("Holy, holy, holy"), once before the *Shema* (known as *Kedushat Yoṣer*); a second time during the Ḥazzan's Repetition of the Amida; and a third time during the prayer "A redeemer will come to Zion" (known as *Kedusha deSidra*). The first and third are different from

◂ the second

the second in that, (1) they do not require a *minyan*, and (2) they do not need to be said standing.

The *Kedusha* – one of the supreme moments of holiness in Jewish prayer – is constructed around the mystical visions of Yeshaya and Yeḥezkel, of God enthroned in majesty, surrounded by angels singing His praises. In the first and third *Kedushot*, we *describe* the angelic order; in the second, we *enact* it, using the same words, but this time in direct, not reported, speech (Geonim, Maimonides). The intensity of *Kedusha* is heightened by this three-movement form: first the anticipation and preparation, then the experience itself, and finally the recollection.

F. PRIVATE, PUBLIC, PRIVATE

The Amida itself – especially on weekday mornings and afternoons – is constructed on a triadic pattern. First it is said silently by the members of the congregation as individuals. Next it is repeated publicly out loud by the ḥazzan. This is then usually followed by private supplications (*Taḥanun*), also said quietly. As I have suggested above, this is a way of reenacting the two modes of spirituality from which prayer derives. The silent Amida recalls the intensely personal prayers of the patriarchs and prophets. The public Repetition represents the daily sacrifices offered by the priests in the Temple on behalf of all Israel (there is no Repetition of the evening Amida because there were no sacrifices at night). Thus the prayers weave priestly and prophetic, individual and collective voices, into a single three-movement sonata of great depth and resonance.

G. FRACTALS

We owe to the scientist Benoit Mandelbrot the concept of fractals: the discovery that phenomena in nature often display the same pattern at different levels of magnitude. A single rock looks like a mountain. Crystals, snowflakes and ferns are made up of elements that have the same shape as the whole. Fractal geometry is the scientific equivalent of the mystical ability to sense the great in the small: "To see a world in a grain of sand / And a Heaven in a wild flower, / Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand, and Eternity in an hour" (William Blake).

◂ The first

The first of the "request" prayers in the daily Amida is a fractal. It replicates in miniature the structure of the Amida as a whole (Praise–Request–Thanks). It begins with praise: "You grace humanity with knowledge and teach mortals understanding," moves to request: "Grace us with the knowledge, understanding and discernment," and ends with thanksgiving: "Blessed are You, O LORD, who graciously grants knowledge." You will find many other fractals in the siddur.

The existence of fractals in the siddur shows us how profoundly the structures of Jewish spirituality feed back repeatedly into the architectonics of prayer.

H. MIDRASHIC EXPANSION

Midrash is the rabbinic investigation into the meaning of holy texts: the root *d-r-sh* means "to explore, enquire, explain, expound." It seeks out the inflections and innuendos of words, making explicit their implicit dimensions of meaning.

One example occurs in the *Nishmat* prayer on Shabbat morning. A key phrase in prayer, spoken by Moshe and incorporated into the first paragraph of the Amida, is "God, great, mighty and awesome" (Deut. 10:17). *Nishmat* meditates on these four words, one by one[1]:

> God – in Your absolute power,
> Great – in the glory of Your name,
> Mighty – for ever,
> Awesome – in Your awe-inspiring deeds.

Another is the passage on Shabbat morning following the phrase "who forms light and creates darkness, makes peace and creates all." A brief prayer takes the last word, "all," and builds around it a fivefold set of variations: "*All* will thank You. *All* will praise You. *All* will declare: Nothing is holy as is the LORD. *All* will exalt You, Selah, You who form *all*."

Always look for apparent repetition in prayer – like the tenfold "Blessed" in *Barukh SheAmar* ("Blessed is He who spoke"), the eightfold "True" after the *Shema*, or the fivefold "All" immediately after *Barekhu*

1 This meditation is found in the Ashkenazic *nosaḥ* of the *Nishmat* prayer.

◂ ("Bless the Lord")

("Bless the LORD") on Shabbat morning. Reiteration is never mere repetition. The prayer is inviting us to meditate on the multiple layers of meaning that may exist in a single word or phrase, as if words were diamonds and we were turning them this way and that to catch their multiple refractions of light.

I. NUMERICAL STRUCTURES

As we have seen, many of the prayers have an obvious three-part structure, but in some cases this is repeated in great detail on a smaller scale, as in fractals.

The most striking example is the weekday Amida, which is composed of three parts: praise–request–acknowledgment. The first and last of these are each constructed in threes: three blessings of praise at the beginning, and three of acknowledgment at the end. Less obvious is the fact that the middle thirteen blessings – "requests" – *also* share this structure. There are six individual requests, followed by six collective ones, each divided into two groups of three. The individual requests begin with three spiritual needs (understanding, repentance, forgiveness) followed by three material ones (deliverance from oppression, healing, prosperity). The collective requests begin with three political-historical elements (ingathering of exiles, restoration of judges, and an end to internal strife – the "slanderers"), followed by the three spiritual bases of nationhood (the righteous, Jerusalem, and the restoration of the Davidic monarchy). The thirteenth, "Listen to our voice," stands outside this structure because it is not directed to any specific request but is, instead, a prayer that our prayers be heeded.

The number seven is also significant and always indicates holiness, as in the seventh day, Shabbat; the seventh month, Tishrei with its Days of Awe; the seventh year, the "year of release"; and the fiftieth year, the Jubilee, which follows seven cycles of seven years. Seven in Judaism is not a simple prime number. It is the *one-after-six*. Six represents the material, physical, secular. Ancient Mesopotamia, the birthplace of Abraham, originally used a numerical system based on the number six. Western civilization still bears traces of this in the twenty-four hour day (2×6 hours of light, plus 2×6 of darkness); the sixty (10×6) minutes in an hour, and seconds in a minute; and the 360 degrees in a circle ($6 \times 6 \times 10$). All

◂ of these

of these originated in astronomy, at which the ancient Mesopotamians excelled. Judaism acknowledges the six-part structure of time and space, but adds that God exists *beyond* time and space. Hence seven – the one beyond six – became the symbol of the holy.

Six, too, is not a simple number in Judaism. This becomes evident when we read the story of creation in Genesis 1 carefully. The first six days fall into two groups. On the first three, God created and separated *domains* (1: light and darkness, 2: upper and lower waters, 3: sea and dry land). On the second three God *populated* these domains, each with its appropriate objects or life-forms (4: sun, moon and stars, 5: birds and fish, 6: land animals and man). The seventh day, Shabbat, is *holy* because it stands *outside* nature and its causal-scientific laws.

Mirroring this pattern, the morning service is structured around the number seven: the three paragraphs of the *Shema*, surrounded by three blessings, leading to the seventh, the Amida, which is the domain of the holy, where we stand directly in the presence of God. On holy days – Shabbat and Yom Tob – the Amida has a sevenfold structure: the three opening and closing paragraphs, plus a middle paragraph dedicated to "the holiness of the day."

It follows that sixfold structures in the siddur signal the universe and creation. Thus, on weekday mornings we say six psalms (145–150) in the Verses of Praise. *Kabbalat Shabbat* also contains six psalms,[2] corresponding to the days of the week, before *Lekha Dodi*, which represents Shabbat itself. The blessing after the *Shema* repeats the keyword *Emet* ("true") six times to show how God's love is translated into redemptive activity in a this-worldly time and space.

Many prayers such *Alenu* are constructed in a pattern of fours: four-line verses, each of four words. Often these reflect Jewish mysticism with its four "worlds": *Asiyya* (Action), *Yetzira* (Formation), *Beri'a* (Creation) and *Atzilut* (Emanation). *Merkaba* mysticism, based on Yeḥezkel's vision of the divine chariot, is an important strand of early rabbinic prayer.

The number ten represents the "ten utterances with which the world

2 This meditation is found in the Ashkenazic *nosaḥ* of the *Kabbalat Shabbat* prayer.

◂ was created

was created" (the ten places in Genesis 1 where an act of creation is preceded by the words "God said"). That is why *Barukh SheAmar,* the blessing before the creation section of the prayers, begins with a tenfold litany of phrases each beginning with the word "Blessed."

Fifteen represents the fifteen steps between the courtyards of the Temple, the fifteen psalms beginning "A song of ascents," and the numerical value of the first two letters of God's holiest name. Hence, there are fifteen expressions of praise in the paragraph *Yishtabaḥ* (page 101), fifteen adjectives following "the LORD Your God is true" at the end of the *Shema* in the morning service, fifteen psalms in the Verses of Praise on Shabbat and Yom Tob mornings, and so on. There are also more intricate numerical patterns.

These are not mere aesthetic conventions like, for example, the fourteen-line sonnet form or the four-movement structure of a symphony. As always in Judaism there is a matching of form to content, structure to substance. The sages understood – as did the ancient Greeks, amply confirmed by modern science – that *reality has a numerical structure*. Mirroring this structure in prayer, we evoke the sense of a world of order in which we are called upon to respect differences and honor boundaries, accepting graciously the integrity of natural and moral law.

J. FROM LOVE TO AWE

The supreme religious emotions are love and awe – in that order. We are commanded to "Love the LORD your God." We are also commanded to experience the feelings associated with the Hebrew word *yira*, which means "awe, fear, reverence." This is how Maimonides puts it: "When a person contemplates His great and wondrous works and creatures and from them obtains a glimpse of His wisdom, which is incomparable and infinite, he will immediately love Him, praise Him, glorify Him, and long with an exceeding longing to know His great name… And when he ponders these matters, he will recoil frightened, and realize that he is a small creature, lowly and obscure, endowed with slight and slender intelligence, standing in the presence of He who is perfect in knowledge" (*Yesodeh HaTorah* 2:2).

The supreme expression of love in Judaism is the *Shema* with its injunction "Love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul,

◂ and with

and with all your might." The supreme expression of awe is the Amida prayer, when we stand consciously in the presence of God. The basic movement of the morning and evening prayers is first, to climb to the peak of love, the *Shema*, and from there to the summit of awe, the Amida.

4. Creation, Revelation, Redemption

One structural principle of the prayers deserves special attention, since it touches on the fundamentals of Jewish faith. In the twelfth century, Moshe Maimonides enumerated the Thirteen Principles of Jewish Faith. They appear in the siddur in the form of a poem known as "Yigdal."

Rabbi Shimon ben Ṣemaḥ Duran (1361–1444) pointed out that Maimonides' principles could be analyzed and categorized into three themes: (1) the existence of God, the Creator (principles 1–5: God's existence, unity, incorporeality and eternity, and that He alone is to be worshipped); (2) Divine revelation (principles 6–9: prophecy, Moshe's uniqueness, the God-given character of the Torah and its immutability); and (3) God's justice (principles 10–13: God knows all, repays us according to our deeds, and will bring the Messiah and the resurrection of the dead). The philosopher Franz Rosenzweig summarized these in three words: creation, revelation, redemption. Creation is the relationship between God and the universe. Revelation is the relationship between God and humanity. Redemption occurs when we apply revelation to creation.

The movement from creation to revelation to redemption is one of the great structural motifs of prayer. One example is the three blessings in the morning service, surrounding the *Shema* and leading up to the Amida (pages 121–125). The first is about the *creation* of the universe in space and time; the second is about the *revelation* of the Torah; and the third is about the miracles of history, ending with the words "who *redeemed* Israel."

The three paragraphs of the *Shema* display the same pattern. The first is about creation (God's unity and sovereignty), the second about revelation (acceptance of the commandments), and the third about redemption ("I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt").

The weekday morning service as a whole is constructed on this principle. First come the Verses of Praise, taken from the book of Psalms, with their majestic vision of creation. Then follows the central section – the

◂ *Shema*

Shema and its blessings, leading to the Amida – in which we sit, then stand, in the immediate presence of God (revelation). Finally we come to the concluding prayers with their central line, "A *redeemer* will come to Zion." The second paragraph of *Alenu* is likewise a vision of redemption.

The pattern is repeated yet again in the Shabbat evening, morning and afternoon prayers. On Friday evening, in the central blessing of the Amida, we speak of the Shabbat of creation ("the culmination of the creation of heaven and earth"). In the morning we refer to the Shabbat of revelation (when Moshe "brought down in his hands two tablets of stone"). In the afternoon we anticipate future redemption (when "You are One, Your name is One" and the people Israel are again one "nation unique on earth").

Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik suggested that the same sequence is the basis for the threefold structure of the weekday Amida: praise, request, thanks. Praise "emerges from an enraptured soul gazing at the *mysterium magnum* of creation," request "flows from an aching heart which finds itself in existential depths," and thanksgiving "is sung by the person who has attained, by the grace of God, redemption." Creation leads to praise, revelation to request, and redemption to thanksgiving.

In these multiple ways, prayer continually reiterates the basic principles of Jewish faith.

5. Prayer and Study

There is one spiritual activity that the sages regarded as even higher than prayer: namely, study of Torah, God's word to humanity and His covenant with our ancestors and us (*Shabbat* 10a). The entire *Pirkei Abot* (Ethics of the Fathers) is a set of variations on the theme of a life devoted to Torah study. In prayer, we speak to God. Through Torah, God speaks to us. Praying, we speak. Studying, we listen.

From earliest times, the synagogue was a house of study as well as a house of prayer. Gatherings for study (perhaps around the figure of the prophet; see II Kings 4:23 and the commentaries of Radak and Ralbag; *Sukka* 27b) may well have preceded formal prayer services by many centuries. Accordingly, interwoven with prayer are acts of study.

The most obvious is the public reading from the Torah, a central part of the Shabbat and Yom Tob services, and in an abridged form on

Monday and Thursday mornings and Shabbat afternoons. There are other examples. In the morning blessings before the Verses of Praise, there are two cycles of study, each in three parts: (1) Torah, that is a passage from the Mosaic books; (2) Mishna, the key document of the Oral Law; and (3) Talmud in the broadest sense (pages 25–31 and 39–51).

In the main section of prayer, the paragraph preceding the *Shema* is a form of blessing over the Torah (see *Berakhot* 11b), and the *Shema* itself represents Torah study (*Menaḥot* 99b). The last section of the weekday morning prayers (pages 233–237) was originally associated with the custom of studying ten verses from the prophetic books. Kaddish, which plays such a large part in the prayers, had its origin in the house of study as the conclusion of a *derasha*, a public exposition of biblical texts. The entire weekday morning service is thus an extended fugue between study and prayer.

This is dramatized in two key phrases: the first is *Shema Yisrael*, "Listen, Israel," God's word through Moshe and the Torah, and the second is *Shema Kolenu*, "Listen to our voice," the paragraph within the Amida that summarizes all our requests (see above). These two phrases frame the great dialogue of study and prayer. Faith lives in these two acts of listening: ours to the call of God, God's to the cry of humankind.

6. Prayer and Mysticism

Jewish mysticism has played a major role in the prayer book. The most obvious examples are the passage from the *Zohar*, "Blessed is the name," Petiḥat Eliyahu (pages 16–17), and one of the songs written by the sixteenth-century Safed mystics associated with Rabbi Isaac Luria, "Come, my Beloved."

Less obviously, many of the early post-biblical prayers were deeply influenced by *Hekhalot* ("Palace") and *Merkaba* ("Chariot") mysticism, two esoteric systems that charted the mysteries of creation, the angelic orders, and the innermost chambers of the divine glory.

Undoubtedly, though, the most significant mystical contribution to the prayers is the *Kedusha*, said in three different forms, most notably during the Ḥazzan's Repetition of the Amida. We have noted the two major tributaries of prayer: the spontaneous prayers said by figures in the Hebrew Bible, and the sacrificial service in the Temple. Mysticism is the third, and its most sublime expression is the *Kedusha*, based on

◂ the mystical

the mystical visions of Yeshaya (chapter 6) and Yeḥezkel (chapters 1–3). There are times in the prayers when we are like prophets, others when we are like priests, but there is no more daring leap of faith than during the *Kedusha*, when we act out the role of angels singing praises to God in His innermost chambers.

Familiarity breeds inattention, and we can all too easily pass over the *Kedusha* without noticing its astonishing drama. "The ministering angels do not begin to sing praises in heaven until Israel sings praises down here on earth" (*Ḥullin* 91b). "You," said God through Yeshaya, "are My witnesses" (Is. 43:10). Israel is "the people I formed for Myself that they might declare My praise" (ibid. 43:20). We are God's angels on earth, His emissaries and ambassadors. The Jewish people, always small and vulnerable, have nonetheless been singled out for the most exalted mission ever entrusted to humankind: to be witnesses, in ourselves, to something beyond ourselves, to be God's "signal of transcendence" in a world in which His presence is often hidden.

This is a mystical idea, and like all mysticism it hovers at the edge of intelligibility. Mysticism is the attempt to say the unsayable, know the unknowable, to reach out in language to a reality that lies beyond the scope of language. Often in the course of history, mysticism has tended to devalue the world of the senses in favor of a more exalted realm of disembodied spirituality. Jewish mysticism did not take this course. Instead it chose to bathe our life on earth in the dazzling light of the divine radiance (*Zohar*, the title of Judaism's most famous mystical text).

7. Reliving History

History, too, has left its mark on the siddur. There are passages, indicated in the Commentary, that were born in the aftermath of tragedy or miraculous redemption. This edition of the siddur also includes suggested orders of service for Yom Ha'aṣma'ut and Yom Yerushalayim, marking the birth of the State of Israel in 1948, and the Six-Day War of 1967.

No less significantly, the synagogue service invites us at many points to reenact history. The Verses of Praise begin with the song of celebration sung by King David when he brought the *Aron* to Jerusalem. The verses we sing when we take the Torah scroll from the *Aron* and when we return it recall the Israelites' journeys through the wilderness, when they

◂ carried

carried the *Aron* with them. In one of the most fascinating transitions in the service, as we move from private meditation to public prayer (pages 93–99), we recall three epic moments of nation-formation: when David gathered the people to charge them with the task of building the Temple; when Ezra convened a national assembly to renew the covenant after the return from Babylonian exile; and when Moshe led the Israelites through the Sea of Reeds. Even the three steps forward we take as we begin the Amida recall the three biblical episodes in which people stepped forward (*vayigash*) as a prelude to prayer: Abraham pleading for the cities of the plain, Yehuda pleading with Yosef for Binyamin to be set free, and Eliyahu invoking God against the prophets of Ba'al on Mount Carmel.

We are a people defined by history. We carry our past with us. We relive it in ritual and prayer. We are not lonely individuals, disconnected with past and present. We are characters in the world's oldest continuous story, charged with writing its next chapter and handing it on to those who come after us. The siddur is, among other things, a book of Jewish memory.

8. Prayer and Faith

The siddur is also the book of Jewish faith. Scholars of Judaism, noting that it contains little systematic theology, have sometimes concluded that it is a religion of deeds not creeds, acts not beliefs. They were wrong because they were searching in the wrong place. They were looking for a library of works like Moshe Maimonides' *Guide for the Perplexed*. They should have looked instead at the prayer book. The home of Jewish belief is the siddur.

At several points, the prayers have been shaped in response to theological controversy. The opening statement in the morning service after *Barekhu*, "who forms light and creates darkness, makes peace and creates all," is a protest against dualism, which had a considerable following in the first four centuries CE in the form of Gnosticism and Manichaeism. Its presence can be traced in the ancient documents discovered in the 1940s, the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Nag Hammadi codices. Against dualism, with its vision of perpetual cosmic struggle, Judaism insists that all reality derives from a single source.

The second paragraph of the Amida, with its fivefold reference to the resurrection of the dead, reflects the ancient controversy between the

◂ Pharisees

Pharisees and Sadducees. The morning prayer, "My God, the soul You placed within me is pure" (page 5), may be directed against the Pauline doctrine of original sin. The Mishna chapter, "With what wicks may we light?" was probably inserted as part of the polemic against the Karaite sect. The Ten Commandments, said daily as part of the Temple service immediately after the *Shema*, was removed from the prayers when it was used by sectarians to argue that only these ten commandments were commanded by God.

The fact that Jewish faith was written into the prayers, rather than analyzed in works of theology, is of immense significance. We do not analyze our faith; we pray it. We do not philosophize about truth; we sing it. Even Maimonides' Thirteen Principles of Jewish Faith – the most famous creed in the history of Judaism – only entered the mainstream of Jewish consciousness when they were turned into a song and included in the siddur as the hymn known as Yigdal. For Judaism, theology becomes real when it becomes prayer. We do not talk *about* God. We talk *to* God.

I have known many atheists. My doctoral supervisor, the late Sir Bernard Williams, described as the most brilliant mind in Britain, was one. He was a good, caring, deeply moral human being, but he could not understand my faith at all. For him, life was ultimately tragic. The universe was blind to our presence, deaf to our prayers, indifferent to our hopes. There is no meaning beyond that which human beings construct for themselves. We are dust on the surface of infinity.

I understood that vision, yet in the end I could not share his belief that it is somehow more honest to despair than to trust, to see existence as an accident rather than as invested with a meaning we strive to discover. Sir Bernard loved ancient Greece; I loved biblical Israel. Greece gave the world tragedy; Israel taught it hope. A people, a person, who can pray is one who, even in the darkest night of the soul, can never ultimately lose hope.

9. Prayer and Sacrifice

The connection between prayer and sacrifice is deep. As we have seen, sacrifice is not the only forerunner of our prayers; many prayers were spoken by figures in the Bible. These were said without any accompanying offering. Yet the sacrificial system is a major tributary of the Jewish river of prayer. After the destruction of the Second Temple, prayer became a

◂ substitute

substitute for sacrifice. It is *aboda shebaleb*, "the sacrificial service of the heart." Yet it is just this feature of the prayers that many find difficult to understand or find uplifting. What, then, was sacrifice?

The Hebrew word for sacrifice is *korban*, which comes from a root that means "to come, or bring, close." The essential problem to which sacrifice is an answer is: How can we come close to God? This is a profound question – perhaps *the* question of the religious life – not simply because of the utter disparity between God's infinity and our finitude, but also because the very circumstances of life tend to focus our gaze downward to our needs rather than upward to our source. The Hebrew word for universe, *olam*, is connected to the verb meaning "to hide" (see Lev. 4:13; Deut. 22:1). The physical world is a place in which the presence of God is real, yet hidden. Our horizon of consciousness is foreshortened. We focus on our own devices and desires. We walk in God's light, but often our mind is on other things.

How then do we come close to God? By *an act of renunciation*; by giving something away; specifically, by giving something *back*. The sacrifices of the biblical age were ways in which the individual, or the nation as a whole, in effect said: What we have, God, is really Yours. The world exists because of You. *We* exist because of You. Nothing we have is ultimately ours. The fundamental gesture of sacrifice is, on the face of it, absurd. What we give to God is something that already belongs to Him. As King David said: "Who am I and who are my people that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from You, and we have given You only what comes from Your hand" (1 Chr. 29:14). Yet to *give back* to God is one of the most profound instincts of the soul. Doing so, we acknowledge our dependency. We cast off the carapace of self-absorption. That is why, in one of its most striking phrases, the Torah speaks of sacrifice as being *re'aḥ niḥo'aḥ*, "sweet savor" to God.

One of the sweetest savors of parenthood is when a child, by now grown to maturity, brings a parent a gift to express his or her thanks. This too seems absurd. What can a child give a parent that remotely approximates what a parent gives a child, namely life itself? Yet it is so, and the reverse is also true. The cruelest thing a child can do is *not* to acknowledge his or her parents. The Talmud attributes to Rabbi Akiva the phrase *Abinu Malkenu*, "Our Father, our King." Those two words encapsulate the

essence of Jewish worship. God is King – Maker and Sovereign of the vast universe. Yet even before God is our King, He is our Father, our Parent, the One who brought us into being in love, who nurtured and sustained us, who taught us His ways, and who tenderly watches over our destiny. Sacrifice – the gift we bring to God – is the gift of the made to its Maker, the owned to its Owner, the child to its Parent. If creation is an act of love, sacrifice is an acknowledgment of that love.

The late Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik emphasized the difference between *ma'aseh miṣva*, the external act specified by a commandment, and *kiyum miṣva*, the actual fulfillment of a commandment. When the Temple stood, for example, a penitent would bring a guilt- or sin-offering to atone for his sin: that was the external act. The fulfillment of the commandment, though, lay in confession and contrition, acts of the mind and will. In biblical times, the sacrificial order was the external act, but the internal act – acknowledgment, dependency, recognition, thanks, praise – was essential to its fulfillment. That is why Judaism was able to survive the destruction of the Temple and the cessation of the sacrificial order. The external act could no longer be performed, but the internal act remained. That is the link between sacrifice and prayer.

The difference between prayer-as-request and prayer-as-sacrifice is that request *seeks*, sacrifice *gives*. The prophets asked, usually on behalf of the people as a whole, for forgiveness, deliverance, and blessing. The priests who offered sacrifices in the Temple asked for nothing. Sacrificial prayer is the giving back to God what God already owns: our lives, our days, our world. Prayer is creation's gift to its Creator.

The prophets were critical of the sacrificial system. They reserved for it some of their most lacerating prose. Yet none proposed its abolition, because what they opposed was not the sacrificial act, but the *ma'aseh* without the *kiyum*, the outer act without the inner acknowledgment that gives the act its meaning and significance. The idea that God can be worshipped through externalities alone is pagan, and there is nothing worse than the intrusion of paganism into the domain of holiness itself. Then as now, the sign of paganism is the coexistence of religious worship with injustice and a lack of compassion in the dealings between the worshipper and the world.

Sacrifice, like prayer, is a transformative act. We should leave the synagogue, as our ancestors once left the Temple, seeing ourselves and

◂ the universe

the universe differently, freshly conscious that the world is God's work, the Torah God's word, our fellow believers God's children, and our fellow human beings God's image. We emerge refocused and reenergized, for we have made the journey back to our source, to the One who gives life to all. Distant, we have come close. That is prayer as sacrifice, *korban*, giving back to God a token of what He has given us, thereby coming to see existence itself as a gift, to be celebrated and sanctified.

10. Kavana: Directing the Mind

Prayer is more than saying certain words in the right order. It needs concentration, attention, engagement of mind and heart, and the left and right hemispheres of the brain. Without devotion, said Rabbi Baḥye ibn Pakuda, prayer is like a body without a soul. The key Hebrew word here is *kavana,* meaning mindfulness, intention, focus, direction of the mind. In the context of prayer, it means several different things.

The most basic level is *kavana leshem miṣva*, which means having the intention to fulfill a *miṣva*. This means that we do not act for social or aesthetic reasons. We pray because we are commanded to pray. Generally in Judaism there is a long-standing debate about whether the commandments require *kavana*, but certainly prayer does, because it is supremely an act of the mind.

At a second level, *kavana* means understanding the words (*perush hamilim*). At least the most important sections of prayer require *kavana* in this sense. Without it, the words we say would be mere sounds. Understanding the words is, of course, made much easier by the existence of translations and commentaries.

A third level relates to context. How do I understand my situation when I pray? Maimonides states this principle as follows: "The mind should be *freed from all extraneous thoughts* and the one who prays should *realize that he is standing before the Divine Presence*." These are essential elements of at least the Amida, the prayer par excellence in which we are conscious of standing before God. That is why we take three steps forward at the beginning, and three back at the end – as if we were entering, then leaving, sacred space.

The fourth level of *kavana* is not merely saying the words but meaning them, affirming them. Thus, for example, while saying the first paragraph

◂ of the Shema

of the *Shema,* we "accept of the yoke of the kingdom of heaven" – declaring our allegiance to God as the supreme authority in our lives. In the second paragraph, we "accept of the yoke of the commandments." The word Amen means roughly, "I affirm what has been said." In prayer we put ourselves into the words. We make a commitment. We declare our faith, our trust, and our dependency. We mean what we say.

There are, of course, higher reaches of *kavana*. Mystics and philosophers throughout the ages developed elaborate meditative practices before and during prayer. But at its simplest, *kavana* is the practiced harmony of word and thought, body and mind. This is how Yehuda HaLevi described it:

> The tongue agrees with the thought, and does not overstep its bounds, does not speak in prayer in a mere mechanical way as the starling and the parrot, but every word is uttered thoughtfully and attentively. This moment forms the heart and fruit of his time, while the other hours represent the way that leads to it. He looks forward to its approach, because while it lasts he resembles the spiritual beings, and is removed from merely animal existence. Those three times of daily prayer are the fruit of his day and night, and the Sabbath is the fruit of the week, because it has been appointed to establish the connection with the Divine Spirit and to serve God in joy, not in sadness. (*Kuzari*, III:5, as translated by Hartwig Hirschfeld)

Of course it does not always happen. It is told that on one occasion Rabbi Levi Yiṣḥak of Berditchev went up to one of his followers after the prayers, held out his hand and said "Welcome home." "But I haven't been anywhere," said the disciple. "Your body hasn't been anywhere," said the Rebbe, "but your mind has been far away. That is why I wished it, 'Welcome home.'"

Rabbi Menaḥem Mendel of Kotzk once asked: "Why does it say in the *Shema*, 'These words shall be *on* your heart'? Should it not say, 'These words shall be *in* your heart'? The answer is that the heart is not always open. Therefore we should lay these words on our heart, so that when it opens, they will be there, ready to enter."

Prayer requires practice. That is implicit in defining prayer as *aboda shebaleb*, "service of the heart." The word *aboda*, service, also means hard

◂ work

work, labor, strenuous activity. We have to work at prayer. But there are also times when the most inarticulate prayer, said from the heart, pierces the heavens. What matters is seriousness and honesty. "The LORD is close to all who call on Him, to all who call on Him in truth."

11. Jacob's Ladder

Prayer is a journey that has been described in many ways. According to the mystics, it is a journey through the four levels of being – Action, Formation, Creation and Emanation. Rabbi Jacob Emden worked out an elaborate scheme in which the prayers represent a movement from the outer courtyards to the Holy of Holies of the Temple in Jerusalem. According to everyone, the stages of prayer constitute an ascent and descent, reaching their highest level in the middle, in the *Shema* and Amida.

The metaphor that, to me, captures the spirit of prayer more than any other is Yaakob's dream in which, alone at night, fleeing danger and far from home, he saw a ladder stretching from earth to heaven with angels ascending and descending. He woke and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the House of God; this is the gate to heaven" (Gen. 28:10–17).

Our sages said that "this place" was Jerusalem. That is midrashic truth. But there is another meaning, the plain one, no less transfiguring. The verb the Torah uses, *vayifga*, means "to happen upon, as if by chance." "This place" was any place. Any place, any time, even the dark of a lonely night, can be a place and time for prayer. If we have the strength to dream and then, awakening, refuse to let go of the dream, then here, now, where I stand, can be the gate to heaven.

Prayer is a ladder and we are the angels. If there is one theme sounded throughout the prayers, it is creation–revelation–redemption, or ascent–summit–descent. In the Verses of Praise, we climb from earth to heaven by meditating on creation. Like a Turner or Monet landscape, the psalms let us see the universe bathed in light, but *this* light is not the light of beauty but of holiness – the light the sages say God made on the first day and "hid for the righteous in the life to come." Through some of the most magnificent poetry ever written, we see the world as God's masterpiece, suffused with His radiance, until we reach a crescendo in Psalm 150 with its thirteenfold repetition of "Praise" in a mere thirty-five words.

◂ By the time

By the time we reach *Barekhu* and the blessings of the *Shema* we have neared the summit. Now we are in heaven with the angels. We have reached revelation. The Divine Presence is close, almost tangible. We speak of love in one of the most hauntingly beautiful of blessings, "Great love" with its striking phrase: "Our Father, merciful Father, the Merciful, have mercy on us." Now comes the great declaration of faith at the heart of prayer, the *Shema* with its passionate profession of the unity of God and the highest of all expressions of love, "with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might." Ending with a reference to the exodus, the *Shema* gives way to the *Emet* blessing with its emphasis on redemption, the exodus and the division of the sea. Then comes the Amida, the supreme height of prayer. Three traditions fuse at this point: the silent Amida said by individuals, reminding us of prophetic prayer; the Ḥazzan's Repetition representing priestly worship and prayer as sacrifice; and then the *Kedusha*, prayer as a mystical experience.

From here, prayer begins its descent. First comes *Taḥanun* in which (in the Ashkenazic *nosaḥ*) we speak privately and intimately to the King. At this point, with a mixture of anguish and plea, we speak not of God's love for Israel but of Israel's defiant love of God: "Yet despite all this we have not forgotten Your name. Please do not forget us." There is a direct reference back to the *Shema*: "Guardian of Israel, guard the remnant of Israel, and let not Israel perish who declare, *Shema Yisrael*."

Then comes *Ashre* and the subsequent passages, similar to the Verses of Praise but this time with redemption, not creation, as their theme. The key verse is "A redeemer will come to Zion." The section closes with a prayer that we may become agents of redemption as we reengage with the world ("May it be Your will … that we keep Your laws in this world"). We are now back on earth, the service complete except for *Alenu*, Kaddish and the Daily Psalm. We are ready to reenter life and its challenges.

What has prayer achieved? If we have truly prayed, we now know that the world did not materialize by chance. A single, guiding Will directed its apparent randomness. We know too that this Will did not end there, but remains intimately involved with the universe, which He renews daily, and with humanity, over whose destinies He presides. We have climbed the high ladder and have seen, if only dimly, how small some of our worries are. Our emotional landscape has been expanded. We have

given voice to a whole range of emotions: thanks, praise, love, awe, guilt, repentance, remembrance, hope. As we leave the synagogue for the world outside, we now know that we are not alone; that God is with us; that we need not fear failure, for God forgives; that our hopes are not vain; that we are here for a purpose and there is work to do.

We are not the same after we have stood in the Divine Presence as we were before. We have been transformed. We see the world in a different light. Perhaps we radiate a different light. We have spoken to and listened to God. We have aligned ourselves with the moral energies of the universe. We have become, in Lurianic terminology, vessels for God's blessing. We are changed by prayer.

12. Is Prayer Answered?

Is prayer answered? If God is changeless, how can we change Him by what we say? Even discounting this, why do we need to articulate our requests? Surely God, who sees the heart, knows our wishes even before we do, without our having to put them into words. What we wish to happen is either right or wrong in the eyes of God. If it is right, God will bring it about even if we do not pray. If it is wrong, God will not bring it about even if we do. So why pray?

The classic Jewish answer is simple but profound. Without a vessel to contain a blessing, there can be no blessing. If we have no receptacle to catch the rain, the rain may fall, but we will have none to drink. If we have no radio receiver, the sound waves will flow, but we will be unable to convert them into sound. God's blessings flow continuously, but unless we make ourselves into a vessel for them, they will flow elsewhere. *Prayer is the act of turning ourselves into a vehicle for the Divine.*

Speaking from personal experience, and from many encounters with people for whom prayer was a lifeline, I know that our prayers are answered: not always in the *way* we expected, not always as quickly as we hoped, but *prayer is never in vain*. Sometimes the answer is, "No." If granting a request would do us or others harm, God will not grant it. But "No" is also an answer, and when God decides that something I have prayed for should not come to pass, then I pray for the wisdom to understand why. That too is part of spiritual growth: to accept graciously what we cannot or should not change. Nor is prayer a substitute for human effort: on the contrary, prayer is one of the most powerful sources of energy for human

◂ effort

effort. God gives us the strength to achieve what we need to achieve, and to do what we were placed on earth to do.

Prayer changes the world because it changes us. At its height, it is a profoundly transformative experience. If we have truly prayed, we come in the course of time to know that the world was made, and we were made, for a purpose; that God, though immeasurably vast, is also intensely close; that "were my father and my mother to forsake me, the LORD would take me in"; that God is with us in our efforts, and that we do not labor in vain. We know, too, that we are part of the community of faith, and with us are four thousand years of history and the prayers and hopes of those who came before us. However far we feel from God, He is there behind us, and all we have to do is turn to face Him. Faith is born and lives in prayer, and faith is the antidote to fear: "The LORD is the stronghold of my life – of whom shall I be afraid?"

It makes a difference to be brushed by the wings of eternity. Regular thrice-daily prayer works on us in ways not immediately apparent. As the sea smoothes the stone, as the repeated hammer-blows of the sculptor shape the marble, so prayer – cyclical, tracking the rhythms of time itself – gradually wears away the jagged edges of our character, turning it into a work of devotional art. We begin to see the beauty of the created world. We locate ourselves as part of the story of our people. Slowly, we come to think less of the "I," more of the "We"; less of what we lack than of what we have; less of what we need from the world, more of what the world needs from us. Prayer is less about getting what we want than about learning what to want. Our priorities change; we become less angular; we learn the deep happiness that comes from learning to give praise and thanks. The world we build tomorrow is born in the prayers we say today.

When, at the end of his vision, Yaakob opened his eyes, he said with a sense of awe: "Surely God is in this place and I did not know it." That is what prayer does. It opens our eyes to the wonder of the world. It opens our ears to the still, small voice of God. It opens our hearts to those who need our help. God exists where we pray. As Rabbi Menaḥem Mendel of Kotzk said: "God lives where we let Him in." And in that dialogue between the human soul and the Soul of the universe a momentous yet gentle strength is born.

Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks
London 5769 (2009)

ימי חול

WEEKDAYS

Shaḥrit

ON WAKING

Immediately upon waking, say:

מוֹדֶה I thank You, living and eternal King,
for giving me back my soul in mercy.
Great is Your faithfulness.

After washing hands, before drying them, say:

בָּרוּךְ Blessed are You, LORD our God, King of the Universe,
who has made us holy through His commandments,
and has commanded us about washing hands.[ABH]

After attending to bathroom needs, and throughout the day, say:

בָּרוּךְ Blessed are You, LORD our God, King of the Universe,
who formed man[IA] in wisdom
and created in him many orifices and cavities.
It is revealed and known before the throne of Your glory
that were one of them to be blocked or ruptured,
it would be impossible to survive even for a moment.
Blessed are You, LORD, Healer of all flesh who does wondrous deeds.

IYUN TEFILLA • עיון תפילה

אֲשֶׁר יָצַר – *Who formed man*. Imagine what it would be like not to be able to go to the bathroom! Imagine the pain or discomfort, the inability to focus on anything else in one's life. And yet for all of its complexity and all of its importance, precisely because it is something that is so natural and so everyday and so private, we take it for granted. And precisely because we have a tendency to take it for granted, the siddur tries to get us to focus upon it first thing in the morning. Blessings are opportunities to not take life for granted.

HILKHOT TEFILLA • הלכות תפילה

The custom is to say these blessings after waking in the morning but, if one did not, then they may be recited before communal services begin.

ANI TEFILLA • אני תפילה

אֲשֶׁר יָצַר – *Who formed man.*

I could prove God statistically. Take the human body alone – the chances that all the functions of an individual would just happen is a statistical monstrosity.

(Attributed to pollster George Gallup, *Readers Digest,* October 1943)

ANI TEFILLA • אני תפילה

אֲשֶׁר יָצַר – *Who formed man.*

Close your eyes and think for a moment about the miracle of your own body.

תפילות השחר

השכמת הבוקר

Immediately upon waking, say:

מוֹדֶה/*women* מוֹדָה/ אֲנִי לְפָנֶיךָ מֶלֶךְ חַי וְקַיָּם
שֶׁהֶחֱזַרְתָּ בִּי נִשְׁמָתִי בְּחֶמְלָה
רַבָּה אֱמוּנָתֶךָ.

After washing hands, before drying them, say:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם
אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ עַל נְטִילַת יָדָיִם.אבה

After attending to bathroom needs, and throughout the day, say:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם
אֲשֶׁר יָצַרע"א אֶת הָאָדָם בְּחָכְמָה
וּבָרָא בוֹ נְקָבִים נְקָבִים, חֲלוּלִים חֲלוּלִים.
גָּלוּי וְיָדוּעַ לִפְנֵי כִסֵּא כְבוֹדֶךָ
שֶׁאִם יִפָּתֵם אֶחָד מֵהֶם אוֹ אִם יִפָּתֵחַ אֶחָד מֵהֶם
אִי אֶפְשָׁר לְהִתְקַיֵּם וְלַעֲמֹד לְפָנֶיךָ שָׁעָה אֶחָת.
בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה, רוֹפֵא כָל בָּשָׂר וּמַפְלִיא לַעֲשׂוֹת.

ANI TEFILLA • אני תפילה

עַל נְטִילַת יָדָיִם – *Washing hands*.
Water is life giving. We wash our hands in the morning in order to remind ourselves that each day we are born anew. I am thankful to God to be able to start all over again (Rashba).
How would I like my today to be different from my yesterday?

BIUR TEFILLA • ביאור תפילה

עַל נְטִילַת יָדָיִם – *Washing hands*. We wash our hands with a vessel rather than directly from the faucet, for that is how the *cohanim* did it in the *Bet HaMikdash* (Ex. 30:17–21). We thereby signal to ourselves that our actions today must also contain an element of sanctity.
How will I use my hands today to serve a higher purpose?

MORNING BLESSINGS[IH]

אֱלֹהַי My God,
the soul[IB] You placed within me is pure.
You created it, You formed it, You breathed it into me,
and You guard it while it is within me.
One day You will take it from me,
and restore it to me in the time to come.
As long as the soul is within me,
I will thank You,
LORD my God and God of my ancestors,
As You are Master of all works, LORD of all souls,
Ruler of all creations, Living and Enduring forever.
Blessed are You, LORD, who restores souls to lifeless bodies.

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experienced something, such as an act of nature (e.g., the blessing on hearing thunder) or eating (*Bircat HaMazon*) or the like. In the present case, however, we recite these blessings even if we have not experienced the occurrence ourselves. For example, if one were blind, one would still recite the blessing of פּוֹקֵחַ עִוְרִים, "Who opens the eyes of the blind"; if one was sick and stayed in one's pajamas all day, one would still recite מַלְבִּישׁ עֲרֻמִּים, "Who clothes the naked," etc. We thus begin our day with blessings for the many natural things in our lives that we and others derive benefit from. Imagine if you were unable to see, or couldn't straighten up in the morning, or didn't have clothes to wear; what would your life be like? Someone who reflects upon these things is able to start each day with a new appreciation for the things that we otherwise tend to take for granted. Each day is a new day, even if at first it may have felt the same as the day before. Each day represents a fresh slate, a new beginning.

HILKHOT TEFILLA • הלכות תפילה

ברכות השחר – *Morning Blessings.* In keeping with the origins of these *berakhot*, each individual is supposed to recite them on his or her own, preferably at home. Nevertheless, in deference to those who could not recite them by heart or who were not yet awake enough to focus, they were moved to the synagogue. Unlike in Ashkenazic practice where their recitation aloud often marks the beginning of the service, Sephardic communities generally do not begin the public service until closer to *Pesukei DeZimra*. These *berakhot*, then, remain part of the private domain, an opportunity for each individual to focus that much more on the praise and thanks for what they have.

ברכות השחר[עה]

אֱלֹהַי
נְשָׁמָה[עב] שֶׁנָּתַתָּ בִּי טְהוֹרָה.
אַתָּה בְרָאתָהּ, אַתָּה יְצַרְתָּהּ, אַתָּה נְפַחְתָּהּ בִּי
וְאַתָּה מְשַׁמְּרָהּ בְּקִרְבִּי
וְאַתָּה עָתִיד לִטְלָהּ מִמֶּנִּי וּלְהַחֲזִירָהּ בִּי לֶעָתִיד לָבוֹא.
כָּל זְמַן שֶׁהַנְּשָׁמָה בְּקִרְבִּי
מוֹדָה/*women* מוֹדָה/ אֲנִי לְפָנֶיךָ
יְהוָה אֱלֹהַי וֵאלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתַי
שֶׁאַתָּה הוּא רִבּוֹן כָּל־הַמַּעֲשִׂים, אֲדוֹן כָּל־הַנְּשָׁמוֹת
מוֹשֵׁל בְּכָל־הַבְּרִיּוֹת, חַי וְקַיָּם לָעַד
בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה, הַמַּחֲזִיר נְשָׁמוֹת לִפְגָרִים מֵתִים.

עיון תפילה • IYUN TEFILLA

אֱלֹהַי נְשָׁמָה – *My God, the soul.* We cannot see love or time or yearning, yet we know they exist. So, too, we cannot see the soul, but we know that it is there within us.

ביאור תפילה • BIUR TEFILLA

אַתָּה בְרָאתָהּ, אַתָּה יְצַרְתָּהּ – *You created it, You formed it. Bara*, "create," usually means creation out of nothing. *Yatzar* means to form something new from that which already exists. The first means that God created my soul in its body, as in all humans; the second means that He made me different from anyone else. I have different ideas and a unique personality. Thus, God created my soul in its body and then gave the soul its individual endowments. We are all created by God, yet we are all different, and hence we need both words (Rabbi Wohlgemuth).

עיון תפילה • IYUN TEFILLA

ברכות השחר – *Morning Blessings.* The Gemara (*Berakhot* 60b) rules that one should recite a blessing of praise upon every act related to getting up in the morning. These *berakhot*, with some exceptions, are what constitute the fifteen *Birkhot HaShaḥar* that appear here. Yet according to current practice, these blessings are unlike most other similar ones. For in general, we recite certain blessings of praise or thanks, *after* having

בָּרוּךְ Blessed are You, LORD our God, King of the Universe,
who gives the heart understanding[B]
to distinguish day from night.

Blessed are You, LORD our God, King of the Universe,
who gives sight to the blind.[A]

Blessed are You, LORD our God, King of the Universe,
who sets captives free.[I]

Blessed are You, LORD our God, King of the Universe,
who raises those bowed down.

Blessed are You, LORD our God, King of the Universe,
who clothes the naked.[I]

Blessed are You, LORD our God, King of the Universe,
who gives strength to the weary.

Blessed are You, LORD our God, King of the Universe,
who spreads the earth above the waters.

Blessed are You, LORD our God, King of the Universe,
who makes firm the steps of man.[I]

---

for granted. At the same time, is there some habit to which you feel bound? If I could only stop being lazy, overeating, staying up so late, wasting my time... This blessing says that freedom from bad habits is possible.

מַלְבִּישׁ עֲרֻמִּים – *Who clothes the naked.* On one level, we must be thankful that unlike so many other people in the world, we have clothes to wear, often an amazing collection of clothes when others have but one outfit they wear all of the time. But as well, we can be reminded that in an act of *ḥesed*, after Adam and Ḥava sinned, Hashem provided them with clothes since they were embarrassed by their nakedness. They had given in to their desires which then changed their perception of the world. Clothes remind us that we are not animals, that we can restrain ourselves with modesty. Another word for clothes is בֶּגֶד, the same root as the word "traitor." Clothes remind us not to betray our superiority over the animals.

IYUN TEFILLA • עיון תפילה

הַמֵּכִין מִצְעֲדֵי גָבֶר – *Who makes firm the steps of man.* Hashem cares about each individual and what you can accomplish in this world. He therefore grants each person only a certain number of steps in life. Make each step you take count today (based on *Shomer Emunim*, *hashgaḥa pratit*). The ability to walk comes from Him; the direction you take is up to you.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם
הַנּוֹתֵן לַשֶּׂכְוִי בִינָה[ב] לְהַבְחִין בֵּין יוֹם וּבֵין לָיְלָה.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם
פּוֹקֵחַ עִוְרִים.[א]

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם
מַתִּיר אֲסוּרִים.[ע]

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם
זוֹקֵף כְּפוּפִים.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם
מַלְבִּישׁ עֲרָמִים.[ע]

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם
הַנּוֹתֵן לַיָּעֵף כֹּחַ.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם
רוֹקַע הָאָרֶץ עַל הַמָּיִם.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם
הַמֵּכִין מִצְעֲדֵי גָבֶר.[ע]

BIUR TEFILLA • ביאור תפילה

הַנּוֹתֵן לַשֶּׂכְוִי בִינָה – *Who gives the heart understanding.* The word שֶׂכְוִי can mean rooster or it can mean the human heart. An animal with a brain the size of a pea, and the most intelligent species on the planet nevertheless share an intuitive sense of the world. There are different ways to "know" something to be true.

ANI TEFILLA • אני תפילה

פּוֹקֵחַ עִוְרִים – *Who gives sight to the blind.*
Try closing your eyes tight. Then open them. Then say this blessing.

IYUN TEFILLA • עיון תפילה

מַתִּיר אֲסוּרִים – *Who sets captives free.* This blessing was said when one stretched for the first time in the morning. The ability to stretch one's limbs should never be taken

Blessed are You, LORD our God, King of the Universe,
who has provided me with all I need.[IA]

Blessed are You, LORD our God, King of the Universe,
who girds Israel with strength.[B]

Blessed are You, LORD our God, King of the Universe,
who crowns Israel with glory.

Blessed are You, LORD our God, King of the Universe,
who has not made me a heathen.

Blessed are You, LORD our God, King of the Universe,
who has not made me a slave.[A]

BIUR TEFILLA • ביאור תפילה

אוֵזר יִשְׂרָאֵל בִּגְבוּרָה – *Who girds Israel with strength.* This blessing literally means "who girds Israel with heroism," which is different from the request for strength. "Heroic action means sacrificial action; if one does not sacrifice, he cannot be called a hero. A Jew may not be strong physically, but he can engage in heroic activity, and, indeed, has been engaging in heroic action for millennia... Jewish existence has been a heroic existence. Even today, our task is to defy everybody, which is a very difficult job and demands a great deal of heroism" (Rabbi J. B. Soloveitchik).

ANI TEFILLA • אני תפילה

שֶׁלֹּא עָשַׂנִי עָבֶד – *Who has not made me a slave.*

One day, and for days thereafter, in the Kovno Ghetto during the Nazi oppression, the ḥazzan Rabbi Avraham Yosef was leading the prayers, and when he got to this blessing he cried aloud to God in a bitter voice:

"How can I recite this blessing to You when we are imprisoned this way? How can I, a slave, recite the blessing of a free man, when death hangs over me, when I have no bread to eat? How can I recite the blessing 'who did not make me a slave?' I would be making fun of God were I to say it! My mouth and my heart would not be in accord." Rabbi Ephraim Oshry responded that the blessing is a reference to the fact that a Canaanite slave is not permitted to do miṣvot; that is why one thanks God, for the opportunity to do more miṣvot than others may be obligated to do. The blessing is therefore not about physical slavery at all but about spirituality. As such, Heaven forbid that one should stop saying this blessing! Let us be reminded and let the enemy see that despite the fact that they work us like slaves, we are still free, free to do miṣvot, and free to serve our Creator. (Responsa MiMa'amakim III:6)

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם
שֶׁעָשָׂה לִי כָּל־צָרְכִּי.א

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם
אוֹזֵר יִשְׂרָאֵל בִּגְבוּרָה.ב

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם
עוֹטֵר יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּתִפְאָרָה.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם
שֶׁלֹּא עָשַׂנִי גּוֹי. / *women* גּוֹיָה.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם
שֶׁלֹּא עָשַׂנִי עֶבֶד.א / *women* שִׁפְחָה.

IYUN TEFILLA • עיון תפילה

שֶׁעָשָׂה לִי כָּל־צָרְכִּי – *Who has provided me with all I need.* Almost all of the blessings are in the present tense yet this one is expressed in the past tense. Why not say "who gives me all I need"? Oftentimes sadness, hardship, and misfortune may appear to be filling up our lives but it truly is only later, further on down the road, that we can see that it all happened for a reason. Only then can we thank Hashem for what previously seemed to have been bad. A man could have found what seemed to be the perfect job: great pay, great location, and great facilities. He goes in for an interview, thinks he got the job, gets excited, and then finds out that he did not get the position. He is distraught, upset, and quite puzzled. Why would he want to thank God for all He does? Only after he gets his new job with better pay, a better location, and better facilities can he thank God for not granting him his originally desired position. Only then can he distinguish the forest from the trees. The siddur helps give perspective to our lives (Based on Rabbi A. Twerski).

ANI TEFILLA • אני תפילה

שֶׁעָשָׂה לִי כָּל־צָרְכִּי – *Who has provided me with all I need.*

The AR"I z'l said that there are souls that are naked and Hashem clothes them, there are souls that are tired and Hashem grants them strength. What does your soul need most today? (Ḥida, *Yosef Tehillot Tehilla 35*)

men: Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the Universe,
who has not made me a woman.

women: who has made me according to His will.

בָּרוּךְ Blessed are You, LORD our God, King of the Universe, who removes sleep from our eyes and slumber from our eyelids. And may it be Your will, LORD our God and God of our ancestors, to accustom us to Your Torah,[B] and make us attached to Your commandments. Lead us not into error, transgression, temptation or disgrace. Keep us far from the evil instinct and help us attach ourselves from the good instinct. Grant us love, grace, loving-kindness and compassion in Your eyes and in the eyes of all who see us, and bestow loving-kindness upon us. Blessed are You, LORD, who bestows loving-kindness on His people Israel.[I]

יְהִי רָצוֹן May it be Your will, LORD my God and God of my ancestors, to save me today and every day, from the arrogant and from arrogance itself, from a bad man, a bad woman, a bad instinct, a bad friend,[A] a bad neighbor, a bad mishap, from an evil eye, an evil tongue, from slander, lies, hatred of others, libelous plots, unnatural death, severe illness, pernicious events, a harsh trial and a harsh opponent, whether or not he is a son of the covenant, and from the judgment of Gehinnom. *Berakhot 16b*

IYUN TEFILLA • עיון תפילה

גּוֹמֵל חֲסָדִים טוֹבִים לְעַמּוֹ יִשְׂרָאֵל – *Who bestows loving-kindness on His people Israel.* There is a rule that the theme at the end of a "long" blessing must relate to the theme at the opening of the blessing. What is the connection here? We began by acknowledging that Hashem relieves us of sleepiness. We conclude by acknowledging that our ability to begin a new day, refreshed and alert, even if we are tired, is an act of *ḥesed* by God (Rabbeinu Tam, *Berakhot* 46a). Each day is a new adventure to be embraced and appreciated.

ANI TEFILLA • אני תפילה

מֵחָבֵר רָע – *A bad friend.* What is a bad friend? If he or she is really a friend, then how could they be bad?

men: בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם
שֶׁלֹּא עָשַׂנִי אִשָּׁה.

women: בָּרוּךְ שֶׁעָשַׂנִי כִּרְצוֹנוֹ.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, הַמַּעֲבִיר חֶבְלֵי שֵׁנָה מֵעֵינַי וּתְנוּמָה מֵעַפְעַפָּי. וִיהִי רָצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ, יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ וֵאלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ, שֶׁתַּרְגִּילֵנוּ בְּתוֹרָתֶךָ,ב וְתַדְבִּיקֵנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתֶיךָ, וְאַל תְּבִיאֵנוּ לִידֵי חֵטְא וְלֹא לִידֵי עֲבֵרָה, וְלֹא לִידֵי נִסָּיוֹן וְלֹא לִידֵי בִזָּיוֹן, וְתַרְחִיקֵנוּ מִיֵּצֶר הָרָע וְתַדְבִּיקֵנוּ בְּיֵצֶר הַטּוֹב, וּתְנֵנוּ לְאַהֲבָה לְחֵן וּלְחֶסֶד וּלְרַחֲמִים, בְּעֵינֶיךָ וּבְעֵינֵי כָל־רוֹאֵינוּ, וְגָמְלֵנוּ חֲסָדִים טוֹבִים. בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה, גּוֹמֵל חֲסָדִים טוֹבִים לְעַמּוֹ יִשְׂרָאֵל.ע

ברכות טז: יְהִי רָצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ, יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ וֵאלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ, שֶׁתַּצִּילֵנוּ הַיּוֹם וּבְכָל־יוֹם וָיוֹם מֵעַזֵּי פָנִים וּמֵעַזּוּת פָּנִים, מֵאָדָם רָע, מֵאִשָּׁה רָעָה, מִיֵּצֶר רָע, מֵחָבֵר רָע,א מִשָּׁכֵן רָע, מִפֶּגַע רָע, מֵעַיִן הָרָע, וּמִלָּשׁוֹן הָרָע, מִמַּלְשִׁינוּת, מֵעֲדוּת שֶׁקֶר, מִשִּׁנְאַת הַבְּרִיּוֹת, מֵעֲלִילָה, מִמִּיתָה מְשֻׁנָּה, מֵחֳלָיִם רָעִים, מִמְּקָרִים רָעִים, מִדִּין קָשֶׁה, וּמִבַּעַל דִּין קָשֶׁה, בֵּין שֶׁהוּא בֶן־בְּרִית וּבֵין שֶׁאֵינוֹ בֶן־בְּרִית, וּמִדִּינָה שֶׁל גֵּיהִנֹּם.

BIUR TEFILLA • ביאור תפילה

שֶׁתַּרְגִּילֵנוּ בְּתוֹרָתֶךָ – *To accustom us to Your Torah.* We ask that Hashem "accustom us to Torah" or "make Torah habitual for us." Perhaps it is a reference to the studying of Torah or perhaps it is about living our lives according to Torah values and commandments. Regardless, these things come about only when they become habits for us, things that we practice every day. "We are what we repeatedly do," said Aristotle. "Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit."

BLESSINGS OVER THE TORAH[I]

In Judaism, study is greater even than prayer. So, before beginning to pray, we engage in a miniature act of study, preceded by the appropriate blessings.

בָּרוּךְ Blessed are You, LORD our God, King of the Universe, *Berakhot 11b*
who has made us holy through His commandments,
and has commanded us about the words of Torah.

וְהַעֲרֶב נָא Please, LORD our God, make the words of Your Torah
sweet in our mouths and in the mouths of Your people,
the house of Israel,
so that we, our descendants, and their descendants
and the descendants of Your people, the house of Israel,
may all know Your name and study Your Torah for its own sake.
Blessed are You, LORD, who teaches Torah to His people Israel.

בָּרוּךְ Blessed are You, LORD our God, King of the Universe,
who has chosen us from all the peoples and given us His Torah.
Blessed are You, LORD, Giver of the Torah.

וַיְדַבֵּר The Lord spoke to Moshe, saying, *Num. 6*
"Speak to Aharon and his sons, saying:
Thus you shall bless the children of Israel. You shall say to them:
"May the LORD bless you[B] and protect you.
May the LORD make His face shine on you
and be gracious to you.
May the LORD turn His face toward you
and grant you peace'.
They shall place my name on the children of Israel,
and I will bless them."

---

challenge or for some other reward. As a result, Torah was devalued perhaps in their own eyes as well as in the eyes of others. In our own day, the equivalent might be studying Torah solely for grades or so that others might see us in a particular way. Saying *Birkhot HaTorah* first thing in the morning is thus a reminder that the things we are going to study today are a value in their own right.

BIUR TEFILLA • ביאור תפילה

יְבָרֶכְךָ יְהוָה – *May the LORD bless you.* We just recited blessings over Torah study. In order to ensure that the blessings not be in vain, the custom is to "learn" some Torah immediately after the recitation of the blessing.

ברכות התורה ע

In Judaism, study is greater even than prayer. So, before beginning to pray, we engage in a miniature act of study, preceded by the appropriate blessings.

ברכות יא:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם
אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ עַל דִּבְרֵי תוֹרָה.

וְהַעֲרֶב נָא יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ אֶת דִּבְרֵי תוֹרָתְךָ
בְּפִינוּ וּבְפִי עַמְּךָ בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל
וְנִהְיֶה אֲנַחְנוּ, וְצֶאֱצָאֵינוּ, וְצֶאֱצָאֵי צֶאֱצָאֵינוּ
כֻּלָּנוּ יוֹדְעֵי שְׁמֶךָ וְלוֹמְדֵי תוֹרָתְךָ לִשְׁמָהּ.
בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה, הַמְלַמֵּד תּוֹרָה לְעַמּוֹ יִשְׂרָאֵל.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם
אֲשֶׁר בָּחַר בָּנוּ מִכָּל־הָעַמִּים וְנָתַן לָנוּ אֶת תּוֹרָתוֹ.
בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה, נוֹתֵן הַתּוֹרָה.

במדבר ו

וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר:
דַּבֵּר אֶל־אַהֲרֹן וְאֶל־בָּנָיו לֵאמֹר
כֹּה תְבָרֲכוּ אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אָמוֹר לָהֶם:
יְבָרֶכְךָ יְהוָה וְיִשְׁמְרֶךָ:
יָאֵר יְהוָה פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ וִיחֻנֶּךָּ:
יִשָּׂא יְהוָה פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ וְיָשֵׂם לְךָ שָׁלוֹם:
וְשָׂמוּ אֶת־שְׁמִי עַל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַאֲנִי אֲבָרְכֵם:

עיון תפילה • IYUN TEFILLA

ברכות התורה – *Blessings over the Torah.* Rabbi Yehuda (*Nedarim* 81a) claims that the *Bet HaMikdash* was destroyed because people did not recite the *Birkhot HaTorah* before they learned. Why such a huge consequence for such a seemingly small omission? Rabbeinu Yona suggests that it was because the lack of a recitation of the blessing means that Torah was not being studied as a religious value. Perhaps those who studied did so for the respect it would bring them or just for the intellectual

אֲדוֹן עוֹלָם LORD of the Universe,
who reigned before the birth of any thing –

When by His will all things were made
then was His name proclaimed King.

And when all things shall cease to be
He alone will reign in awe.

He was, He is, and He shall be
glorious for evermore.

He is One, there is none else,
alone, unique, beyond compare;

Without beginning, without end,
His might, His rule are everywhere.

Without measure, without likeness,
or transformation, even slight;

Who could add or take away
from His great power and His might?

He is my God; my Redeemer lives.
He is the Rock on whom I rely –

My banner and my safe retreat,
my cup, my portion when I cry.

He is the Physician, He the Cure,
helping Hand, all-seeing Eye.

Into His hand my soul I place,
when I awake and when I sleep.

The LORD is with me, I shall not fear;
body and soul from harm will He keep.

(When He sends our savior soon,
in His House will I find joy again,

And in our Temple we shall sing
to His great name: Amen, Amen.)

אֲדוֹן עוֹלָם אֲשֶׁר מָלַךְ
בְּטֶרֶם כָּל־יְצִיר נִבְרָא

לְעֵת נַעֲשָׂה בְחֶפְצוֹ כֹּל
אֲזַי מֶלֶךְ שְׁמוֹ נִקְרָא

וְאַחֲרֵי כִּכְלוֹת הַכֹּל
לְבַדּוֹ יִמְלֹךְ נוֹרָא

וְהוּא הָיָה וְהוּא הֹוֶה
וְהוּא יִהְיֶה בְּתִפְאָרָה

וְהוּא אֶחָד וְאֵין שֵׁנִי
לְהַמְשִׁילוֹ לְהַחְבִּירָה

בְּלִי רֵאשִׁית, בְּלִי תַכְלִית
וְלוֹ הָעֹז וְהַמִּשְׂרָה

בְּלִי עֵרֶךְ, בְּלִי דִמְיוֹן
בְּלִי שִׁנּוּי וּתְמוּרָה

בְּלִי חִבּוּר, בְּלִי פִרּוּד
גְּדָל כֹּחַ וּגְבוּרָה

וְהוּא אֵלִי וְחַי גּוֹאֲלִי
וְצוּר חֶבְלִי בְּיוֹם צָרָה

וְהוּא נִסִּי וּמָנוֹסִי
מָנָת כּוֹסִי בְּיוֹם אֶקְרָא

וְהוּא רוֹפֵא וְהוּא מַרְפֵּא
וְהוּא צוֹפֶה וְהוּא עֶזְרָה

בְּיָדוֹ אַפְקִיד רוּחִי
בְּעֵת אִישַׁן וְאָעִירָה

וְעִם רוּחִי גְוִיָּתִי
יְהֹוָה לִי וְלֹא אִירָא

בְּמִקְדָּשׁוֹ תָּגֵל נַפְשִׁי
מְשִׁיחֵנוּ יִשְׁלַח מְהֵרָה

וְאָז נָשִׁיר בְּבֵית קָדְשִׁי
אָמֵן אָמֵן שֵׁם הַנּוֹרָא.