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Jewish Views on the Efficacy of Petitionary Prayer:

A Comparison of Classical Rabbinic and Medieval Sources

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Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Ordination

Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion

Cincinnati, Ohio 1996.

Referees: Dr. Richard S. Sarason
Dr. Barry Kogan

For my parents, Eric & Elaine Williams, who taught me to pray and, more importantly, to be careful what I pray for.

For my daughters, Jessica and Elizabeth, who are living proof of the efficacy of prayer, for they, thanks to God, are the answer to all of mine.

Acknowledgements

This thesis, in many respects, is the culmination of my education as a rabbinical student, although it is my goal to never cease learning. This thesis would never have been accomplished without the help and support of several special individuals. I wish to extend to them my sincerest thanks:

To my rabbis, Dr. Richard Sarason and Dr. Barry Kogan whose patience and gentle wisdom have guided me through this process.

To Roz Chaiken for her empathy and support.

To Jennifer and Carol, who give new meaning to the word "friends".

To Dr. Michael Meyer who, perhaps unknowingly, inspired me to look at my topic over a span of two time periods.

To my parents, who never stopped believing in me, even when I couldn't find the strength to believe in myself.

To my daughters Jessica and Elizabeth, who suffered through the writing of this thesis with uncommon grace and humour.

And to Deb Xander for her humour and the jelly beans.

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Jewish Views on the Efficacy of Petitionary Prayer:

A Comparison of Classical Rabbinic and Medieval Views

The Psalmist's characterization of God as שומע תפלה, the One who "hearkens to prayer" has found a place in the daily Amidah: *"Blessed are You, Eternal One, who hearkens to prayer."* But does God hearken to our prayers? Does this characterization imply that petitionary prayer is indeed efficacious? Under what circumstance and conditions will petitionary prayer be favourably received? By what criterion do we determine its efficacy?

This thesis discusses these questions, as they are addressed in some of the texts of our tradition. Specifically, halakhic Rabbinic texts were consulted to determine what the rabbis of Late Antiquity believed about the efficacy of statutory and private petitionary prayer. Then the perspective of two medieval theologians, Rabbi Judah Halevi and Rabbi Moses ben Maimon, were examined to determine if these beliefs had changed from one time period to the other.

What emerges is differing opinions among the rabbis of these time periods concerning the role of petitionary prayer in the life of the individual and his community. Furthermore, they interpreted efficacy in very different ways. Through prayer, the classical rabbis sought to approach the personal God of Scripture and the sacrificial cult, while the medieval rabbis attempted to establish either a personal or an intellectual bond with a God whom they characterized as a transcendent form-giving intellect. The rabbis of the

Rabbinic period could offer no guarantees for the tangible fulfillment of prayers, yet they were not prepared to divorce themselves from that understanding of efficacy either. They concluded that whether or not our prayers are directly and concretely fulfilled, we should continue praying -- including the praying of petitionary prayers. The medieval rabbis we have examined here, however, viewed prayer as an avenue to communion with the divine order. For them, the efficacy of petitionary prayer is determined by its ability to facilitate this experience. Apprehension of the deity, not seasonal rainful, the healing of the sick or the ingathering of exiles, is the goal of prayer in the medieval thinkers we have examined, even though they utter the same prayers as the rabbis who did seek fulfillment of these desires.

Introduction

Theological Implications of Petitionary Prayer

Prayer is, theologically speaking, very complex. It is both offering and request; blessing and thanksgiving; meditation and praise. It is a reflection, not only of what is in men's souls, but of our perceptions about our relationship to the sacred and the divine. Indeed, it is an expression of what we consider to be sacred and divine. It has been a part of man's religious expression since earliest times. It is a basic human experience. Broadly speaking, prayer may be described as an outpouring of the soul; an expression of joy, sorrow, and hope. It is, quite simply "*.... what man does when he recognises that he stands in the presence of God.*"[1]

In Greek, the word "to pray" means to wish or hope. In German, it is to beg. In Hebrew, however, the action of prayer, להתפלל, is a reflexive activity. It means to judge, or to judge oneself. Modern scholars typically understand it as an act of self-examination through which man pauses from daily routine to commune with God through self-evaluation and meditation on the realities of life.[2] But is all prayer self-evaluative, self-reflective, and meditative? Scholars typically identify different types of prayer based on their linguistic formulation, as well as by what the overall tone or intent of the prayer may be. The range of terms includes praise, thanksgiving,

1. Dudley Weinberg, "Efficacy of Prayer", in Jakob J. Petuchowski, ed., Understanding Jewish Prayer, (New York, KTAV, 1972), p. 124.
2. Solomon Colodner, Concepts and Values in Prayer, (New York, Cole Publications, 1972), p.6.

acknowledgement, supplication, ethical meditation, historical reminiscences, and formulations of fundamental principles of Judaism.

Jewish prayer incorporates all of these elements, sometimes as a specific prayer formula, and at other times as elements of another type of prayer. For example, ברכות and הלל are both forms of praise, although their linguistic formulation varies. In English we tend to identify supplication and petition as more or less the same type of prayer. In Judaism, however, they are identified by different terms, תחנון and בקשות respectively, and each follows a different formula for wording. Furthermore, there are formulations such as the אבות prayer which praises God by listing a series of divine attributes in mantra-like fashion, yet is build around historical references which serve to "remind" the deity of the merit of ancestors. On the surface, not all of these prayers appear to be reflective or meditational, nor do they seem to be directed toward the same purpose. Additionally, when one examines them critically from a philosophical or theological perspective, certain prayer formulations, notably petitionary prayer, present some unique and problematic questions.

To a certain extent, all prayer is fraught with theological difficulties. It is based on the premise that there exists a deity to whom the prayer is being addressed, and that the deity is aware of, or can be made aware of, human circumstances. Although sages, philosophers, and theologians have grappled with proofs for centuries, there is, in fact, no empirical, irrefutable evidence for the existence of such a deity. No one has successfully presented a proof that was without challenge.

Petitionary prayer in particular assumes not only the existence of a deity who is aware of human circumstances, but that this deity, when acceptably petitioned, will respond to and somehow ameliorate those circumstances. Jewish tradition is replete with tales of human appeal for divine mercy and of God's compassionate response to those appeals. The story of Hannah's prayer for a child (1 Samuel 1:11) and of Moses' plea in Miriam's behalf (Numbers 12:13), two of the more commonly known examples, clearly illustrate the biblical author's conviction that God not only hears but answers our prayers.

In the book of Psalms, God is described as שומע תפלה, the One who hearkens to prayer: "*All mankind comes to You, You who hearken to prayer*" (Psalms 65:3). This description has found expression in the liturgy, as part of the Amidah, where God is praised as the One who hearkens to the prayers of Israel.

But does being a God "who hearkens to prayer" mean that God always responds to our petitions and that the response will always be favourable? In Talmud Bavli, prayer is likened to a shovel that turns the grain from one place in a granary to another. Just as the shovel turns the grain, so too the prayer of the righteous turns the dispensations of God from a measure of anger to a measure of mercy (b. Yevamot 64a). Yet elsewhere in the Talmud we are admonished not to pray long and expect fulfillment. If we do so, all we can expect is "vexation of the heart" (b. Berakhot 32b).

So then, what does it mean to characterize God as שומע תפלה? Does this characterization of God mean that petitionary prayer is efficacious?

Scholars and laymen alike have concerned themselves with these questions for centuries. In order to successfully address these questions, however, one must also take into consideration several other concomittant issues. To begin with, even though Judaism has characterized its God as one who listens to prayer, one must also ask what is the theological basis for prayer? If we are to determine whether or not prayer is efficacious, we must also address the *means* as well as the circumstances under which prayer may be successfully offered. Furthermore, we must consider the definition of efficacy itself. That is, what do we mean when we say that prayer is efficacious? Does it imply direct, concrete fulfillment of a request to the deity? Is God at liberty to refuse or to answer in a fashion that is other than what is requested? If so, how is the worshiper to understand such replies? Does prayer offer the worshiper more than an opportunity to have wishes fulfilled and needs answered? Does prayer provide God with more than an opportunity to fulfill a convenantal obligation to His people?

The relationship between Israel and her God is an important factor in arriving at answers to these questions. While Israel's relationship with God has remained constant, it has not remained unchanged. The rabbinic texts reflect the concerns and theological dilemmas of their time. These concerns had great impact on the way the rabbis ritualized and formulated the wording of Jewish petitionary prayer. The roles they determined petitionary prayer would play in the life of the individual Jew and his community are also reflections of this relationship with God. Furthermore, they are indicative of the rabbinic attitudes regarding the content, nature, and efficacy of the prayers themselves. Similarly, the manner in which later generations interpreted Israel's relationship with God affected their understanding of, and

approach to, the offering of petitionary prayers. Through consideration of the views of two medieval theologians, Judah Halevi and Moses Maimonides, the changing perceptions with respect to God, prayer, and its efficacy will be discussed and analysed. While preliminary examination of these texts indicates that the rabbis from both of these historical periods shared some common views, the argumentations for their opinion often varies. This is, perhaps, a response to the religious leaders' concerns with respect to the particulars of their cultural, historical, and geographical situations.

Among Rabbinic texts, there is a wide range of relevant source material. The scope of texts under consideration here has been narrowed to the Mishnah, Tosefta, Talmud Yerushalmi, and Talmud Bavli. In the medieval period, discussion on prayer and its inherent value was enhanced and, to some extent, challenged by the resurgence of classical rationalist philosophy. This meant that the discussions about prayer were now also being approached from philosophical perspectives in addition to the more traditional halakhic and theological discussions. There is a plethora of texts written by various rabbis from which to choose. Again, the scope of discussion has been narrowed. Discussion here will be limited to the consideration of the Kuzari, by Judah Halevi, and the Guide for the Perplexed and the Mishneh Torah, by Moses Maimonides.

By comparing the views of rabbis from two different time periods we begin to develop a picture of the evolution of Jewish perspectives on the efficacy of petitionary prayer and, hopefully, to address the theological conundrums which petitionary prayer presents to both worshiper and sage.

Classical Rabbinic Texts:

Jewish Petitionary Prayer of Late Antiquity

Historical and Theological Context of Public Petitionary Prayer

Discussions of prayer appear in the earliest rabbinic sources -- the Mishnah, Tosefta, and both the Talmud Bavli and the Talmud Yerushalmi -- which took on their unique literary forms during the first six centuries of the common era.[1] The content of these documents reflects not only the issues of the redactors in their day, but contains a legacy of thought, ideals and practices handed down from earlier generations of the rabbinic movement. Within these texts there are dozens of statements from the Tannaim and Amoraim ascribing ancient origins to the custom of public statutory and fixed prayer. The Bavli tells us that "the men of the Great Assembly ordained benedictions and prayers, קדושות and הבדלות for Israel" (b. Berakhot 33a). In b. Megillah 18a the Talmudic sages declare, "One hundred and twenty elders, among whom were several prophets instituted the Eighteen Benedictions, and arranged them in their proper order." Indeed both the Yerushalmi and the Bavli contain statements that retroject the custom of fixed daily prayer even further in Israel's history. The Yerushalmi credits Moses with ordaining the form of prayer (Y. Berakhot 7:11c) and the Bavli establishes the daily prayers as having been instituted by the Patriarchs

1. The Mishnah is generally assumed to have been redacted around the turn of the third century; the Tosefta sometime during the third century; the Talmud Yerushalmi during the fourth and fifth centuries, and the Talmud Bavli, around the fifth and sixth centuries of the common era.

(b. Berakhot 26b). Finally, in an historically more credible statement regarding the redaction of daily prayer, the Bavli tells us that the Eighteen Benedictions were placed "in their proper order in the presence of Rabban Gamliel at Yavneh" (b. Berakhot 28b).[2]

Although some contemporary scholars have expressed views to the contrary, these statements combined seem to indicate that public prayer was not inaugurated by the great leaders of the past, but rather instituted and to some extent formulated by the Rabbis in the generations that followed the destruction of the Temple. Today, most scholars agree that the Eighteen Benedictions as a unit did not exist before the year 70 C.E.

While the Temple was still standing, public prayers played a supplementary or complementary role in the religious life of our ancestors. Prayer and sacrifice were considered correlative to one another. Indeed there are several non-biblical sources from that era, such as the Book of Judith and the writings of Josephus, which affirm that it was the custom of worshippers to recite their prayers at precisely those times when the daily sacrifices were being offered up and the incense burned in the Temple. Nevertheless, up until the time the Temple fell, layman and priest alike relied on the sacrificial cult as the prime contact between Israel and her God. One of the most important rites for the average Israelite in the Second Temple period was that of making offerings to expiate sins. In the ancient near eastern milieu it was firmly believed that, without God's blessing, rains could

2. Joseph Heinemann, Prayer in the Talmud, Richard S. Sarason, trans., (New York, Walter De Gruyter, 1977), p. 13.

falter, crops would fail, and flocks and herds, as well as household members, could find themselves afflicted with all manner of plagues. That being the case, the loss of the Temple sacrificial cult created just as much of a crisis for the layman as it did for the sage.

With the loss of the priestly cult, it was clear that the leaders of the day had to devise a way for Israel to maintain its channel of communication with God and, in so doing, to safeguard the integrity of the covenant with God, which was now in doubt in many people's minds. Integral to that preservation was the forging of new links between the people and their God. These new links took the form of public statutory prayer -- the Amidah.

But in order for these links to be established, the rabbis had to answer a fundamental theological question: would God indeed hear and respond to the prayers and petitions of Israel? During the Temple period, the Israelites understood that the acceptance of both prayer and sacrificial offering was contingent upon God's "dwelling" within the Temple. Once the Temple was razed, however, the שכינה (God's indwelling presence) was understood to have been withdrawn from Israel, raising the question of whether or not God would indeed continue to hear and respond to the prayers and petitions of Israel. The Rabbis were quick to establish both the validity and the obligatory status of petitionary prayer. In T. Berakhot 4:3, Rabban Gamliel explicitly states that it is the obligation of every man "to pray the Eighteen Benedictions (the Amidah) every day". Even though the cult sacrifical rites had traditionally been performed only by the Temple priests on behalf of all Israel, every male Jew over the age of thirteen years was now considered obligated for participation in daily communal prayer. Sifre Deuteronomy

(Pisqa 41), an early midrashic commentary, clearly identifies the "worship of the heart" (העבודה שבלב) with the recitation of prayer. In this context, God is portrayed as satisfied with words of prayer alone, rather than the sacrifices that were typically understood as the definition of עבודה (worship).

The sages and rabbis of late antiquity assured the disoriented populace that prayers could and would indeed be heard and in the process changed the focal point of communal religious ritual. They enjoined Israel to

> seek the Lord where he may be found (Isaiah 55:6) -- and where may he be found? In the synagogues and the houses of study! Call upon him when he is near -- and where is he near? [In the synagogues and the houses of study! (Y. Berakhot 5:8d)

Prayers would continue to be offered and heard, not at the Temple Mount, but in the study halls and synagogues of Palestine and the diaspora communities.

The transition from sacrifice to prayer, from Temple altar to synagogue and house of study signalled a change in the role of the individual in the religious life of Israel as well. The religious service of Israel in effect became democratized, as it moved away from dependence upon the cultic priests and slaughtered animals as intermediaries before God toward an emphasis on communal prayer services, and the active role of the individual .[3] As previously noted, the sacrifical rites of the ancient Temple had been enacted *only* by the priests on behalf of the individual or

3. Heinemann, ibid.

community who brought the offerings. In public prayer services this element was, to some extent, preserved by the שליח ציבור who recited the prayers, for those who were unable to recite them. By listening intently, and intoning "Amen" at the conclusion of the prayer, worshipers are considered to have fulfilled their obligation with respect to this commandment. However, passive participation was not the goal of the public prayer service. Rather, the Rabbis envisioned and encouraged individuals to became active participants in the service, praying as individual members of the community for the needs of the community as a whole. This was the age in which the "core of Jewish spirituality was made portable"[4] and the liturgy of the Jewish people would enter its most formative stage of growth.

The earliest rules about the formulation of the Amidah stem from the Yavnean period between the wars of 70 and 135 C.E. During the Tannaitic period the number and the overall theme of the individual benedictions became more or less standard, although their exact formulation was not entirely fixed until much later in history. The association with the ancient cult is thematically a close one. Just as the Temple rite involved regular, statutory offerings at set times of the day and seasons of the year, so too the Amidah came to incorporate set prayers and petitions for each day and for special seasons and occasions during the year. Just as there were offerings in the Temple as tribute and thanks to God, the Amidah incorporated expressions of praise and thanksgiving. Just as certain offerings were designated as expiation for sins and pleas for deliverance, so too the

4. Tzvee Zahavy, Studies in Jewish Prayer, (New York, University Press of America, Inc.), p. 44

intermediate benedictions of the Amidah came to incorporate these themes. Furthermore, just as the individual could bring personal offerings to the altar in Jerusalem to plea for divine intervention, so too the individual could now bring personal offerings of the heart to the "altars" of the synagogue and house of study. By associating the benedictions of the Amidah with the ancient Temple rites, they became a worthy and acceptable substitute, not only in the eyes of God, but, more importantly, in the eyes of those who were to utter them, be they sage, student, or layman.

For the modern religious Jew, the idea of the synagogue as the focal point for religious life and the concept of prayer as an offering of the heart (עבודה שבלב) in the same way that a sacrifice had been an offering to God are neither new nor controversial. But to the Jews of the early rabbinic era, they must have been both. Synagogues and houses of study had been in existence prior to the Temple's destruction, but now, in place of the Temple, these institutions emerged from their secondary status to become the primary locus of communal religious activity for the community of Jews in the diaspora and the remnant communities in what was now Palestine.

Historical and Theological Context of Personal Petitionary Prayer

The association between prayer and sacrificial ritual was not restricted to statutory prayers such as the Amidah. Personal prayer was also legitimized through associations with Temple rites. Individuals in the post-Temple era could offer personal supplications before God, in the form of blessings and petitionary prayers, in much the same way that personal

offerings had been brought to the Temple altar in days of old. In ancient times, a tithe from the earth's produce was brought to the Temple as an offering to God. The priests recited benedictions and burnt a portion on the altar. The remainder was then consumed by the priests and their families. Building on this model, the rabbis came to identify the recitation of appropriate blessings prior to the performance of an action, regardless of how mundane, as a way of acknowledging God's sovereignty. Eating food without first reciting a prayer over it came to be considered an act of sacrilege. Since the earth and all its produce is the property of God, the consumption of animal or vegetable without first reciting benediction was tantamount to misappropriating God's property (T. Berakhot 4:1). These broad verbal formulations, which gradually became standardized over time formed a system of benedictions which elevated even the most mundane parts of daily existence, endowing them with some level of sanctity, of sacredness. All of an individual's prayers, meals, and other religious obligations were now thought of as comprising parts of a much larger system.

In addition to the formalization of the public prayer service and the berakhot recited in conjunction with the fulfillment of biblical commandments, the rabbis also began to formalize the offering of personal petitionary prayer. As the Amidah gradually became fixed in structure and content, focussing on the general welfare of the community, it became apparent that the needs of the individual must also be addressed. Therefore, time was set aside for personal petitions after the recitation of the Amidah.

However, finding the appropriate words for communion with the Divine does not come easily to everyone. Disciples of the great rabbis began taking note of the personal prayers their masters offered during the period of the worship service devoted to private prayer. Many of these are recounted in the Talmud, each one introduced by the formula, "Rabbi X, after his Prayer (i.e., the Amidah), said the following..." and the petition itself beginning with the formula, "May it by Thy will, O Lord our God...".[5] Their content often reflects the historical era in which they were framed -- a time of great peril, when Jews lived at the mercy of foreign (non-Jewish) neighbours and governors both inside and outside of Palestine -- although they also reflect the common existential, personal difficulties, and uncertainties of life in Late Antiquity in general. They range from simple wayfarers' petitions that they enter and leave cities unharmed to petitions for safety from the strangers among whom they now dwelt:

> "May it be Your will, O Lord my God, that I enter (the city) in peace" (T. Berakhot 6:16);
>
> "May it be Your will, O Lord my God, to cause me to enter (the bathhouse) in peace and to come out in peace, and may no mishap be caused by me" (ibid., 17)
>
> "May it be Your will, O Lord our God and God of our fathers, that no harm may enter men's hearts against us..." (Y. Berakhot 4:7d).

Still others addressed specific perils faced by an individual, such as supplications for healing in addition to those found in the Amidah: "May it be Your will, ... that this operation be a cure for me" (b. Berakhot 60a).

5. Petuchowski, Understanding Jewish Prayer, p. 11.

Several of these private prayers ultimately found their way into various rubrics of the public prayer service. For example, the private prayer of Mar, the son of Ravina, "My God, keep my tongue from evil..." has been a part of the Jewish worship service since its inclusion in Rav Amram Gaon's order of prayer in the ninth century. It was placed immediately after the Amidah, momentarily delaying the time for personal prayer. Over time, more and more of these once-private petitions found their way into the prayer service as a part of the fixed liturgy, although still varying widely in content. The expansion of these formulaic petitions notwithstanding, free prayer has continued to have a place in the traditional Jewish worship service.[6]

There is, however, a very important caveat to these prayers -- one is not to rely solely upon them for beneficence or for protection against evil. Implicit in this is the requirement for human action. For example, while offering supplication for healing is considered appropriate, the one who is ill is nevertheless required to seek a cure. Hence, the prayer cited above which asks that the operation be the cure. Similarly, with regard to the recitation of the daily statutory prayers during one's travels, one is enjoined to take steps to safeguard one's life. Stopping by the roadside, where one is likely to fall prey to bandits, in order to fulfill the requirement of daily worship is not considered praiseworthy or a sign of appropriate piety by the rabbis. Indeed, it was viewed as folly on the part of the worshiper (b. Berakhot 32b). While the worshiper is always welcome and even encouraged to appeal to God for beneficence, he is not at liberty to leave everything up to God. God acts

6. Petuchowski, ibid, p. 12.

within the natural order, not outside of it. To expect the latter is deemed to be folly and not an expression of piety. The individual, therefore, is required to act in his own behalf *in conjunction* with the recitation of his prayers. This includes taking steps such as the consultation of a surgeon to cure an illness or the abbreviation of the daily prayers in order to speedily resume one's journey and not fall victim to bandits along the road.

The obligation for blessing is not limited solely to expressions of thanks for God's beneficence, however. In M. Berakhot 9:5, we are told that it is the individual's "... duty to bless (God) for misfortune even as he blesses (God) for good fortune, for it is said, And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. (Deut. 6:5)". The paradigmatic example for fulfillment of this commandment may be found in the story of Rabbi Akiva who was arrested for defying Imperial Rome's edict against the teaching of the Torah and martyred by them in 135 C.E. Akiva is reputed to have been preparing to recite the Shema even at the hour in which he was being tortured to death. His disciples asked him whether this was not too extreme an interpretation of accepting the yoke of Heaven (fulfilling the commandments), but Akiva countered with an exposition of the Biblical proof text cited above: "All my days I have been troubled by this verse 'with all your soul', which I have interpreted as meaning "even if He takes your soul'," which is in keeping with the Mishnah's interpretation of this text. Akiva continues, "But I said, When shall I have an occasion to fulfill the precept? Now that I have the occasion, shall I not fulfill it?" As the legend continues, Akiva proceeded with his recitation of the Shema, focussing only on the prayer and holding the last word, "One", until his very last breath.

Keva, Kavanah, Danger and Vanity:

Form and Function of Jewish Petitionary Prayer

As previously noted, the formulation of statutory prayers, public or private, goes beyond the mere association of prayer with ancient Temple rites. By establishing the offering of prayer as the mandated, acceptable, ritual equivalent of the sacrifices, the sages endowed the prayers with the same power as had previously been accorded to those sacrificial offerings. And by placing the offering of prayer in the hands of the entire community, the rabbis endowed the individual worshipper with a direct role in determining the fate of his community in its relationship with God.

In the time of the Temple, only the priest was allowed to enter the Holy of Holies. Entering this sacred space was fraught with dangers, however. An inappropriate offering, a word mispronounced, or a priest who was deemed unworthy, could result in the death of the priest and/or punishment inflicted on the entire community. So, too, now, was this the case for the emerging practices in communal worship. There was a keen awareness that prayer, ritual, even study of Torah-text meant engaging on an intimate level with the Divine. Engagement with the Divine through prayer brought with it new concerns about the leadership, wording, timing, and etiquette of prayer offerings. The rabbis debated the merits of fixed prayer (קבע) versus the desire to allow for fluidity and personal expression on some level, and weighed in the effect of the intent behind one's prayers (כוונה) on the acceptability and efficacy of those prayers as the non-cultic Jewish liturgy began to take shape.

In M. Berakhot 4:4, Rabbi Eliezer begins with the statement, "He whose prayer is fixed, his prayer is not supplication." This statement should not, however be interpreted as an argument against a fixed Amidah, or a standardized liturgy as a whole. On the contrary, the issue being addressed in this early halakhic discussion, is actually that of כוונה. By "fixed" R. Eliezer is referring to those who make the offering of prayer a perfunctory act rather than approaching prayer with the appropriate sense of reverence and awe associated with standing before God. In the Bavli, this is further emphasized with the edict, "One should not stand up to say the Amidah except in a reverent frame of mind" (b. Berakhot 30b). It is clear, therefore, that the rabbis understood כוונה to mean more than simple concentration and קבע to mean more than a fixed series of prayers to be recited by rote. True כוונה, in the eyes of the Rabbis, meant creating a heightened state of awareness of one's own relationship to the Divine and the limits of that relationship. In part, the aim of the fixed prayer was to provide man with a stimulus to turn his thoughts to God, to approach the Deity with the correct sense of awe and reverence. Furthermore, the fixed liturgy lays out bona fide petitions for protection, prosperity, etc., in addition to allowing the individual and the community as a whole the opportunity to make an offering to God in the tradition of the ancient Temple cult. The offering in this instance is that of the lips, heart and soul.

The replication of cultic ritual on a formal level serves to establish communal patterns for worship. The public, standardized prayer brings everyone together reciting the same words at the same time to ensure that the petitions offered are correct in form and content, and the appropriate etiquette of the prayer service is observed. In this setting, prayer is a

collective experience. Like the sacrifices of the ancient Temple, it is offered on behalf of the entire community. The individual is to see himself as part of the collective. Hence, the requirement for a minyan for the performance of certain public rituals and prayers. The rules and rituals surrounding the recitation of prayers (i.e., the קבע) serve to help create this heightened sense of community. When true כונה is achieved, the formalized prayer service removes the individual from the realm of the mundane and the routine, elevating his thoughts and feelings to the level of the Divine and the Absolute.[7]

But, once we have turned our thoughts to the Divine, the question remains, what constitutes appropriate supplicatory prayer? The rabbis argued that great care had to be taken with respect to the wording, intent, and timing of prayers, even going so far as to address what language should be used for personal petitions: "R. Judah said: 'A man should never pray for his needs in Aramaic. R. Yohanan said: 'When a man prays for his needs in Aramaic, the ministering angels, who do not understand Aramaic, will not respond to him" (b.Shabbat 12b). The underlying notion here is that the angels are thought to act as intermediaries or intercessors in humanity's behalf. Interestingly enough, this did not prevent the formulation of various forms of the Kaddish, which are essentially litanies of praise, from being standardized in Aramaic. Nevertheless, the examples of petitionary prayers, particularly the public, statutory petitions, we find in the Rabbinic sources, and within the traditional prayerbooks, are in the language of the

7. Heinemann, Prayer in the Talmud, p. 18.

Torah (i.e., Hebrew). The use of Aramaic as a language for prayer is permitted only for subsidiary prayers, not the statutory liturgy.

What then, do the rabbis regard as vain, foolish, or inappropriate prayer? Praying for something that can be resolved by human action is considered foolish, as related in a story from Y. Sanhedrin 10:5, 29c in which Antoninus asks Rabbi Yehudah Hanasi to pray on his behalf. Rabbi responds, "May it be (God's) will that you will be delivered from cold." Antoninus declares that the prayer "makes no sense. Add a garment and the cold goes away." That is, why pray for something we can immediately remedy ourselves? Rabbi concurs, praying, "May it be that you be delivered from dry heat." This prayer makes sense to Antoninus because, as it says in Psalms 19:7, "Nothing can escape the sun's heat."

In the case of personal petitions (prayers one offers in one's own behalf) the Rabbis warn against requests that would tempt fate. In b. Moed Katan 18b, we are are told of Rabbah overhearing a young man seeking (God's) mercy and pleading, "May a certain girl become my wife". Rabbah warns him, "Do not seek mercy in this way," because if the girl is meant for him, she will be his; and if not, the man runs the risk of being tempted to "deny the Lord" out of frustration at not having his plea answered to his satisfaction. The lesson is hard learned, however, because after the young man has indeed married the girl, Rabbah overhears him praying that either he die before her or she die before him. Rabbah then said to the young man, "Did I not tell you that you should not have prayed as you did?"

Similarly, in M. Berakhot 9:3, the sages declare, "...one who cries out over a past occurence, this is a vain prayer." The Mishnah illustrates this point by citing the example of a man returning home from a journey who hears a cry of alarm coming from his city and utters the prayer, "May it be the will (of God) that they (who are crying out) are not of my household." The point here is that God will not/cannot undo what is already done -- thus this is an idle prayer. In the Yerushalmi discussion on this mishnah, the sages state that it is better to utter the affirmation "I am sure that they do not come from my house," thus demonstrating one's faith in God (Y.Berakhot 9:3). Another example of prayer uttered in vain is the case of man whose wife is pregnant and he prays, "May it be the will (of God) that my wife give birth to a son." The Talmud Yerushalmi expands on this mishnah with a brief debate between R. Judah b. Pazzi and the House of Yannai, the former arguing that at no time should one utter such prayers because God may change the sex of the fetus at any time prior to birth, and the latter arguing that one may indeed offer such a prayer prior to the final stages of labour. Y. Berakhot 9:3 continues with an astonishing example of a prayer gone wrong. Rabbi Yehudah, in the name of the school of Yannai, taught that, in utero, Jacob's daughter, Dinah, had actually been a male child. After Rachel prayed, however, the unborn child was changed into a female. He supports this with the verse from Genesis 30:21 which states: "Afterwards she bore a daughter...". "Afterwards" is understood as *after* Rachel's prayer, which implies, of course, that *some* prayers are efficacious. Clearly, the rabbis are warning us to be careful about what we pray for.

But the rabbis also address this issue from the other side of the coin. They cite examples of petitionary prayer that is appropriate, such as prayers

of intercession offered for the benefit of others. M. Berakhot recalls an incident from the wilderness experience in the Book of Exodus, following the construction of the golden calf. After the calf is built and the divine anger has been kindled, God demands of Moses: "Let me alone that I may destroy them" (Deut.9:14). Moses realises that averting complete destruction of Israel is dependent upon his actions, and "immediately he (Moses) stood up and prayed vigorously and begged for mercy" (b. Berakhot 32a).

Continuing in this vein, b. Baba Kamma 92a, in a discussion between Rabba and Rabbah b. Mari, teaches: "... one who solicits mercy for his fellow while he himself is in need of the same thing, (will be answered first)". This is based on the biblical passage, "And the Lord changed the fortune of Job when he prayed for his friends" (Job 17:10), according to Rabbah b. Mari, although Rabbah bases the proof for this on Abraham's prayer for the recovery of Avimelech and his wives and concubines who became pregnant in Genesis 20, which is followed by Sarah's pregnancy in Genesis 21. Accordingly, the literature is replete with examples of petitionary prayers to be offered by individuals for the betterment of the community and the lot of Israel as a whole. The following are a few illustrations:

> "May it be thy will, O Lord, our God and God of our fathers,
> to dispose our hearts to return in perfect repentence"
> (Y. Berakhot 4:7);
>
> "May it be thy will, ... to utterly vanquish and remove
> from our hearts the yoke of the inclination to do evil"
> (ibid);
>
> "May it be thy will, ... to cause love and brotherhood
> to dwell in our midst..." (ibid);

"May it be thy will, ...to look upon our shame and to behold our misfortune..." (ibid);

"May it be thy will, O Lord, ... that we do no sin nor bring upon ourselves shame or disgrace before our fathers" (b. Berakhot 16b)

"May it be thy will, O Lord, ... that Your Torah be our occupation" (ibid).

Conversely, in b. Baba Kamma 92b, R. Hanan teaches that it is equally important for us not to pray against our fellow man. R. Hanan taught "He who invokes the judgment of Heaven against his fellow is himself punished first." R. Isaac furthers this point by adding,

> ... both the one who cries (supplicates, petitions) for Divine intervention and the one against whom it is invoked come under scriptural threat, but punishment is first meted out to the one who cries, (and is) more severe than the one against whom justice is invoked....

Similarly, the individual is also admonished not to be self-centred in the formulation of his personal petitions. Y. Yoma 5:3 relates an unusual story of the High Priest in the Temple on Yom Kippur who, in addition to the prayers for material and spiritual blessing to be bestowed upon Israel in the coming year, asks God to ignore the prayer of the wayfarers. Why, one might ask, would ancient Israel's highest religious official make such a petition? Quite simply, because the wayfarer's prayer was considered contrary to the needs of the general populace. Travellers on the open roads are understandbly hampered by the heavy rains that fall in the winter season. Hence, the wayfarers naturally pray for the witholding of the rains to ensure drier, safer roads for travel. But ancient Israel was an agrarian society, dependent upon the rains for irrigation and, hence, for bountiful harvests.

Were the Deity to grant the wayfarer's petition, the rest of Israel would be condemned to drought and famine. The High Priest's prayer is thus directed at counteracting the petition of the wayfarers to ensure the welfare of all of Israel. But his prayer is also a condemnation of those who would place personal interest over national concerns. Prayer, we are taught -- even our most private, personal petitionary prayers -- should never be an act of selfishness. Rather, it is *selflessness* which is deemed meritorious and an appropriate approach to petitionary prayer.[8]

Also of importance to the notion of an acceptable petition is the merit of the one offering the prayer. We have above the paradigmatic example of Moses, who prayed on behalf of the Israelites in the wilderness. While few, if any, rabbinic sages would have credited themselves as being worthy of the same merit as Moses or any of the patriarchs, the merit of the supplicant is as important as the merit of those for whom it is offered. Such is the case for the statutory public petitions of the Amidah, for communal petitions in times of strife, and for personal suppplications. Hearkening back somewhat to the role of the priest who offered up sacrifices for the benefit of the individual and the community, the communal service leader (שליח ציבור or ש"ץ) offers prayers or, at the very least, leads the community in the appropriate prayer offerings before God. The rabbis argued that great caution must be exercised both in the recitation of the Amidah and in the selection of the service leader. M. Ta'anit 2:2 advises that on a fast day which has been declared on account of drought the ש"ץ should be someone with children because such a person's petitions will be more impassioned,

8. Petuchowski, ibid, p. 38.

urgent and more likely to be heard and answered by God. Lastly, in M. Berakhot 5:5, we are warned that "if one who is praying makes a mistake (in the recitation of the prayer), it is a bad sign (omen) for him. If he is a communal leader then it is a bad omen for those whom he leads." Referring back to the example of Moses as communal leader, R. Yochanan stated:

> If a man makes his petition depend on his own merit, heaven makes it depend on the merit of others; and if he makes it depend on the merit of others, heaven makes it depend on his own merit. (b. Berakhot 10b)

Yochanan explains that Moses had recalled to God the merit of the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob with whom the covenant had previously been made. But, Yochanan determines that, ultimately, Scripture made the petition's outcome dependent not upon the merit of the fathers (זכות אבותינו) but rather upon Moses' own merit. Citing Psalms 106:23 as his proof text, R. Yochanan argues, "He said that He would have destroyed them, had not Moses His chosen stood before Him in the breach, to turn away His wrath....".

Clearly these statements are an injunction against praying for inappropriate ends. But they are also a subtle warning against invocation of the Holy Name (i.e., the Tetragrammaton) without due consideration to the risk to one's own welfare. It is indeed a forceful testament to the power attributed by the rabbis to petitionary prayer when one realises that one's own wellbeing is considered to be just as affected as the welfare of the one for whom or against whom a petition is offered.

Inherent in the offering of petitionary prayers is an etiquette, somewhat reminiscent of a kingly court, which is played out in the "choreography" of public prayer services as well as the specific wording of the prayers themselves. With respect to the Amidah, R. Hanina explains:

> in the first ones (benedictions) he (the worshipper) is the same as a servant who is praising his master; in the middle ones, he is the same as a servant who requests benificence from his master and in last one he is the same as who has received beneficence from his master. (b. Berakhot32a)

Within the framework of the Amidah's fixed prayers, there is an opportunity to insert petitions. In b. Berakhot 32a Rab Judah is recorded as establishing the place for such petitions in between the first three and last three benedictions. Following R. Hanina's paradigm of the servant asking for and receiving from his master beneficence, b. Berakhot 16b-17a records the private prayers of rabbis dating back to the days of the academy at Yavneh, most of them beginning with the familiar יהי רצון, "May it be Your will..." formula:

> " May it be Your will that You .... cause to dwell in our lot love and brotherhood and peace and friendship...." (R. Eleazar);
>
> "... look upon our shame and behold our evil plight..." (R. Yohanan)
> " .... [grant] long life of health, goodness, blessing, sustenance, bodily vigour, in which there is fear of sin, free from shame and confusion, of riches and honour, in which we may be filled with the love of Torah and the fear of heaven, and in which any wish for goodness will be granted by God" (Rab).

In each case, the rabbi's personal prayer at the end of the Amidah is a request for the betterment of the human condition in general and an easing of Israel's plight in particular. More importantly, this petition is not made for the welfare of the petitioner alone, nor solely in behalf of any specific individual. Rather, the individual prays for his own benefit, but within the context of the community of Israel. Because these personal prayers are offered within the body of the public prayer service, they do not individually incorporate the format of praise, petition, followed by thanksgiving that is the established paradigm of the Amidah. Since the actual request from the individual tends to come at the very beginning of the personal prayer, without the prefatory words of praise, it was deemed unfitting for an individual to use language which was aggressive and demanding in style. It should be noted, however, that imperative prayer forms were not entirely abandoned, even in the case of personal prayer. Nevertheless, as previously illustrated, the יהי רצון מלפניך, "May it be Your will" model, an indirect passive formulation, became prevalent wording for such prayers.[9]

While the establishment of set forms even in private prayers may seem to negate heartfelt expression, it is important to remember that the קבע provides the pathway for the כונה. The יהי רצון מלפנך formula affords the worshipper the security of knowing how to begin his petition when emotional or intellectual circumstances might be such that he is incapable of formulating a petition of his own. At the same time, it gives him the peace of mind that he is, indeed, "praying appropriately".

9. Heinemann, Prayer in the Talmud, pp. 184-88.

Returning briefly to the concept of the "etiquette" of prayer, it is important to note that generally it is considered inappropriate to merely offer petitions before God and then depart the sanctuary. To do so would be akin to entering a royal court, making a demand of the king and then immediately departing. Without appropriate greetings and thanks, such behaviour would be considered a rude intrusion upon the court's daily workings, as well as an act of impudence vis a vis the King. So too with the offering of petitions, private or public, before God in the sanctuary. While personal petitions themselves may simply incorporate the "May it be the will..." introductory clause followed by the petition, they are nevertheless framed within the body of the entire prayer service which *does* include the praise and thanksgiving offerings appropriate to the Heavenly Sovereign, thereby eliminating the risk of committing an affront to the Deity.

The Rabbinic tradition expounds on the appropriate rituals surrounding the recitation of the Amidah and other obligatory prayers. These statements reflect the courtly etiquette suggested above and extend beyond language choice to the physical actions of the one who is at prayer. In b. Berakhot 24b the Rabbis remark: "He who makes his voice heard during his Prayer [Amidah] is of those whose faith is small. He who raises his voice during his Prayer is at one with false prophets." The thinking here is that in raising one's voice, there is an underlying assumption that God would not hear otherwise. The dignity of the one who is at prayer was also taken into consideration when establishing the silent recitation of the Amidah. b. Sotah 32b records the following from R. Yohanan in the name of R. Simeon b. Yochai: "Why was it instituted that the Prayer be spoken in a whisper? In order not to embarrass transgressors [confessing their transgressions], for

Scripture does not provide one place on the altar for a burnt offering and another place for a sin offering." That is, since both offerings are made in the same place, onlookers cannot tell which offering is which. The same sense of 'anonymity' is being preserved here in the offering of prayer in public. The Tosefta supports silence in the offering of personal petitions, citing the biblical example of Hannah praying silently for a son.

In T. Berakhot 3:4-6, there is an extended discussion regarding the appropriate way to pray the Amidah which once again focuses on the כוונה of the one who is at prayer. It begins with the statement from the Mishnah: "He who recites the Prayer [Amidah] must concentrate" (b. Berakhot 5:5). This is expanded upon by recalling the practices of Rabbi Akiva who, according to Rabbi Yehuda, would begin in one corner of the room and, through the course of his prayers, end in another corner, "on account of his (repeated) bowing and prostration (during the course of the prayer)."

Posture was also taken into consideration by the sages. Bavli Yevamot 105b records a discussion concerning where one's eyes should be directed during prayer. The discussion takes place between R. Hiyya and R. Simeon bar Rabbi, with one arguing that the eyes of the worshipper should be directed toward the place on earth where the Temple once stood (ie. toward Jerusalem), while the other argued that the worshipper should gaze upward, toward Heaven. R. Ishmael son of R. Yose resolves the dispute, citing the custom of his father: "A man at prayer should direct his eyes toward the place here on earth (where the Temple once stood) and direct his heart toward (the heavens) above...."

Just as the rabbis determined the appropriate place for the insertion of personal prayers within the recitation of the Amidah, their attention was turned to the appropriate timing of seasonal prayers, such as the prayer for rain. The point of concern, of course, is that praying for rain at times when people would be making pilgrimages to Jerusalem could inadvertently place the travellers in danger, whereas holding off petitions for rain could endanger the economic well-being of the farmers whose crops are dependent upon the seasonal rains. In T. Ta'anit 1:1-4, the discussion commences with a quote from Rabbi Meir in the Mishnah (M. Ta'anit 1:2): "They ask for rain until Nisan is over, since it says, 'And he causes the rain to come down for you, the former rains and the latter rain, in the first (month)' (Joel 2:23)". The debate then proceeds over when the former and latter rains fall, and what affect, if any, the leap year has on the recitation of this important prayer. Again, as in previous discussions, the correct formulation and timing of prayers is considered integral to the prayer's acceptance and fulfillment.

The Efficacy of Petitionary Prayer -- God's Response[s]

In b. Berakhot 32b, R. Eleazar states explicitly that the "gates of prayer" have been closed since the day the Temple was destroyed. Yet, he maintains, ".... though the gates of prayer are closed, the gates of weeping are not closed, as it says, "Hear my prayer, O Lord, and give ear unto my cry: keep no silence at my tears" (Ps.39:13). Since this biblical text begins with the words "Hear my prayer", it may be assumed that the weeping referred to by Eleazar is, in fact, the weeping of petition before God. And so while the "gates of prayer" may be closed, there is at least a hint that some prayers,

presumably those properly uttered as a sincere expression of supplication before God, are indeed still heard.

By the time the Mishnah was compiled there were three major extended liturgies in the rabbinic system of blessings and prayers: the morning and evening recitation of the Shema and its blessings; the recitation of the Amidah (Eighteen Benedictions) thrice daily; and the blessings before and after partaking of communal meals. The rabbinic system of prayer also included a full range of blessings, which were to be recited at specific times in one's daily life, such as prior to the performance of a commandment, upon enjoying something, upon beholding a natural wonder, etc. These berakhot and petitions combined to enhance and imbue even the most mundane parts of life with some sense of the sacred. The Talmuds further elaborated on the Mishnaic rubrics. That such a complex system of prayers could develop, replacing the public sacrificial cult and receiving such wide acceptance, is itself testament to the power which the rabbis accorded to prayer.

This is perhaps most directly attested on a daily basis by one of the intermediate petitions in the Amidah itself. After pleading with God to "hearken unto our prayer" the supplication concludes with the eulogy: ברוך אתה ה', שומע תפילה, "Blessed is the Eternal, who hearkens to prayer." The divine attribute, שומע תפילה, is a fundamental theological statement that God both listens to and acts upon, the petitions of Israel. R. Eleazar himself offers testament to this belief by quite forthrightly stating that "prayer is more efficacious than good deeds..." and even ".... more efficacious than

offerings," noting "... there was no man greater in good deeds than Moses our Teacher, and yet he was answered only after prayer..." (b. Berakhot 32b)

In M. Ta'anit 2:1, Rabbi Eleazar declares: "Three acts nullify the harsh decree, and these are: prayer, charity and repentance", an argument which he supports with the scriptural statement: "If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, pray and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land (II Chron. 7:14)." In the case of Moses referred to above, the Talmud relates that when God planned to exact a harsh decree upon all Israel because of the sin of the Golden Calf, Moses continued to pray until he wearied God, at which point God agreed not to destroy all Israel.

Ordinary Jews, of course, are not expected to pray to the point where the Deity would be "wearied" and acquiesce to their petitions. Indeed, many of the ancients worried about man burdening God with his numerous petty and insignificant requests. It was thought that such behaviour might actually be somewhat disrespectful. The sages, however, argued that God does indeed desire prayer and will accept it: "The Holy Once (blessed be He!) yearns for the prayers of the righteous" (b. Yevamot 64a). It is assumed in the story above that God *wanted* Moses to pray in the vigourous fashion that he did, just as God desired Abraham's petitions for S'dom and Amorah.

Returning to b. Berakhot32b, we read that R. Hanina said: "If one prays long, his prayer does not pass unheeded". This is supported by the story of Moses' lengthy prayer noted above. R. Hiyya ben Abba takes issue with this statement, arguing that "one who prays long and *looks for fulfillment* of his

prayer, in the end will have (only) heartache..." The anonymous voice of the Talmud attempts a resolution of the issue by stating that if one prays long and looks for fulfillment, his prayer will not be answered, whereas one who prays long not looking for fulfilment will, in the end, be answered. Lastly, in this same discussion, R. Hana says "if a man sees that he prays and is not answered, he should pray again". There is in these statements an inherent cultural tension which cannot be ignored. On the one hand, the rabbis tell us that prayer is *not* always answered. On the other hand, we are told that one should nevertheless continue to pray. This refers specifically to the praying of petitionary prayers.

But this is by no means the quintessential statement or argument concerning prayer. R. Hana is not arguing for a simple lengthening of prayer. Rather, the rabbis seem to be indicating that the act of prayer is in and of itself of some benefit to the one who is praying. In b. Rosh Hashanah 17b, R. Yohanan tells us that, like a service reader in a congregation, God "showed Moses the order of prayer and said to him: 'Whenever Israel sins, let them carry out this service before Me and I will forgive them", which seems to indicate that the *ritual* of prayer is itself efficacious. Indeed the primary purpose of the weekday Amidah is to petition for Israel's necessities out of the conviction that God will indeed hear these supplications and respond favourably to them.[10] In the Talmudic discussion above, R. Yochanan further testifies: "Great is the power of repentance that it rescinds a man's final sentence..." Since the previous discussion involves the recitation of the Amidah as an act of repentance, the repentance referred to in this statement

10. Heinemann, ibid, p. 18.

also seems to imply that prayer has the power to rescind a final sentence, in much the same way that R. Eleazar interpreted the psalmists "cry" as an acceptable petition before God.

However, an objection is raised. In the ensuing debate over the fate of individuals versus the decided fate of an entire community, it is pointed out that once God has made a decree, it cannot be changed or annuled. Hence, if Israel had been deemed worthy of abundant rains but later incurred guilt so as to be no longer worthy of such beneficence, God cannot diminish the rains, but rather sends them down at the incorrect time and to land that doesn't require rain. Likewise, if scanty rains had been decreed and Israel later repented, "to increase the supply of rains is impossible, because the decree has been issued". Therefore, in answer to Israel's repentance, God sends what rain there is only in the appropriate season and upon land which needs it. This discussion is interesting because it not only places conditions upon worshippers vis a vis the offering of petitionary prayers, but limits the Deity's ability to respond to such petitions, thereby accounting for the paradoxical experience of seasonal rainfall.

The discussion continues with the Talmud informing us that, regarding a question of the final sentence of an individual, there is a difference of opinion among the Tannaim. R. Meir cites the examples of two men who take to their bed suffering equally from the same disease, or of two men who are before a criminal court, awaiting judgment for the same offence. And yet, as things proceed, one sick man gets up from his bed, while the other does not and one criminal escapes a death sentence, while his equal does not. How does one account for this difference in outcomes? R. Meir offers

the position that one was praying a perfect prayer, i.e., with his whole heart, while the other was not.

In M. Berakhot 5:5 Rav Hanina ben Dosa demonstrates this notion of "perfect prayer" by likening this difference in outcomes to his "reciting a prayer over someone who is ill and he says this is life and this is death" (ie., he could say -- he knew -- who would live and who would die). "They said to him, 'How do you know this (outcome)?' He (Rav Hanina) said to them: 'If my prayer is fluent (fluid) in my mouth, I know that it has been accepted; and if not, then I know that it has been rejected'. The implication in this statement seems to be that fluency in the offering of a petitionary prayer is understood as a sign of divine acceptance and is, therefore, assumed to be efficacious.

Whether or not the *act* of offering petitionary prayer succeeds in moving those at prayer from preoccupation with the realm of the mundane to interaction with the realm of the Divine, is also a component of the efficacy of prayer. However, it is not the focal point of early rabbinic theology. But the efficacy of the recitation of the Amidah, or of humbling oneself before God to offer up personal pleas, is not solely determined by the literal fulfillment of the petition either. The nature of the covenantal relationship between Israel and her God, as expressed in the liturgies and rituals of prayer, is far more complex. Yet, as far as discerning a quintessential statement about the efficacy of petitionary prayer in the rabbinic texts is concerned, the rabbinic literature remains somewhat inconclusive.

On the one hand, the rabbis offer prescriptive words, rituals and mindsets to insure the efficacy of petitionary prayers, be they private or public. Yet, they stop short of presenting a simplistic "ask and ye shall receive" theology. There is absolutely no way to know *if* a prayer will be answered. Indeed, in Aggadat Bereshit 77, we are told that "there is a set time and season for every experience... except for the offering of prayer." While this may seem to be a contradiction of the rabbinic ordinances governing public prayer services, this aggadic text is really stating that there is no set time at which an individual's prayer will be answered because,

> "Were a man to know the time when, if he prays, he will be answered, he would leave off other times and pray only then. Accordingly, the Holy One blessed be He, said: for this reason I do not let you know when you will be answered, so that you will be willing to pray at all times..."

The passage concludes with the Psalmist's injunction, "Put your trust in Him at all times" (Ps. 62:9).[11] Maintaining Israel's faith in God is one of the highest aspirations of rabbinic prayer as a religious activity. Hence, while we can not know for certain when or even how petitionary prayers will be answered, the rabbis maintain that there is, ultimately, an answer. Acceptance of a petition does not mean it will be fulfilled in the exact manner in which the worshiper hopes. Silence, on the other hand, does not necessarily signify refusal, either. Regardless of the immediate outcome or lack of immediate outcome from the offering of petitionary prayer, the rabbis assert that it is

11. Aggadat Bereshit 77, cited in The Book of Legends, Sefer Ha-Aggadah, Hayim Nahman Bialik and Yehoshua Hana Ravnitzky, eds., William G. Braude, trans., (New York, Schocken Books, 1992) p. 526.

important for Israel to continue praying, for "in truth, the gates of prayer.... are never barred" (Lam. R. 4:44). [12]

12. Cited in The Book of Legends, Sefer Ha-Aggadah, p. 526.

Medieval Sources:

Petitionary Prayer in the Writings of Judah Halevi and Moses Maimonides

Historical/Theological Context of the Medieval Period:

By the beginning of the medieval period, Rabbinic Judaism had already been established for a number of centuries, but the Jewish communities and the Judaism of medieval Europe was nevertheless uncertain. The birth of Islam and its rapid rise through northern Africa, southern Europe and the Middle East had brought some initial debilitory costs to the Jewish communities of the Diaspora, but ultimately, the cultural and intellectual life of Judaism flourished. Contact with Muslim scholars brought new impetus to biblical scholarship, development of liturgical poetry, philosophy, art and the sciences. In many ways, it generated a "Golden Age" for Judaism.

However, by the end of the eleventh century C.E., the Islamic states and the Christian principalities of the day were pitted in a struggle for control over contiguous territories in Spain, and the Holy Land, leaving the Jews in a precarious position between two powerful camps. Again, the physical survival of Jews and the survival of the Jewish faith became a matter of critical concern for the rabbis and scholars of the day as Jewish communities struggled for life and Judaism itself came under attack. This is the age when the apologetic became a common vehicle of response to the dogmatic challenges posed by Church doctrine and Islamic scholarship while *halakhic*

and biblical scholarship flourished to fortify Judaism from within. The focus of such apologetics was often to respond to specific challenges or charges raised by non-Jewish religious authorities. But the principal challenges to Jewish theology during this period were posed by Aristotelian rationalism and by Karaite Jews who challenged the validity of Rabbinic Judaism by challenging the authority of the Oral Law.

Response from the rabbinic communities of Europe and northern Africa was prolific and varied. Scholars responded to Karaism with everything from direct attacks to legal codes, aimed at enabling the average Jew to more easily adhere to rabbinic *halakhah*. Responses to Aristotelianism essentially took two forms: there were those scholars who rejected philosophy as being contrary and inferior to Rabbinic Judaism, and there were those who attempted to harmonize classical philosophy with classical rabbinic doctrine. Among the scholars of this era, two of the best known rabbis whose works have endured over the centuries are Judah Halevi (c.1075-1141) and Moses ben Maimon (Maimonides), the Rambam (1138-1204). Halevi, after an early flirtation with philosophy, ultimately belongs in the former category. Maimonides, one of the most systematic supporters and expositors of rabbinic tradition, belongs in the latter.

Rabbi Judah Halevi: *Medieval Theologian*

The political circumstances of late eleventh century Spain profoundly affected the circumstances of Rabbi Judah Halevi's early life and had an equally powerful impact on his evolving thought. During his childhood, the

ancient Visigothic capital Toledo fell into the hands of Alphonso VI, while Christian Crusaders began their siege of Jerusalem. Jews were often caught between the opposing factions, leaving them politically weakened and insecure -- a feeling which is often echoed in Halevi's poetry as well as his other work. Nevertheless, Halevi received a well rounded education which included secular culture as well as traditional Jewish studies. He was a well-respected physician who was fluent in Arabic and well-versed in Arabic sciences, including philosophy. Halevi was a master of the classical rabbinic texts and was acclaimed for his poetry, which bears signs of Arabic stylistic influence.

As a young man, his poetic talent made him popular with many prominent families, providing him with a somewhat courtly lifestyle. Eventually the Almoravid advances and takeover of the petty kingdoms of Andalusia brought this to an end as they temporarily halted the Christian advance into southern Spain. For many years thereafter Halevi lived in Christian held Toledo, although later in life (summer of 1140) he left for Palestine.

Throughout his lifetime, he continued to write, often expressing growing alarm at the changes in the political fortunes of Jewish communities and the turbulence in Jewish life. While cultural fluency and personal popularity served to protect Halevi from many of the misfortunes experienced by his fellow Jews, he was not immune to their suffering. As Spanish Jewish life continued to decline, he began to question the value of some of the cultural pursuits which he had embraced in his youth.

Sometime after 1125, Halevi began to draft his defense of Judaism, entitled The Kuzari: The Book of Refutation and Proof on Behalf of the Despised Religion. Using the historic facts recorded about the conversion of the Khazar king to Judaism sometime in the eighth century as a point of departure, Halevi addresses contemporary criticisms of Judaism from philosophy, Christianity, Islam and Karaism. Written in Judeo-Arabic, and organised in a dialogue format, somewhat reminiscent of Plato, it has endured as one of the most eloquent expressions of the veracity of Judaism ever penned. It has come to be his best known and, perhaps, best loved work.[1]

Halevi and the Kuzari:

The Book of Refutation & Proof on Behalf of the Despised Religion

The story begins with a pagan Khazar king who is characterized as "... very zealous in (carrying out) the worship (prescribed) by the Khazar religion to the extent that he himself used to officiate at the temple-service and (in offering) the sacrifices with a pure and sincere intent" (Kuzari 1:1)[2]. Nevertheless, the king is told repeatedly by an angel from God that "Your intention is pleasing, but your action is not pleasing" (Kuzari 1:1). This

1. S.D. Gottein, "The Individual: Portrait of a Mediterranean Personality of the High Middle Ages as Reflected in the Cairo Geniza," A Mediterranean Society: The Jewish Communities of the Arab World as Portrayed in teh documents of the Cairo Geniza, Volume V. (Berkley, University of California Press, 1988) pp. 448-639.
   Isaak Heineman, "Jehudah Ha-Levi" Three Jewish Philosophers. (New York, MacMillan Publishing, 1969) pp. 7-25.
   Barry Kogan, "Yehudah Ha-Levi", Encyclopedia of Religion, (New York, MacMillan, 1987) pp505-508.
2. Unless otherwise noted, all excerpts from the Kuzari are from the Barry Kogan trans., Cincinnati, 1995 (unpublished manuscript)

provides the impetus for the Khazar king's search for a religion embracing a course of action and belief which would be pleasing to the Deity. He begins by consulting an Aristotelian philosopher, and then, subsequently, representatives from Christianity, Islam and Judaism. The presentation of the non-Jewish beliefs, which, to Halevi's credit, is fairly objective, is nonetheless intentionally included to establish the primacy of Jewish belief.[3] Perhaps most interesting of all is that while the philosopher makes only a brief appearance in the beginning of Book One, Halevi continues to address the challenges rationalism posed to Jewish tradition throughout the discourse.

The Deity described by the philosopher is not a personal deity, but the eternal First Cause of an eternal universe from whom subsidiary causes emanate. When one speaks of God as the Creator, he argues, one does so only metaphorically, since God is the cause of all of the causes involved in the creation of every thing created (Kuzari, 1:1). The God of the philosopher is above desire and intention, because intentions intimate desires that must be met in order for an individual to be complete. This would imply a God who is somehow diminished. Lastly, since God is unchanging, so is God's knowledge. Therefore, God is above knowledge of the particulars of the mundane world and the intentions and actions of those who occupy it, because they change with the times. Consequently, the philosopher tells the king, there is no specific course of action which will please the Deity, and prayer is not literally efficacious.

3. Heineman, ibid, p52.

However, the philosopher presents intellectual inquiry and meditation, preceded by moral perfection, as the pathway to a perfection of the intellectwhich culminates in the union of the passive intellect of an individual with the Active Intellect. This experience is the ultimate goal of the philosopher's quest. It is a state of existence in which the passive intellect of the individual and the Active intellect are co-eternal with the First Cause, and, hence, devoid of matter. This experience, according to the philosopher, is what may symbolically be called "God's being pleased" (Kuzari 1:1). The philosophic path, therefore, is not strictly an intellectual endeavour. Rather, because it first requires perfection of one's behaviour, followed by perfection of the intellect, it is a means to attain truth, morality and immortality.[4]

The Khazar king, despite finding several of the philosopher's statements appealing, ultimately disqualifies philosophy as the true path to divine favour. The king argues that if the philosphers had indeed attained the definitive state of moral, intellectual perfection, "then prophecy should have been well known and widespread among them, because of their attachment to spiritual things." Furthermore, miracles and extraordinary feats similar to those ascribed to the prophets of old should also have been ascribed to them (Kuzari 1:4).

The king's rejection of philosophy is significant because it establishes the Khazar's own criterion of proof. Only a person who could answer the king's questions without doubt could teach the king the way of faithful

4. Heinemann, Ibid.

service to God.[5] He insists on direct observation of interactions between humanity and the divine. Failing that, the evidence he seeks must be well-attested accounts of such incidents. Since it is *not* the case that prophecy is prevalent among philosophers and this is the sort of evidence the king is seeking, his rejection of the philosophic path, and its God-concept, paves the way for acceptance of revelation and publicly witnessed miracles, if such evidence may be produced. Having dismissed the philosopher's argument, the king turns first to the Christian, then to the Muslim, and finally, reluctantly, to the Jewish representative of prophetic faith.

Both Christian and Muslim scholars lay claim to religious supremacy, having received the "final testament" from God, yet they too are unable to satisfy the Khazar king. The Christian presents a corporeal God in the form of his Messiah, which, to the Khazar, is unsupportable by reason. The Muslim maintains that God is strictly non-corporeal and may be only spoken of metaphorically. However, his doctrine is unattainable to the non-Arab, because the Quran was not then translated into other languages and the king is incapable of understanding Arabic. Having failed to support their claims with evidence which the king would have accepted as valid, both religions appeal to events based to some extent on God's well-attested revelation to Israel. This compels the king to turn to the Jews "because they are the remnant of the children of Israel", realising that they themselves are "the proof that God has a religious law on earth" (Kuzari 1:10).

5. Eliezer Schweid, "Prayer in the Teaching of Judah Halevi", Prayer in Judaism: Continuity and Change. (Hebrew) Gabriel H. Cohn, ed., (Ramat Gan, Shlomo Rozner Press, 1978) p. 132.

The sage begins his dialogue with the king with a statement of belief which is most specifically aimed at refuting the assertions of rational philosophy. He states his belief in the God of the Patriarchs, noting the signs, wonders and miracles wrought in Israel's behalf as well as the receiving of the Law at Sinai, through God's prophet, Moses, and the perpetuation of the Law through generations of prophets after him (Kuzari 1:1).

For the sage, revelation is a fact which was not only recognised in ancient times, but in his own day as well. Halevi does not credit philosophers with the superior level of perfection accorded them by Maimonides and other Jewish philosophers of the period. Halevi believed that philosophy was based partially on individual intellectual speculation and partially on the basis of a tradition. As such, he believed they were not in full possession of the truth, even though the teachers of the Greeks were the ancient Chaldean astronomers who prospered in the same geographic location and cultural milieu as the patriarch Abraham (Kuzari 1:63). Without a reliable tradition, philosophers do not truly know if their suppositions are correct (Kuzari 1:65). Their own doctrines are constantly debated and refuted amongst themselves. Under such circumstances it is impossible to be sure that one had arrived at Truth or Wisdom with any degree of certainty (Kuzari 1:13).[6]

The prophets and the descendants of Israel, however, have a higher level of spiritual perfection. Hence, they are in possession of direct revelation from God and are, in Halevi's view, in full possession of the truth.

6. Heinemman, ibid, p. 55.

The Jews have a tradition which recounts instances of public revelation, witnessed by thousands and meticulously recorded. The sage argues that this is the only reliable way to understand what it is that the Deity expects of us. It is through the acceptance of received tradition that we learn God's expectations of us and how we can fulfill them, thereby meriting personal knowledge of the Deity (revelation) (Kuzari 3:53 end;3:23). The revelation at Sinai, as recounted and witnessed in the Torah, is the public, empirical and direct proof for the veracity of the Jewish tradition which the other scholars failed to provide for their own religions. For the Khazar king, the reliability and the necessity of a revealed tradition as a pathway to serving God in the most acceptable manner proves to be most compelling. It is the only thing which confirms his dream experience. Therefore, on the basis of this argument that the king becomes convinced (Kuzari 1:98) and he converts to Judaism (Kuzari 2:1).

But the king's conversion does not bring the dialogue to an end. Nor does the king's acceptance of Judaism's revealed tradition conclude the sage's exposition of that tradition. Indeed, with the conversion, the task of explaining and defending Judaism truly begins. The king earnestly questions various facets of his new-found religion, including the nature of prophecy, those deemed worthy of its reception, and the apparent loss of prophecy in post-biblical times. As the sage addresses each of the king's inquiries, he speaks not only for Jewish tradition, but to further refute rational philosophy and Karaism.

Halevi's rejection of rationalism in favour of received tradition is neither complete nor unambiguous. Within the sage's refutation of non-

Jewish beliefs there are elements of neo-Platonic and Aristotelian cosmology and logic.[7] For example, the sage does not discount evidence of God through nature. Indeed, in keeping with the ontology of his day, Halevi presents a concept of the world which consists of an organic unity with each lower level perpetually striving for movement toward a higher level. Furthermore, the perfection of each level is understood as consisting of the perfection of all the levels beneath it.[8] At the lower end of the spectrum, that of plants and animals, the organic powers are understood as comprising the forces of nurture, growth and propagation (Kuzari 1:31). Man incorporates all of these forces or powers, but he is considered above all other living beings by virtue of his intellectual power which distinguishes him from them.

At a still higher level of existence are those individuals who are capable of receiving prophetic grace -- a state of existence which is described as belonging to the divine order rather than that of the intellectual, the psychic, or the natural (Kuzari 1:35, 1:42). This select group of individuals can apprehend the divine will, something which human speculation can not accomplish. As the sage explains and the king has

7. Yochanan Silman (Philosopher and Prophet: Judah Halevi, the *Kuzari* and the Evolution of His Thought, Albany, State University of New York,1995) explains this apparent dichotomy in thought -- Halevi's seeming rejection and simultaneous embracing of certain philosophic principles are evidence of two distinct strata within Halevi's thought. He identifies sections 1:68-69, 2:1-7, and all of Book 3 as evidence of Halevi's earlier thought, which favoured, or at least took a more lenient approach to, philosophy, as opposed to later thought where philosophic doctrine is ultimately rejected in favour of preserving rabbinic tradition. Nonetheless, Silman maintains there is an internal unity in the work as a whole, as there are interpolations between the strata, p.159.

8. Schweid, ibid, pp. 132-33.

already surmised, philosophers do not have the capacity to prophesy in the manner of the prophets of the Torah. Adam, the first man, was the first to receive prophecy. This gift, or capacity to experience prophecy was passed on through the line of early biblical heroes, occasionally skipping a generation or family member, until it reached the descendants of Jacob (Israel), among whom prophecy flourished. In describing this phenomenon, Halevi likens the ancient Israelites to choice seeds blossoming in select soil, ie., the land of Israel (Kuzari, 1:95;2:9ff). By using this and other similar analogies, the sage is arguing not only for the primacy of the people (Israelites) in their capacity to receive prophecy, but of the land itself as the focal point for prophecy. As the sage argues, prophecy has only occured in Israel or outside of Israel for its sake, as in the case of Abraham's call to seek the land, and in the case of Daniel and Ezekiel's prophecies with respect to preparation for the return to Israel at the end of exile (Kuzari, 2:14). Therefore, prophecy has not been permanently lost to Israel. Rather, the capacity still exists and it will become prevalent among Jews once more when the people as a whole have succeeded in pleasing God, and returned to the land itself in order to serve God there.[9] For the moment, the one among the Jews who is capable of achieving the level of divine grace is not the philosopher, but the pious man, about whom the king inquires and the sage directs his discourse.

The pious man, in the time of the sage, is described as one who lives by the teachings of his faith, stimulating by virtue of his own example, those

9. Interestingly enough, this conclusion prompts the sage to emigrate at the end of the Kuzari, and Halevi himself attempted to do the same.

living at the lower levels of existence to seek something higher. Halevi's cosmology, which speaks of forms and their ability to absorb certain levels of emanations from the Deity is not unlike the forms spoken of in Platonic philosophy. Each level of existence incorporates those finishing causes of the preceding lower level or levels and is maintained by a drive toward the level immediately above it.[10] Hence, in the case of the pious man, who has already attained a level higher than that of the average individual, the drive is toward union with the divine order. This union is explained by the sage in terms that are not entirely dissimilar to the apprehension of the Active Intellect described by the philosopher in Book One of the Kuzari.

The Pious Man and the Efficacy of Petitionary Prayer:

In order to experience the divine, the pious man follows a regimen of mandated rituals and prayers infused with the intense desire to draw nearer to the divine order and unite with it. In Halevi's thought we see elements of a tension akin to the issue of קבע versus כונה that was the focus of much rabbinic debate in Late Antiquity. However, the tension does not take the same form as in the rabbinic texts. Rather, we see statements by the sage which argue for a fixed and carefully defined way of life in order to draw nearer to the divine order: "... one may come close to God only by means of action commanded by God..." (Kuzari 2:46), and further that "engaging in arbitrary judgment, rational speculation, and conjecture with regard to the religious Law does not lead to God's being pleased" (Kuzari 3:23).

10. Schweid, ibid, pp. 133-35

Elsewhere in the Kuzari, Halevi admits that there are commandments which could be deduced by human reason even in the absence of revelation (Kuzari 3:11); and "even those who venerate God only as a result of their own rational efforts merit reward"[11] (Kuzari, 3:21). These statements may, on the surface, appear to be contradictory. However, they reflect the sage's (and Halevi's) understanding that there are two different levels of commandments. There are those which are, indeed, deducible through reason, but there are also divine commandments whose reasoning we can not know. Furthermore, the sage adds an additional level of psychic commandments which are directed at the state of man's thoughts. The sage maintains that God ".... observes (and) is acquainted with the inner thoughts of those who worship (Him)..." (Kuzari: 3:11) as well as their actions and words, repaying both good and evil deeds, as well as good and evil thoughts.[12]

The concept of religious forces being the highest of human forces, coupled with the underlying cosmological notion of every level of existence being maintained by the movement toward higher levels, provides for the integration of both the emphasis on action and the emphasis on intent (i.e., קבע and כוונה). Since one can only move toward a higher level when the current level of existence is complete, i.e., all the completing causes are present, these emphases find expression through the fulfillment of various commandments (מצות), including the offering of prayer.

11. Silman, ibid, p. 122.
12. Silman, ibid, p. 123.

For the pious, there is a requirement for the establishment of intention with regard to the fulfillment of any commandment. Only with the *intention* to fufill a commandment can one truly be convinced of its fulfillment. More significantly, for the pious, the *intention* of all the מצות is the movement toward prayer. Hearkening back to the analogy of the pious man and the well-ordered state (Kuzari 3:5ff), Halevi likens the pious one's movement toward prayer to that of the commander of the army who imposes discipline upon those under him. Just as the commander would first examine the goodness of those he commands, the pious man summons the powers of his body and soul for similar examination. Hence, the movement toward prayer, for Halevi, is not passive meditation; it is the beginning of an active situation . If all the powers of the body are prepared for one deed, and all of his desires (urges) are focussed on the soul's intent, then, and only then, can the pious one raise his own essence and ascend higher and higher to a level before the presence of the Creator.[13]

Having achieved a balance between the concepts of action and intent, Halevi then turns to the more traditional debate between קבע and כונה as it is played out in classical rabbinic debate. Like his predecessors, Halevi stresses the notion of proper intent (כונה) with respect to prayer, balanced against a fixed time and liturgy (קבע) for such prayers. Despite insistence upon a fixed liturgy, the rabbinic sage admonishes the Khazar king that prayer must not be spoken "in a rote or mechanical way like the starling and the parrot." Rather, there should be "... thought and reflection on every word" so that each time one is at prayer it is a unique experience, a

13. Schweid, ibid, p. 138-39.

new and insightful journey toward the Divine. The result of this is that the time at prayer becomes a cherished and sought after time of the day. Indeed under ideal circumstances, the hours at rest are viewed as pathways to the hour of prayer (Kuzari, 3:5).

By engaging in prayer of this type, with the proper intent, the prayer becomes to the soul what food is to the body[14] -- essential nourishment (Kuzari, 3:5). Daily, the soul is weakened by life's circumstances and the "feast" of prayers replenishes it, giving it new strength. Therefore, one engages in prayer for the sake of one's soul in much the same way that one takes in food for the sake of one's body. Carrying the analogy even further, the sage notes that, like a good meal, the blessing of prayer remains with the individual until it is time to pray again. Similarly, just as we experience severe hunger when a meal is delayed, so too the soul hungers and is distressed when the time for prayer approaches but the act of prayer is delayed (Kuzari, ibid).

Yet, even though God may be experienced in a personal, i.e., individual way, and there is much talk of the pious man as an individual seeking personal perfection, the individual does not stand alone. He is part of a community. Like his rabbinic predecessors, Halevi stresses the importance of contributing to the community and the importance of communal prayer. Halevi is quite explicit in his rejection of ascetic or monastic lifestyles (Kuzari 3:1ff). The perfected individual, be he pious man or prophet, is not truly complete except through his relationship to the

14. Schweid, ibid, p.138.

community or general group. His wholeness as an individual is intricately connected to his membership in the community and, therefore, in the prayer to his God before whom he stands with that community (Kuzari 3:17,3:19).[15] The pious individual is involved with the life of his people. The source of this involvement may originate from the pious' own spiritual needs and natural inclinations, such as the desire for family life or to help the poor (Kuzari 3:1); it may be imposed upon him by external circumstances, such as the 'debilatory' affects upon his perfection as a result of association with children, women or evil persons (Kuzari, 3:5); or it may be rooted in the Torah itself as in the case of the performance of circumcision on the newborn which, ideally, should take place in the presence of a large congregation (Kuzari, 3:8).[16]

Regardless of the impetus for this involvement, the sage clearly regards the community as the necessary focal point for the pious ones' actions and prayers. He explains this necessity, echoing the traditional rabbinic requirements for the offering of prayer as well as stating conditions under which the offering of such prayer would be deemed pleasing to God. In keeping with rabbinic tradition, Halevi presents the recitation of the Amidah as an act which is done first and foremost for the benefit of the *community*. The individual, including the pious, only prays for himself secondarily and within the context of the offering of communal prayers; ie., at the appropriate allotted time during the public service (Kuzari, 3:17, 3:19). Putting a slight twist on the rabbinic argument that personal prayer may

15. Schweid, ibid, p. 134-35.
16. Silman, ibid, p. 139.

sometimes harm the community,[17] the sage contends that while "... the community does not pray for something that is bad for individuals..., sometimes the individual prays for something that is bad for himself (Kuzari 3:19). This sort of prayer is problematic because, as the sage understands the offering of supplication, only those prayers which aim at "something that benefits the world and does not harm it in any way" are likely to be answered (Kuzari, ibid). In a direct echo of rabbinic tradition the sage explains that the public prayer service serves to focus the thoughts of the individual on the needs and problems of the collective, ensuring that the intent, language, and form of his prayer are appropriate and, hence, efficacious.

> ".... the prayer of the individual seldom comes to an end without (his succumbing to) distraction and carelessness. Therefore it was ordained for us that the individual should pray.. with the community .... so that (of the people praying together) what is lacking in relation to some through distraction and carelessness may be made complete by others." (Kuzari 3:19)

Likening the individual who prays for himself to someone who wishes to repair his own home but is unwilling to join in the communal effort to repair the walls of his city, such an individual expends a great deal of energy in his own behalf but, ultimately, remains in danger. Hence, the goal of one's prayer can not be selfish. However, in the case of one who participates in the communal effort, the result is the exact opposite. He expends less, but reaps greater rewards "because what one lacks the other makes up for."

17. See discussion regarding the wayfarer's prayer from Yerushalmi Yoma, 5:3 in the previous chapter, p. 22.

The sage concludes that when communal prayer "... is properly put together by everybody" then everyone reaps the benefits with each person receiving his portion of the general welfare of the community.

The sage qualifies these statements, however, by noting that occasionally when the entire community shares in God's blessing(s), there are some individuals who are undeserving, yet "enjoy good fortune through the intercession of the majority" (Kuzari, ibid). Likewise, there are occasions when a community may suffer as a whole and there will be individuals within that community, presumably the pious ones, who will be undeserving of such misfortune, but, nevertheless, they too are consigned to suffer with the community. Such individuals, the sage assures us are compensated for their suffering by rewards to be reaped in the hereafter (Kuzari, ibid).

The pious are involved in the life of the Jewish people as part of a praying and commandment-fulfilling community of the present. Yet, they are also linked to the past and the future through the mandated public worship service. Through the participation in the recitation of the Amidah, the pious individual imagines events of the past, finding meaning and justification for the present circumstances of his people in the promised future:[18] "... he [the pious one] consoles himself, first of all, *by acknowledging the justice of (God's) decree*, ... then by clearing away his (own) sins, and then by (contemplating) the treasure and honor that are to be anticipated in the *world to come*, as well as (his) attachment to the divine order in this world" (Kuzari, 3:11). The pious one does not employ מעשה

18. Silman, ibid, p. 140-41.

מצות, the fulfillment of commandments, or petitionary prayer as a means to change the present circumstances of Israel. Despite the hardship of the exile, the pious ones live with spiritual tranquility and live happy lives (Kuzari 3:12) because they trust in the promise of future redemption.[19]

Understood in this fashion, prayer goes beyond the intellectual meditation of the philosophers, and beyond the direct fulfillment of one's wishes that may be implied in the texts of the Torah or the ancient rabbis, to become a purificatory process whereby the soul of both the individual and the people is actively tried, tempered, and ultimately strengthened and bettered. When one approaches the recitation of the Amidah, one approaches it from the stance of engaging in a trial of the soul. Just as the body surrenders to the will of the mind and conforms to its instruction, in the recitation of the Amidah there is a surrender of the soul to the Divine Will. Carrying the analogy further, one may argue that just as it is possible to achieve physical perfection through discipline resulting from direction of the mind so too it is possible to perfect the soul through discipline resulting from direction by mitzvot.[20]

The perfection of the Jewish people in its fullest measure is the fulfillment of prophecy. The specialness of the prophet, therefore, is not determined by virtue of his knowledge or ideas. Rather, it is an expression of his being present before God. Hence, the way of life of the Torah, anchored in prophecy, is intended to draw the individual Jew through the

19. Silman, ibid.
20. Schweid, ibid, pp. 139.

prophetic experience of Israel. The essential fact of the commandments is that they begin with the individual and then bring along with it the entire people, since they are activities derived from the prophetic experience. Likewise, with participation in the recitation of the Amidah -- a prayer-worship ritual which has a direct corollary with the ancient sacrificial rites, which were born out of Israel's prophetic experience -- public worship through prayer is also considered to be derived from the prophetic experience. For Halevi, prayer is a reflection of existence at the prophetic level and, hence, is a means to satisfy the ontologically decreed striving from one level of existence toward a higher level of existence. Because it is a reflection of the prophetic experience of Israel, its invocation serves to bring the individual, along with his community, through the prophetic experience of his ancestors, elevating them to the level of the divine order and, potentially, uniting them with the divine order in an experience that is prophecy.[21]

For Halevi, nothing in philosophical intellectual quest could lead one to such wisdom or experience. As noble as making an effort to perfect oneself intellectually may be, ultimately philosophical inquiry comes up empty because it is not God's will that we seek the Divine through Aristotelian rationalism. The Divine Will calls us to prayer and to the observance of the mitzvot in order for us to be drawn near to it. It is the willingness to accept Divine direction (mitzvot) and the striving toward that higher Will through active participation in prayer which ultimately brings

21. Schweid, ibid, pp. 136-37.

the individual into a direct relaton with God, and with it, to that higher level of wisdom known as prophecy. The extent to which the recitation of petitionary prayers succeeds in lifting the individual out of the realm of the mundane and brings him before is God, is for Halevi's sage, the measure of the efficacy of petitionary prayer.

Moses ben Maimon: *Jewish Philosopher*

The attraction of philosophical inquiry and the application of one's intellect in the search for personal perfection and ultimate knowledge proved to be far more compelling for other medieval religious philosophers and theologians. Rather than reject philosophy in favour of revealed religion or reject revealed religion in favour of philosophy, some scholars sought an accommodation or harmonization of both systems of thought and belief. Most noteworthy and enduring among them is Moses Maimonides, a twelfth century religious philosopher, who grappled with the compatibility of Aristotelian philosophy and Jewish religious tradition and ultimately concluded that a religion which did not incorporate that which could be demonstrated by rational speculation was untenable.

Born into a family of scholars in 1138 in Cordoba, Spain, Maimonides also found his early years changed by the shifting political fortunes of Christian and Muslim dominated Spain. In 1148, Cordoba fell to Almohad invaders, and the Maimon family began a decade of wandering through Spain and northern Africa, seeking a haven of tolerance, away from the religious persection of fanatical Islamic rule. In 1158, the family settled in

Fez, but just seven years later Maimonides began his own wanderings which ultimately took him through Morocco and to Palestine before settling in old Cairo to escape the unsettling political scene.

Like Halevi, Maimonides supported himself through the practice of medicine. He served as the house physician for Saladin's vizier and simultaneously maintained a dizzying schedule of study, scholarship, and leadership of the Jewish community of Cairo, including two terms as the *Rais al-Yahud* (Head of the Jews). Maimonides functioned as rabbi, communal administrator, overseer of philanthropic foundations and fulfilled several judicial functions. A man of strong convictions who did not believe in a rabbinate dependent upon the goodwill of the community, he accepted no renumeration for these duties.

The Case for Rational Philosophy in Judaism:

As a scholar, Maimonides was a respected Talmudist, halakhist and philsopher who had an impact on Jewish life so pervasive that it is still felt today. His works in halakhah and religious philosophy were unprecedented in their thoroughness and originality. He carved new paths in the codification of Jewish religious law and the harmonization of rabbinic thought with Aristotelian philosophy. Among his most noteworthy works are his Commentary on the Mishnah, intended as both an introduction and review of the Oral Tradition of Torah; the Mishneh Torah, a concise codification of the halakhah which is noteworthy for its style and scope; and, equally famous, the Guide for the Perplexed, which covered a wide range of

philosophic problems which occupied the minds of many medieval religious thinkers, including Judah Halevi.

Written in Judeo-Arabic (c. 1185-90), the Guide, which was later used in Latin translation by Christian scholars, explores the challenges of faith and reason. Aimed at a reader who is a religious intellectual, Maimonides enters the debate on the existence, unity, and incorporeality of God; the relationship between God and the world with respect to its creation and governance; and communication between the Deity and humanity through revelation, all the while maintaining that the traditions of Judaism contain the basic truths of philosophy and as such the two are not only *not* incompatible, but one form of wisdom is an integral part of the other.

As Maimonides presents the case for Aristotelianism, he argues that the Jews of antiquity had cultivated the sciences of physics and metaphysics as part of their religious tradition. In Book One, Chapter 71, Maimonides states:

> Know that the many sciences devoted to establishing truth regarding these matters have existed in our religious community have perished because of the length of time that has passed, because of our being dominated by pagan nations and because ... it is not permitted to divilge these matters to all people.[22]

Philosophy, for Maimonides, is part of the esoteric content found in both the Torah and the traditional rabbinic texts. At issue for him then, is not so

22. Moses Maimonides, Guide for the Perplexed, 1:71, (Shlomo Pines trans., Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1963), p.175. All excerpts and page references from the Guide are from the Shlomo Pines translation.

much how to integrate Aristotelian physics and metaphysics with revealed tradition -- as far as he is concerned that has already been done -- rather the task is to explicate the philosophic elements found in the tradition so that it becomes apparent that philosophical wisdom and prophetic revelation are integral parts of the same truth.

Critics of Maimonides, both medieval and contemporary, have taken issue with this stance, raising many questions. Are dialogical prayers to God and intellectual contemplation of God contrary or complimentary forms of prayer or religious ideology? Maimonides advocates both, but has he successfully integrated the traditional halakhic conception of prayer with the Aristotelian approach to an understanding of and communion with the deity? Indeed is an Aristotelian God concept even compatible with Jewish beliefs? Maimonides often suggests he had succeeded in showing the harmony between the two systems of thought:

> "It is clear that the perfection of man that may truly be gloried in is the one acquired by him who has achieved, in a measure corresponding to his capacity, apprehension of Him .... who knows His providence extending over His creatures as manifested in the act of bringing them into being... The way of life of such an individual... will always have in view *loving-kindness, righteousness,* and *judgment,* through assimilation to his actions, ... just as we have explained several times in this Treatise.[23]

However, the opinion of scholars and critics is far from unanimous. In some parts of the Jewish world, Maimonides continues to be thought of

23. Guide, III:54, p.638.

as a heretic and his works remain banned. Avoiding the passing of judgment on Maimonides himself, other scholars have debated the apparent incongruity between revelation and philosophic discourse, maintaining that he has failed to successfully resolve this dialectical tension. More recently, scholars have re-examined Maimonides, attempting to address this incongruity from the perspective of the author himself. The result, however, has not been any more unanimous than past attempts at such resolution.

Limits of Rational Philosophy:

In his article, "Prayer in the Thinking of the Rambam"[24], Marvin Fox presents an account of Maimonides' religious philosophy with respect to prayer as it is addressed throughout the entire corpus of his work (halakhic and philosophic). This theme is taken up, in much greater detail, in his book, Interpreting Maimonides[25], in which Fox avoids classifying Maimonides as strictly an Aristotelian philosopher or a non-Aristotelian theologian. As Fox interprets his philosophy, Maimonides does not argue for the exclusive supremacy of reason, or of religion or any other source of truth. Rather, Fox contends that Maimonides should be understood "... as a thinker who seeks to exploit every possibility of true knowledge..."[26]. Furthermore, Fox

24. MarvinFox, "Prayer in the Thinking of the Rambam" in Prayer in Judaism: Continuity and Change, (Hebrew) Gabriel H. Cohn ed., (Shlomo Rozner Press, Ramat Gan, 1978), pp. 142-167.
25. Marvin Fox, Interpeting Maimonides: Studies in Methodology, Metaphysics, and Moral Philosophy, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1990.
26. Fox, Interpeting Maimonides, p22.

argues, Maimonides himself was "superbly sensitive to the methodological problems that he faced...."[27] in attempting to harmonize Aristotelian rationalism and traditional Jewish beliefs. He concludes that Maimonides has adopted "a rather delicately balanced stance" which affirms both reason and revelation; a stance which has far reaching consequences for Maimonides' conceptions of God, revelation, the purpose of מצות, and the offering of prayer.[28]

Ehud Benor[29] also takes the stance of reading Maimonides as Maimonides himself intended his works to be read. He, however, does not conclude that Maimonides presents contradictory conceptions of God, or differing conceptions with respect to prayer and worship of the Deity. Benor argues that Maimonides has demonstrated that conventional distinctions in types of religiosity which historically have been contrasted as ethical versus the intellectual or mystical are not necessarily as distinct from one another as we might have been led to believe. On the contrary, Benor maintains there is an inherent unity in Maimonides' thought that is not based on a carefully balanced, though intended, tension between reason and revelation. Rather, in his understanding of Maimonides, the two are different aspects of the same whole.[30]

Both scholars agree that Maimonides is committed to the principle that reason must be followed, as Fox explains, because "intellectual honesty demands that we accept the conclusion that reason has demonstrated to

27. Ibid, p34.
28. Fox, Interpeting Maimonides, p35.
29. Ehud Benor, Worship of the Heart, *A Study in Maimonides' Philosophy of Religion*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 1995.
30. Benor, Ibid, pp.1-2.

be true..."[31] An individual may not, therefore, arrive at any true knowledge of God by employing his imagination or by relying on authority. Individuals who do so, when they speak about God are ".... not in true reality mention[ing] or think[ing] about God",[32] according to Maimonides. For Maimonides, then, the first among religious obligations is the application of one's intellect to the study and apprehension of the Divine, after which follows love, i.e., understanding of God, in direct proportion to the level of apprehension:

> If, however, you have apprehended God and His acts in accordance with what is required by the intellect, you should afterwards engage in totally devoting yourself to Him and strengthening the bond betwen you and Him -- this is, the intellect.[33]

However, while Maimonides considers it our duty to employ our intellect to its utmost limits, he acknowledges that human intellect does, indeed, have limits. Furthermore, there are limitations to classical rationalism itself. Classical rationalistic thought tends to be based on the affirmation of fundamental claims about the nature of the world that are not, themselves, derived from reason. These claims rest on a belief that reality itself is a fully rational structure; something for which we have no proof. As a result, rationalism can carry claims of reason and rational knowledge far beyond limits of formal logic.[34]

31. Ibid, p.34.
32. Guide, III:51, p.620.
33. Ibid
34. Fox, Ibid, p. 28.

Maimonides' God:

As Fox interprets him, Maimonides presents his readers with a God concept which many have deemed "radical". He is adamant about maintaining a notion of God as incorporeal, denouncing all attempts at anthropomorphisms as tantamount to idolatry.[35] While it may seem natural to characterise God in human terms, given that we are created בצלם אלהים, in God's image, to do so, in Maimonides' view, is not only inaccurate, it is wrong. In the opening chapter of the Guide, Maimonides addresses this issue by arguing that בצלם אלהים does in fact mean *image* of God, not the natural, specific form in its potential state, but the actualized incorporeal form which characterizes intellectual apprehension. Hence, the incorporeality of the deity can be maintained without contradicting the Biblical verse. Maimonides continues by arguing that what sets man apart from the rest of creation is his capacity for rational apprehension. Furthermore, because human intellect operates incorporeally, this is the part of man that is most like God, although Maimonides maintains that human apprehension is "....(only) likened unto the apprehension of the deity, which does not require an instrument, although in reality it is not like the latter apprehension but only appears so to the first stirrings of opinion."[36]

What is important to note here, according to Fox, is that Maimonides stresses not the quality of the intellect, but its nature. "Man *qua* man is incorporeal."[37] Thus, by correctly apprehending the nature of human

35. Maimonides, Guide I:36, p.84.
36. Maimonides, Guide, I:1, p. 23.
37. Fox, Ibid, p.169.

intellect -- understanding it in its incorporeality -- one gains some insight, a pathway, to an understanding of the deity.[38] However, the incorporeal nature of God coupled with the limitations of human intellect and language create further stumbling blocks in this pathway to an understanding of God.

Because Maimonides presents a conception of God that is not only incorporeal but is so wholly other than anything in human experience, he maintained we can not truly make any positive attributive statements about God's nature. If, for example, we wish to describe God as "compassionate" or "merciful" we have only our own human experience as a frame of reference to understand what these terms mean. But, according to Maimonides, one may be able to understand "compassion" in reference to a human being, but the term does not have the same meaning when applied to God, because God's intrinsic nature is not like ours.

So too is the case concerning God's actions in the world. Maimonides did not adopt a completely Aristotelian notion of the divine. The God of Israel does act in this world and is apparently cognizant of it. In Part II of the Guide, Maimonides engages in an extensive philosophic discussion on creation and its implications for religious belief in general.[39] What is noteworthy is his critique of Aristotle's account of creation: ".... all that Aristotle and his followers have set forth in the way of proof of the eternity of the world does not constitute in my opinion a cogent demonstration.... I myself desire to make clear is that the world's being created in time,

38. Fox, Ibid.
39. Isadore Twersky, A Maimonides Reader, (New York, Berhman House, Inc.,1972), p.232.

according to the opinion of our Law... is not impossible." [40] This is a classic instance of Maimonides asserting the viability of revealed tradition. As he goes on to explain, his opinion that the Toraitic account of creation is not impossible ".... should be accepted without proof because of prophecy, which explains things which it is not in the power of speculation to accede."[41] Furthermore, Maimonides maintains that any religiously acceptable theory of creation must preserve God's freedom to act.[42] Yet, we run into the same problems describing God's actions in the world that we ran into in the attribution of emotions to God in the example above. Hence, we are forced to conclude that positive epithets, though they may be poetic and praiseful of the deity, can not be said to be truly descriptive of the deity.

Maimonides does, however, consider the knowledge of negative attributes of God an important tool to gaining some knowledge of the divine; a view which strikes many as being somewhat paradoxical. If carried to its rationalistic extreme, arguing that the less one knows about God, the more one knows, it would be possible to arrive at a level of such complete negation that we negate God. This would be heretical! [44] How then, may we arrive at an understanding of God's nature when denying only some positive attributes could lead to the attribution of others and the complete negation of attributes could lead to an unwitting negation of the Deity? Ultimately, Maimonides does not provide us with a simple, decisive answer. He acknowledges the unique nature of God which is beyond human capa-

40. Moses Maimonides, Guide II:16, (Shlomo Pines translation, as excerpted in Twersky).
41. Maimonides, Ibid.
42. Twersky, Ibid.
43. Fox, Ibid, p. 19.

city to fully comprehend and yet insists that we continue to strive to do so. It seems that in this interpetation of Maimonides, the pathway itself is of some value and the effort to apprehend some sense of the divine has its own intrinsic worth; the fewer misconceptions we have about God, the more we can be said to know about God.

Benor also discusses Maimonides' "radical negative theology"[44], but while Fox presents the apprehension of the incorporeal human intellect as a pathway to God, Benor maintains that the object of rational speculation in Maimonides' thought is not specific attributes of the Deity. The contemplation of which Maimonides speaks is not directed at God, but rather at the teleological structure of the world. Nature is understood as an expression of God's will, as proceeding from God as "divine attributes of action " or what would be described as virtues in a human being. In this attempt to describe the Deity, it is important to remember that such a description is purely metaphorical. That is, we are constructing an image of the Deity as the divine power has been expressed in Creation, and not, in actuality, attributing any positive descriptions to the deity responsible for Creation. Nonetheless, Benor considers this idea of divinity to be the highest idea to which one should strive in Maimonides' understanding of what it is to "know" God. It is only by first apprehending the totality of nature as it truly exists and then appreciating its manifest wisdom that one can be drawn into the unconditional love of God which Maimonides considered genuine.[45]

44. Benor, Ibid, p6.
45. Benor, Ibid, pp. 47-51.

By determining that divine wisdom is manifest in the Teleological structure of nature, Benor concludes that Maimonides interprets this teleological structure as reflecting an end which God has prescribed for the universe and all that is in it. Thus, Maimonides' conception of God is not the unknowing completely detached God whom we generally associate with rational philosophy. Rather, this is a God who does have knowledge of our world in so far as the application the term "knowledge" is used as a negative attribute to qualify the meaning of the term "intellect" when it is applied to God, whom we think of an intellect which is unlike ours. God's knowledge, then, is not the pure consciousness of self-intellection, rather it extends to the general structure of nature, i.e., God is the form of forms. As Benor interpets Maimonides, it is through the apprehension of the structure of the universe that we acquire a path toward the knowledge of God that is required by true religion.[46]

Knowledge of God and Moral Action:

The conflict between the demands of religious law and its insistence upon the necessity of action, and rational philosophy, with its insistence upon the excellence and superiority of contemplation, -- a leitmotiv of medieval thought[47] -- did not escape Maimonides' attention. He too was aware that pure intellectual knowledge of God is not necessarily motivating. If, through intellectual perfection, an individual is capable of transcending

46. Benor, Ibid, p. 38.
47. Twersky, Ibid.

the mundane, what would compel him to continue to interact with the world which he has transcended? In Plato, this issue is addressed by portraying the perfected individual as making the ultimate sacrifice for the greater good of humanity. He withdraws himself from contemplating the forms and serves this world as a prince of a city-state. Indeed, ironically, it is his level of intellectual perfection which makes him uniquely suited for such duties. There is, however, an inherent injustice in this, that the perfected individual is seemingly "punished" or at least penalised for having transcended the mundane world by being required to govern in it.[48]

Maimonides attempts to circumvent this problem by positing a philosophical knowledge of God that is morally transformative. The *amor dei intellectualis* which is the culmination of the contemplative's intellectual perfection is not purely theoretical. It would be incomplete if it did not result in moral action.

> ... the perfection of man that may truly be gloried is in the one acquired by him who has achieved, in a measure corresponding to his capacity, apprehension of Him.... The way of life of such an individual, after he has achieved this apprehension, will always have in view loving-kindness, righteousness, and judgment, through assimilation to His actions... [49]

In order for an individual to be "complete", ie., all of his perfecting causes realised, his morality must be actualized. The intellectually perfected individual is required to perform ethical and moral actions (ie., מצות) on

48. Plato, The Republic, 519d(ff), as summarized in Benor, Ibid, pp. 27-28.
49. Maimonides, Guide III:54, p638.

behalf of this world, in order to achieve the intellectual excellence he seeks. What is important to note here is that practical perfection (moral behaviour) is not considered to be solely a result of *amor dei intellectualis.* Rather, it is a necessary pre-condition for theoretical perfection (intellectual excellence).[50]

Maimonides' Conception of Prayer:

Similarly, intellectual perfection does not negate the obligation for participation in the ritual life of Judaism as well. More specifically, it does not absolve the individual from participation in prayer. But this obligation is not without its difficulties either. If we can form a conception of a God who is both the Creator of the world and maintains an ongoing connection with the world via interventions in both nature and history, one feels compelled to ask what role human prayer plays in the determination of the Deity's actions.

At first glance, Maimonides seems to present his reader with two very different conceptions of prayer. The first is the conventional, simplistic dialogical type of prayer that arises out of our awareness of humanity's complete dependence upon God as the Creator and Master of the World; Judge and Loving Father of humanity. In this conception, humanity turns to God in plea and supplication for the fulfillment of its needs and God, who is understood as knowing both our prayers and our needs, responds to them according to the merit of those who are praying. Yet it is possible that, even if an individual lacks merit, God may still elect to respond favourably.

50. Benor, Ibid, p. 56.

The second prayer conception stems from Maimonides' philosophical understanding of God and the relationship between God, humanity and the world. In this conception God is eternal, unchanging, immutable and, hence, we might conclude that any attempt at prayer might, at best, be superfluous; but in the worst case it might be deemed futile. Within this frame-work, Fox argues that true worship of the divine appears as a form of *amor dei intellectualis* (intellectual love of the Deity).[51] It may be possible, however, to provide an avenue for expressions of thanks to the Deity. Such expressions, although meagre due to the limitations of human intellect and language, would nonetheless be deemed appropriate, considering that the capacity to apprehend the nature of man (ie., the incorporeality of his intellect, which is likened to that of the Deity), is acknowledged as a gift from the Creator, whom man strives to apprehend. Fox contends, however, that praise would be impossible. This is due to both the limits of human intellect, which prevents complete apprehension of the Deity, and of human language, which is poorly equipped to express something which our own intellects can not fully apprehend. [52]

If, as Fox and others[53] maintain, this polarity exists in Maimonides' approach to prayer, then petitionary prayer becomes especially problematic. With the offering of petitionary prayer, there is the presupposition that there is some meaningful sense in which we may affirm that God both hears and responds (positively or negatively) to it. If such prayer is successful, ie., efficacious, God is affected in some fashion and divine intention toward us is mitigated. If, however, we fail to move God, our petition is rejected.

The paradigmatic model for this conception in biblical, classical rabbinic, and medieval texts is Moses and his personal petitions before God. Although one may view the response to his petitions as Moses' discovery of what was and was not possible in his relationship with God, the traditional view of these instances is that some of his petitions wer favourably answered; some were denied;[54] and some received a response that did not reject the petition outright, but was not an explicit fulfillment of the petition either. For example, when Moses pleads for mercy on behalf of the Israelites after the construction of the Golden Calf, the Torah states: "And the Lord renounced the punishment He had planned to bring upon His people." However, when he pleads to change the divine decree concerning his own fate -- "Let me, I pray, cross over and see the good land on the other side of the Jordan...."[55] -- he is both rebuffed and rebuked: "Enough! Never speak to Me of this matter again!"[56] Finally, there is Moses' request to behold God's Presence. God responds, saying "I will make all My goodness pass before you..." yet Moses is not permitted to see God's face because "... man may not see Me (God) and live." [57]

51. MarvinFox, "Prayer in the Thinking of the Rambam" in Prayer in Judaism: Continuity and Change, (Hebrew) Gabriel H. Cohn ed.,(Ramat Gan, Shlomo Rozner Press), p. 158.
52. Fox, Ibid, pp. 297-8.
53. See, for example Leo Strauss's introduction to Pines' translation of the Guide, "How to Begin to Study the Guide of the Perplexed"; Julius Guttmann, On the Philosophy of Religion, N. Rotenstreich ed., Jerusalem, Magnes, 1976.; Jakob Petuchowski, Understanding Jewish Prayer, New York, Ktav, 1972.; David Hartman, Maimonides: Torah and Philosophic Quest, Philadelphia, Jewish Publication Society, 1976.
54. Fox, Ibid, pp 298-9
55. Exodus 32:14. (Jewish Publication Society translation, Philadelphia, JPS, 1967).
56. Deuteronomy 3:25-26 (JPS translation).
57. Exodus 32:18-20 (JPS translation).

In his halakhic works, Maimonides typically reflects the conventional understanding of prayer. However, there are a number of instances in Maimonides' Commentary on the Mishnah (identified by Fox), where there is a hint of some philosophical or theological reservations about this traditional conception. For example, in the discussion regarding the praising of God for both the good and the ill that befalls us in our lives,[58] it is readily apparent that, due to our own limitations, we are uninformed about the ultimate ends of such good or ill. Hence, if we are offering petitionary prayers to change our circumstances in an environment which assumes that God only does good, are we not guilty of second-guessing God's intent? If we are to adopt the halakhic tradition of trusting in God and believing that today's misfortune will become tomorrow's blessing, then why offer petitionary prayers at all? Fox argues that, for Maimonides, this was not a problem at all, because accepting God's decree in good faith does not preclude us from hoping or praying that God's ends will be achieved, but in a less painful manner than if we let current circumstance prevail.[59]

In another passage Maimonides refers to an interpretation of Hezekiah's praiseworthy deeds, one of which was the removal of certain books containing formulas for healing from public use. In this interpretation, Hezekiah is praised because these books are deemed a threat to prayer. That is, people will choose to consult them rather than rely on the offering of petition or supplication for healing. Maimonides fiercely attacks this view, arguing in the traditional rabbinic vein that one is obligated to seek help in

58. For Rabbinic discussion, see previous chapter, p. 15.
59. Fox, Ibid, pp. 302-3.

times of illness and, furthermore, that the prayer for healing is not in and of itself a method of cure, nor is seeking medical advice a break with faith.Rather, one offers prayers for healing in the same way that one offers blessing for food. Just as God has made the land bountiful for us, so too, God has granted us the knowledge and skill to make medicines that will heal.[60]

Perhaps most intriguing of all, is his discussion of the Thirteen Principles of Faith, which Maimonides presents as the necessary basis of belief for all Jews. In this discourse, Maimonides stresses that God alone is to be worshipped, yet he speaks only of praise and adoration. In a scholarly milieu which has an interpretive tradition that tends to put almost as much emphasis on the silences of a text as it puts on the explicit words of the text, Maimonides' omission of petitionary prayer in this explanation of "worship" might be interpreted as a rejection, or at least a lower opinion, of petitionary prayer. Fox himself, however, is quick to point out that this is probably reading too much into it.[61]

Nevertheless, the conventional/halakhic treatment of prayer does seem to run contrary to the philosophical tenets which Maimonides held so dear. If we hold a conception of a God that is immutable, then, by definition, God does not change because there is nothing in the nature of the world nor in divine nature that could cause change to occur in God. Furthermore, we can ascribe no positive attributes to God, nor make any correlative analogies between human emotion and divine response. That being the case, the

60. For Rabbinic discussion, see previous chapter, p. 14.
61. Fox, Ibid, pp. 303-4.

traditional portrayal of God as a merciful father who "hearkens to prayer" or, for that matter, the portrayal of any relation between God and humanity, is rendered unintelligible. Maimonides himself states:[62]

> In view of the fact that the relation between us and Him, may He be exalted, is considered as non-existent -- I mean the relation between Him and that which is other than He -- if follows necessarily that likeness between Him and us should also be considered non-existent.[63]

Given this description, the intelligiblity of conventional prayer is certainly called into question, especially when we consider the petitions and supplications of the standardized liturgy. It would indeed appear that prayer can not have any meaningful petitionary function in a setting where one is addressing a deity who is not only immutable, but whose very nature is not expressible in human language.

Contrary to Fox and those who maintain that there is a dialectic tension in Maimonides' conception of prayer, Benor dismsses the tension and argues for an inherent unity in Maimonides' idea of prayer. He arrives at this conclusion by attributing to Maimonides a fundamentally different conception of prayer. Rather than categorizing prayer as either diaological (expressing needs, hopes, fears, etc.) or ritualistic (expressing obedience to religious law), and then attempting to reconcile them to Maimonides' rational contemplation of the divine, Benor suggests that, for Maimonides, all of the so-called forms of prayer are merely different aspects of essentially the same

62. Fox, Ibid, pp. 306-7.
63. Maimonides, Guide, I:56, p. 130.

phenomenon. Benor contends that Maimonides viewed prayer asessentially an expression of thanksgiving and understood it as a primary mode of worship.[64] Rather than raising philosophical or theological questions that would call into question the possibility of petitionary prayer, Maimonides chooses to affirm the propriety of praise, petition and thanksgiving and our duty to offer them.

> .... 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 upon him in rich measure. [65]

As Benor interpets this passage, Maimonides' presents prayer as an act of pure worship, rather than as an attempt at communicating with God or contemplating eternal truths. In this conception, prayer becomes essentially an act of thanksgiving, designed to foster a love of God. As such, it is not centred solely on formalized ritual or rational contemplation; rather it incorporates both. It is an act that allows the individual to "realise the true nature of God, to experience God's presence and to inculcate this realization into all dimensions of life."[66]

> .... 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 straightaway love Him, praise Him, glorify Him and long with an exceeding longing to know His great Name...."[67]

64. Benor, Ibid, p1.
65. Moses Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, Book II, *Hilkhot Tefillah*, 1:2., Isadore Twersky translation, from A Maimonides Reader, pp88-89.
66. Benor, Ibid pp1-4.
67. Moses Maimonides, Mishneh Torah Book I, *Hilkhot Torah*, 2:2., cited in Benor, Worship of the Heart, p40.

It is important to note that the object of contemplation here is the world which God has created, rather than the Deity. Yet, this apprehension leads to a love of God from which proceeds the desire for praise and further apprehension of the divinity. The fulfillment of the commandment to participate in praying the Amidah, then is understood as reflecting a from w sustained effort to conform the mind to a proper worshipful stance,[68] and as such is another tool in the effort to achieve the intellectual perfection which results in an apprehension of the divine.

Fox offers an alternate understanding of Maimonides insistence on the offering of statutory prayers which presents the laws of prayer as a possible concession to our current state of religious and intellectual development. In much the same way that he interprets the ancient sacrifical cult to be a concession to an age when worship without animal sacrifices was unthinkable, religious practice without prayer is considered unthinkable by Maimonides' contemporaries. Prayer is a concession in so far as it recognises the limits of human intellect and the depths of human spirtual need. Since no one can ever fully achieve a true intellectual apprehension of God, and, at the same, no one is ever entirely devoid of the need to praise and glorify God or appeal for divine intervention in times of need, the need for prayer remains.[69]

Regardless of whether one interprets Maimonides' view of petitionary prayer as a concession to human limits and needs which is in dialectical

68. Benor, Ibid pp1
69. Fox, Ibid, p308.

tension with the rational concept of divinity, or as the fulfillment of an halakhic precept for praise of the Deity, stemming from apprehension of the teleolgical structure of the world, Maimonides is conspicuous in his lack of address to the issue of the necessary conditions under which prayer will be answered. He does discuss the necessary eloquence for the formulation of prayer and the required mindset of the individual at prayer, however. Proper prayer evokes feelings of respect, fear, and admiration that result from the realization that one is in the presence of the Divine. These conditions reflect the approach to the Deity espoused in the classical rabbinic texts -- one approaches God through prayer in the manner of one who is preparing for presentation at court. These feelings are necessary for both private supplication and the public sections of the Amidah because they are what make the prayer meaningful and, hence, genuine. But, Maimonides resists drawing the conclusion that genuine prayer is efficacious because it results in some form of answer from God. This may be because he viewed prayer as simply the halakhically sanctioned method by which one comes before the presence of God.

But what may one expect once one is brought before the presence of the Deity? Aristotelian dialectic assumes an unchangeable God. Indeed, it would argue for a Deity which is altogether unaware of the vagaries of human existence. The rabbinic concept of prayer, however, assumes a changeable God who "hearkens to prayer" and hence responds to the concerns of humanity. How then may this be reconciled with Maimonides' pure intellectual meditation that brings the truly pious before the presence of God?

Some scholars have concluded that Maimonides did not achieve such a reconciliation, arguing that he was either an Aristotelian or an halakhist due to political circumstances of his time. This, however, has proven to be an unsatisfactory reading of his work. Indeed, some contemporary scholars would argue that it is not only an unsatisfactory conclusion, it is erroneous. In recent scholarship there have been new attempts at reading Maimonides through Maimonides' own eyes, as it were, attempting to understand his works from the perspective of the writer.

Both Fox and Benor, as we have seen, conclude that there is a place within Maimonides' rational approach to Judaism for both the contemplative prayer of the intellectually sophisticated and the mandated petitions of the fixed liturgy. Yet, they do not concur on the reasons for this reading. Fox maintains that revelation and rational philosophy continue to be in dialectical tension with each other throughout the corpus of Maimonides' work. He concludes, however, that the tension is the result of a conscious choice on Maimonides' part to incorporate both systems of belief and thought into his conception of prayer. As Fox repeatedly states, Maimonides' sought to incorporate elements of both revelation and reason into his thought, rather than make a choice of one over the other. His genius is evident in his ability to pick and choose from the traditions at hand and keept them in balance with one another.

Benor, on the other hand ameliorates the apparent conflicts in Maimonides' assertions about petitionary prayer by offering what might be considered a radical reinterpretation of Maimonides' own conception of prayer. As Benor interprets Maimonides all prayer is essentially an act of

praise in fulfillment of halakhic edict and, hence, is not incongruent with, nor in conflict with a rational conception of God. In both interpretations, however, petitionary prayer serves as a vehicle for bringing the individual into the presence of the deity. The efficacy of petitionary prayer, if one may speak of efficacy in this context, may be judged by its ability to facilitate the individual's appreciation of the teleological structure of nature.

Efficacy of Petitionary Prayer: *The Medieval Perspective*

The resurgence of Aristotelian philosophy in the Middle ages posed great theological challenges to Jewish religious authority. As scholars grappled with ways by which to either reconcile or reinterpret rationalist philosophy and revealed Toraitic tradition, they developed new insights about how to conceive of the Jewish worshiper's relationship with God. Prayer, revelation and halakhic observance took on new meaning in light of the acceptance or rejection of rationalist thought. Yet, in spite of strongly divergent views on the validity of Aristotelian thought, scholars such as Halevi and Maimonides arrived at not entirely dissimilar views on the efficacy of petitionary prayer.

For Halevi, prayer is a self-fulfilling activity that enables the individual to transcend the mundane and establish a connection with the Divine. For Maimonides, prayer is an exercise designed to facilitate the perfection of the spirit which brings the pious individual before the presence of God. for Halevi, prayer is nourishment for the soul. For Maimonides, it is meant to lead to nourishment for the intellect. For both, prayer -- including petitionary

prayer -- is a conduit to an experience of the Divine.

The divergence occurs with respect to the path that leads them to their conception of the Deity toward whom their prayer is directed. While he could not completely escape the influence of rational philosophy, Halevi ultimately felt compelled to assert the primacy of revelation over reason in order to safeguard the validity of Judaism itself. Maimonides, however, did not see Aristotelian rationalism as a threat to the veracity of his faith or its established traditions. Rather, he saw Aristotelian thought as an opportunity to establish Judaism as a religion of both revelation and reason.

Regardless of whether one attains prophecy or inspiration through devotion to Toraitic revelation, as advocated by Halevi, or the apprehension of Divine attributes through philosophic speculation, as proposed by Maimonides, petitionary prayer is not understood by either of these medieval thinkers as product of an 'ask-and-you-shall-receive' theology. For both Maimonides and Halevi, petitionary prayer is a step on the path toward a greater awareness of God. It is a vehicle for the betterment of the individual and his community and not the fulfillment of wishes.

Time and Tide and Reason:

Changing Views on the Efficacy of Petitionary Prayer

Politics and the Validity of Prayer

Prayer has long been a part of Jewish worship. However, its role in the ritual life of Jews has altered over the centuries. More importantly, the understanding of that role and the approach to the act of prayer itself has been fundamentally changed due to the influence of cultural, political and social factors in the societies in which Jews have lived. During the centuries following the destruction of the Second Temple, as the Temple's reconstruction seemed less and less imminent, the status of prayer and the role it played in the lives of ordinary Jews was transformed. Prayer was elevated from the level of supplementary ritual in the sacrificial cult to that of formalized ritual offering as *locum tenens* for the now lost sacrificial rites. Just as the ancient sacrifices had provided for more than the expiation of sins, Jews now turned to the evolving liturgical formulae of praise, petition, and thanksgiving as the only sanctioned method for approaching God. Equally profound was the resultant democratization of Jewish worship. Prayers were now offered by the individual as part of a praying community, with no one person's prayer deemed more significant than another's and each person's prayer viewed as an integral link in the community's relationship with God. Furthermore, prayer was now recognised as the personal, private pathway for the individual to communicate with his/her God. This revolution in worship forever changed the face of Judaism and its ritual practices.

By the time of Judah Halevi, Moses Maimonides, and their contemporaries, the prayer service had long been established as a communal rite and personal obligation. Nevertheless, the validity of Jewish worship came into question as the Jews of medieval Europe were subjected to the vagaries of political policy, theological challenge and philosophical syncretism. Contact with Islam had eventually yielded a Golden Age of scholarship and creativity for Judaism. However, the conflict between Islamic states and Christian principalities in their respective drive to assert primacy over the contiguous territories of Spain and over the "Holy Land" left the Jews of medieval Europe in a precarious position between two very powerful opponents.

While Christian and Muslim religious leaders took issue with Judaism's rejection of their newer covenants of faith, the resurgence of Aristotelian rationalism posed new challenges to the rabbinic understanding of Israel's realtionship with God. Judaism was characterised by Christianity and Islam as outmoded, legalistic, and ultimately rejected by God in favour of their respective revelatory texts, or as a faith which could not be reconciled with reason and hence, an invalid approach to communion with the divine. Furthermore, the rabbis of the Middle Ages grappled with challenges to their authority from within the Jewish world. Karaite Jews, who disputed their interpretation of the Torah and its obligations, argued for a direct, literal interpretation of the Written Law, without recourse to the Oral Law, as embodied in the Mishnah, Gemara, Midrash and Aggadah.

Jewish religious authorities rose to these challenges and a new form of scholarship -- the apologetic -- was born. Halevi's Kuzari stands as one of

the most comprehensive and eloquent examples of this genre. Through the medium of the apologetics, Jewish scholars addressed Christian, Muslim, Aristotelian, and Karaite challenges alike, maintaining and defending the validity of the Jewish faith. Against Christian and Muslim claims to religious primacy Halevi in particular argued for the validity of Israel's revealed tradition, noting that both Christian and Islamic knowledge of God through revelation and miracles is rooted in the revelation experience of ancient Israel, and that their own eschatological claims remain unfulfilled. In response to Aristotelian philosophy, the rabbis took one of two approaches. Anti-Aristotelians like Halevi maintained that philosophers do not achieve true union with the divine Intellect, nor are they privy to true Wisdom which can only be achieved thorough prophecy, ie., revelation. Pro-Aristotelians, like Moses Maimonides, claimed that the ancient rabbinic traditions incorporated truths of rational thought. Many medieval rabbis attacked the Karaite stand on Oral Law in discourse that often bordered on venomous. Those accepting the rabbinic tradition insisted that the nature of the written Torah text was ellipitical. Therefore, adherence to an interpretive tradition was imperative. Without an established authoritative method of interpretation, the integrity of both the text and its practical application to Jewish life could be brought into question. The authoritative interpretive tradition, Halevi and his rabbinic contemporaries argued, is the Oral Law.

Apprehension of the Divine and the Praying Community

The validity of both traditions -- Written and Oral Law -- is of special importance, for it is the Oral Law that establishes the validity of statutory prayer and the Written Law that provides the textual support for that

position. However, the offering of prayer involves more than halakhic and Scriptural deliberations or the opening of our mouths and the utterance of the contents of our hearts or minds heavenward. Before one determines the content, setting, and timing for the offering of prayers, one must first take into consideration the Deity to whom they are being offered.

In the mindset of the classical rabbis, the God to whom they prayed, (though characterized as a compassionate God who hears prayers) was the God who had exacted the punishment of exile upon Israel. This is the enigmatic God of all Creation, the ultimate power in the universe who was intimately connected to and responsible for the fortunes and misfortunes of Israel -- both individually and collectively. Each recitation of the Amidah has a correlative part in the daily Temple sacrificial service -- the service commanded by the God of the Torah who spelled out the ritual, content and mindset for each sacrifice in exacting detail. Scripture is replete with tales of inappropriate offerings being brought before God and transgressors being consumed by Divine wrath. Since the prayers of the Amidah, including personal petitionary prayers, were now associated with the sacrificial offerings, the element of danger associated with the making of an offering before God was now associated with the uttering of these statutory prayers. The rabbis of Late Antiquity, therefore, turned their focus from the minute details of sacrificial offerings to the content, ritual, and mindset of the liturgy to safeguard both individual and community as they stood before this God, engaged in the act of prayer, as well as to ensure the successful, efficacious result of that prayer.

The establishment of a fixed liturgy provides worshipers with a stimulus for turning their thoughts toward God. The public worship setting, combined with the fixed liturgy ensures that correct language, formula, posture and attitude are maintained as the individual approaches the Deity as part of a praying community. Public worship is offered in behalf of the whole community, of which the individual must see himself as a part. However, individuals may offer personal petitions, particularly in distress, at any time. Still, there is an attempt to balance individual and communal needs and identities, and rabbinic prayer forms were set as well for individual petitions. The rabbinic prayer formulae and the communal setting work in concert to guide the thoughts of the individual so that the intent of his prayer is in keeping with the greater good of the community. By setting the parameters for the public prayer service as well as the formulation and offering of personal prayer, the rabbis attempted to safeguard the one at worship and, at the same time, establish the validity of prayer as ***the*** substitute for sacrificial offerings, not only in the eyes of God, but in the eyes of the people as well, and to facilitate its efficacy.

Public prayer served a specific social/psychological function as well. The gathering together of the community at regular intervals allowed for the now nationless Jews to momentarily re-experience the grandeur of the ancient Temple service and the potency of national spirit. The prayers of Judaism are an expression of the people Israel. They provided an outlet to expel despair and rekindle the hopes of a nation bereft of its sacred and political centre, Jerusalem. Just as the call to the Temple, to stand before their God, had been a binding force, so too standing before God in the presence of the community provided a common voice for the expression of

hopes, fears and dreams and served to unite Jews in the common goal of the experience of the divine.

The rabbis of the medieval period recognised the benefits of public worship and steadfastly argued for the offering of prayer in the communal setting. Echoing the concerns of his rabbinic predecessors, Judah Halevi focuses specifically on the individual's natural inclination to be so caught up in his own affairs that he could find himself directing his prayer toward a goal which would be contrary to, and potentially harmful for, the community as a whole. Maimonides, prizing intellectual and spiritual perfection above all, paradoxically viewed formalised prayer as both a concession to man's inadequacies and an expression of his loftiest ideals. As a direct parallel to the ancient sacrifices, which Maimonides understood as a concession to man's lack of spiritual and intellectual sophistication, the prayers of the Amidah reflect a concession to similar conditions. More specifically, he felt that the establishment of fixed wording for prayers was a sign that his contemporaries lacked the vision, eloquence and perfection of their prophetic ancestors. As an expression of man's lofitiest ideals, prayer is a pathway to the divine. Maimonides understood the Amidah as the instrument through which the individual might begin to engender within himself the religious ethic of *imitatio dei.* For the most intellectually and spiritually sophisticated, the Amidah serves as a vehicle, moving the individual to a state of pure intellectual meditation which brings the worshiper before the presence of God. The rabbis of the Middle Ages also placed the offering of prayer in the same realm of purity and danger in which the ancient sacrificial rites had existed. The legislation of formal public

prayer thus enabled the preservation of both the integrity of the prayer and the element of awe that results from being in the presence of the Deity.

However, the conception of God presented in the philosophically oriented writings of Maimonides, and even in the anti-Aristotelian stance of Judah Halevi, differed markedly from the God images of the Torah from which the rabbinic traditions of prayer were drawn. The God of medieval religious philosophy was highly intellectualised. Similarly, the human experience with this deity is intellectual in nature, although even Maimonides,who argued for a rational approach to religion, retained an emotional component in his approach to God.

Maimonides' conception of God, along with his approach to religious philosophy, seems to be a study in contradictions, although he insisted that Aristotelian philosophy was not contrary to the teachings of Judaism; rather, he perceived rationalism to be an integral part of Jewish theology and cosmology. Much of his scholarship was devoted to proving this perception. To this day, however, debate continues as to whether he was attempting to use Aristotelian thought to rationalise and defend Judaism, or if he was in fact an Aristotelian at heart and using Judaism to rationalise and defend his adherence to Aristotelian cosmology. Regardless of which conclusion one reaches regarding Maimonides' philosophy, the neo-Aristotelian theology of the Guide does not appear to be the same God of judgment and reward presented in the Torah.

In the pages of his philosophical writings, such as the Guide, Maimonides presents us with the conception of an incorporeal deity that, at

times, appears paradoxical. The God Maimonides describes is so radically other than human nature or form, that it is impossible to accurately ascribe any positive attributes to God or God's nature. This notion of the divine is not purely Aristotelian, however. Aristotle described the divine as an Unmoved Mover, in essence, an Intellect that was completely removed from the sphere of human action and, indeed, even from knowledge of the human realm. Maimonides also characterizes the deity as an Intellect of supernal power, but he rejects the absence of cognition or involvement with respect to the mundane world. Maimonides' religious philosophy envisions a God without desires or human emotions, arguing that terms such as wrath, compassion, and the like do not have the same meaning when applied to God as they do when applied to humans. Yet, this God is characterized as producing only good for humanity and engendering ethical behaviour in man, through human apprehension of His divinity.

Despite this radically other conception of God, Maimonides maintains the Biblical characterization of man as created in the image of God, arguing that God's *image* is not the same as God's *form*. By characterizing man's intellect as incorporeal, it is possible for man to be likened to his Creator. However, human intellect is not equal to that of God. Maimonides acknowledges that the limits of human intellect and reason prevent all but the most intellectually and spiritually perfected human beings from fully apprehending God's unique nature. Still, the striving for such apprehension and its prerequisite spiritual and intellectual perfection is a worthy quest; indeed, it is the ultimate quest of the human soul and intellect.

Judah Halevi also grappled with Aristotelian notions of cosmology, theology and the appropriate path to apprehension of the Deity. Unlike Maimonides, however, Halevi ultimately rejects rationalistic philosophy as the only path to the divine. He concludes that philosophers are not privy to revelation, which he deems to be the highest source of wisdom. Nevertheless, classical philosophy had an impact on Halevi's theological deliberations and the God he presents in the Kuzari is not limited to the conceptions evidenced in the rabbinic literature. While it is obvious that Halevi wishes to maintain his links with the rabbinic past, he nonetheless presents us with a God concept and a discourse that are both reminiscent of rational dialectic. Halevi was definitely influenced by the prevalent cosmology of his time. He understood the universe as being comprised of various levels of existence. Each level is higher than the one that precedes it and each higher level incorporates all the finishing causes all the levels before it. At the lower end of the spectrum are the simpler elements and life forms that inhabit our world. At the higher end is man, with the divine realm being the highest level of all. Yet not all men are relegated to the same plane of existence. There are those who reach of higher level and are capable of receiving prophetic grace. Such individuals are able to communicate with the divine will -- a will that bears more than passing resemblance to the Intellect characterised by Maimonides and the Active Intellect of Aristotelian rationalism.

In both medieval conceptions, the characterization of God as an Intellect casts the role of prayer and מצוות in a different light. Furthermore, the interaction of petitionary prayer and the performance of מצוות is significant when considering the question of the efficacy of petitionary

prayer. Halevi maintained the rabbinic path of מצות leading to and including the offering of petitionary prayer, but he did so as a prescribed regimen infused with an intense desire on the part of the pious individual to draw nearer to the divine order and unite with it. Unlike the rabbis, however, Halevi interpeted the intention of all the מצות as movement toward prayer. The pious individual is called into action to fulfill the commandments as part of his drive toward communion with the divine. With all the powers of the body focused for one deed (the act of prayer) and all of man's desires focused on the soul's intent, the pious one is able to raise his own essence and move to higher levels of existence until he is able to commune with his Creator. Halevi did not address the efficacy of petitionary prayers in the concrete terms of wish fulillment. Rather than defining efficacy in terms of literal fulfillment -- one measure of efficacy that is provided for in the classical rabbinic texts -- Halevi linked the efficacy of petitionary prayer solely to the offering of the prayer itself. In a departure from traditional rabbinic understanding, both the fufillment of the מצות and the offering in the Amidah of petitionary prayer are deemed efficacious when the individual reaches a level of spiritual perfection where he is capable of receiving revelation. The gift of prophecy, not the empirical fulfillment of a request, is the ultimate proof of the prayer's efficacy.

The allegorical nature of Maimonides' writings, and their apparent contradictions, makes arriving at a definitive determination of his viewpoint difficult. Many scholars, notably Julius Guttmann, maintain that Maimonides never succeeded in harmonizing Jewish ritual practices such as the offering of prayer and the fulfillment of מצות with Aristotelian rationalism. Others, such as Marvin Fox, maintain that the philosophical notions gained from

Aristotelianism and the religious tenets of Judaism remained in dialectical tension, with adherence to rabbinic practice ultimately winning out over pure rationalism. Hence, Fox concludes, because Maimonides was able to admit the limits of rationalism he was able to circumvent a philosophy that would have been ethically inert. The act of prayer thus incorporates both formalized ritual and rational contemplation to provide the individual with the awareness of being in God's presence. This leads to the unconditional love of God, out of which is born the desire to do the will of the Deity. Compliance with that will, for Maimonides, is realised through the performance of מצות and the cultivation of ethical behaviour. Maimonides looked upon the מצות as both a pathway to the spiritual improvement of the individual and an act of *imitatio dei* which, for him, was the ultimate expression of love for God.

Similarly, there are conflicting notions as to the role Maimonides ascribes to prayer. If one insists on classifying prayer into different forms serving different functions and even representing differing approaches to the deity, then the contemplative mode of prayer advocated by Maimonides is unreconcilable with a fixed liturgy of petitionary prayers. If one accepts Fox's interpretation, that petitionary prayers are a concession to human limitations and needs, then they remain in tension with the contemplation of the Deity which Maimonides so highly prized. If, however, one accepts the intepretation of Benor -- that all prayer, including petitionary prayer, is merely part of a liturgical whole that is an expression of thanks in fulfillment of Divine command -- then petitionary prayer is merely a complementary aspect of the contemplative ideal.

In classical Rabbinic Judaism, where the rabbis are addressing the God of the ancient sacrificial cult, the fulfillment of the מצות, the intent (כונה) and fixed wording (קבע) of the Amidah prayer combine to call God's attention to the plight of the individual and/or the community. God is, of course, understood as being aware of all things at all times as well as being free to heed the petitions or ignore them for some other purpose not yet comprehended by the worshiper(s). Nevertheless, the meticulous observance of the מצות and the approach to prayer with an attitude and language of true supplication are understood as increasing the chances that the petitions will, in actuality, be fulfilled.

But the actual fulfillment of a petition is not the only standard by which the Rabbis determined the efficacy of the Amidah or other petitionary prayers. To be sure, in the guidelines for both public and personal petitionary prayer, the underlying theological value expressed in the classical rabbinic texts is that prayer has an instrumental value. But the covenantal relationship between Israel and her God is far more complex than simply "ask and ye shall receive". Yet the rabbis maintain that all prayer is eventually answered. As previously related, acceptance of a petition does not imply tangible fulfillment in the manner in which the worshiper hopes, nor does silence signify rejection. The act of prayer, of continuing to offer petitions in the hope that they will eventually be answered, is the ongoing demonstration of Israel's continuing faith in God and God's willingness and ability to respond to prayer. Thus, the *ritual* of offering prayer in and of itself may be described as being efficacious.

Understanding the Role of Petitionary Prayer

The understanding of the role of petitionary prayer in the life of the individual Jew and his community has undergone some subtle changes with the passage of time. But certain commonalities remain. This is the case whether one approaches prayer from the perspective of a rabbinic sage, a defender of received tradition, or a neo-Aristotelian. The Amidah and the allowance for personal supplication are at their most fundamental level a liturgical substitute for the legislated and personal cultic offerings of the ancient Temple era. The rabbis of the Middle Ages understood this as well as the rabbis of Late Antiquity who had been so instrumental in the formalisation of petitionary prayer. Thus, the element of danger concommitant with the bringing of sacrifices and agricultural offerings to the altar in the Temple has continued to be associated with the offering of petitionary prayers by the rabbis of both eras. While the classical rabbis certainly provided for the possibility of actual fulfillment of requests for beneficence from the Deity, i.e., a prayer for rain could in fact result in rainfall, their deliberation on the wording, choreography and intent of those at worship is not entirely dissimilar to the rabbis of later generations, even though the understanding of the nature of the Deity to whom the prayers are being offered may have changed. In both time periods the rabbis are careful to present the public worship service as the preferred venue for such offerings, arguing that in the public setting the correct wording and posture could best be ensured and the values of the entire community appropriately be expressed.

What emerges from the discussions in the classical texts of Mishnah, Tosefta, and Talmud and the medieval scholarship of theologians and philosophers such as Judah Halevi and Moses ben Maimon, is that historical Jewish tradition, in its rich variety, understands that, regardless of the actual outcome of petitionary prayer, the offering of such petitions before the Deity has instrumental value in and of itself. Whether one understands the Deity as a primal First Cause of the Universe, as an Active Intellect, or the nameless God of the Patriarchs from the Bible, the value of petitionary prayer is expressed, among other ways, in its ability to move the worshiping individual and community from preoccupation with the mundane affairs of the human realm to the preoccupation and interaction with the realm of the Divine. Whether prayer was regarded as the fulfillment of a Divine command, or the fulfillment of the מצות is understood as the natural result of prayer, the rabbis of both periods understood worship as the service man owes God. The awareness of being in the presence of God that is achieved through participation in formal prayer is understood as an acknowledgement of the deity; an expression of gratitude, and compliance with the divine will. As part of a praying community, the individual is both caretaker and partaker of the communal good.

If the efficacy of petitonary prayer is to be measured by God's "answer", then the efficacy of petitionary prayer can, at best, be described as indeterminate. While those who take a more intellectualized approach to the Deity do not look for direct fulfillment of requests, both the medieval and rabbis of the classical rabbinic period conceived of a God who has free will. Thus an "answer" to prayer may be positive, negative, or "not now". Furthermore, even a positive response may not be the one anticipated

because it is assumed that God not only knows all our needs, God meets them according to what God has judged best for the individual, for his community, or even for all of humanity It is simply beyond human capacity to know for certain. However, if we focus on the instrumental nature of prayer, the capacity to pray is in and of itself a measure of efficacy. Man's ability to suffuse the words of prayers with real personal meaning and significance may be deemed an indication of his contact with the divine will and the ultimate assurance that God will indeed help in the attainment of the desired ends expressed in the prayers he utters. This may indeed be the true meaning of the prophetic verse:

> *"And it shall come to pass that, before they call, I will answer, and while they are speaking, I will hear."* (Isaiah 65:24)[71]

71. Jakob Petuchowski, Understanding Jewish Prayer, pp40-41.

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