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Report on the Rabbinic Dissertation Submitted by

Judith Lynn Brazen

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for Ordination

Retzon Elohim: A Rabbinic Understanding of God's Will in Prayer

Liturgical theology is a rare discipline in Jewish Studies. Liturgists have traditionally preferred the tried and true projects inherent to historical investigation. Theological enquiry is not actually absent in the secondary literature, certainly, but we have few systematic studies of theologically laden terminology in the liturgy.

Judith Brazen's thesis is therefore a pioneer study, in that her concern is not at all historical, but plainly theological, and systematic at that. Taking Seder Rav Amram as her text, she isolates every usage of the root rtzh - nouns like ratzon or retzonkha, and thus reserving only those which denote the action or sentiment of God, she tries to arrive at the dominant liturgical conception of God's will.

An elementary consideration in this thesis was the stipulation of the rules by which inferences might be drawn. As the thesis developed, it became clear that one might argue from a variety of perspectives, all of which are outlined in Ms. Brazen's Introduction. The liturgical and, therefore, largely poetic, nature of the material permits the researcher to go beyond explicit statements regarding God's will, and to include also cases of syntactic parallelism. That is, when ratzon occurs in a couplet, with the various terms in the two parts of the couplet paralleling each other, one may assume that ratzon and its parallel term are somehow equivalent. Then too, certain associational patterns were found, in that ratzon occurs along with other words or contexts in a more than random manner. In such instances, one may deduce the contexts or areas of experience in which God's will is presumed to be active. Finally, attention was given to the cluster of associated concepts revealed by diverse translations of ratzon: such things as "will," "take pleasure in," and "choose." It was assumed that the multifaceted translation-set that the word ratzon generates has relevance also to the initial Hebrew term itself, in that God's ratzon may refer to God's capacity to will, to take pleasure, and to choose, for instance. Especially when syntactic parallelism of associational patterns paired ratzon with terms such as bachar, this line of reasoning proved fruitful.

### Thesis Report - Judith Lynn Brazen

Methodologically, Ms. Brazen proceeds inductively, citing each Hebrew text, then translating it, and, finally, drawing out whatever conclusions she finds possible, using the above criteria for argumentation. She divides her texts into three conceptual categories: 1) ratzon as a theological category relating to the nature of God; 2) ratzon as a religious anthropological category referring to the nature of human beings, with respect to the human fulfillment of God's will; and 3) ratzon as a covenantal term implying the relationship between God's will on one hand, and human will on the other. Each section concludes with a summary statement of what the mass of individual cases imply, when taken as a whole.

An introductory chapter surveys the concept of God's will in the Bible, as a backdrop against which to comprehend what the rabbis built as their own conceptual scheme, it being assumed that some rabbinic usage would be understandable only if the prior biblical pattern were kept in mind. A concluding chapter is used by the author not only to summarize her findings in a narrative synoptic style, but also to confront those conclusions from her own perspective as a modern Reform Jew struggling to comprehend what she herself may affirm about God's will.

In general, Ms. Brazen argues that the rabbis had a well-developed sense of God's will, in which it was assumed that God deliberately created the world with design, and then chose Israel willfully presenting to Israel the covenantal gifts of Torah, the Sabbath, and the Land of Israel. In the religious anthropology section - clearly the strongest chapter here - she notes that human will parallels God's will, except that humans have the potential for good and evil, whereas God's will is all good. Humans thus struggle to align their will to God's will, fearing most the arch sin of hubris, symbolized by "the leaven in the dough" of human character. At such times, we make pretensions to having a will that is wholly good, like God's, and we go astray. We thus pray that it may be God's will that our will incline to God's will, for we need God's help. Our task requires wholeheartedness on our part, and even the situational overcoming of other virtues that stand in our way - as Abraham had to overcome his parental compassion for Isaac, in order to obey God's will at the akedah trial. The covenantal implications of this parallelism between God and human beings, both of whom are blessed with wills, are drawn out in the fifth chapter.

The reader may not agree with every conclusion Ms. Brazen draws from her texts. Liturgical theology is not as empirically based as the usual historical problems to which liturgists have attended. Similarly, much of what is said merely confirms what we already know from other contexts - midrashic accounts of God's nature, for instance. But the thesis's strength lies in its systematic patterning of a single theological item that has hitherto received

Thesis Report - Judith Lynn Brazen

no serious attention in a sustained way, certainly not in its liturgical manifestations.

Respectfully submitted,  
Dr. Lawrence A. Hoffman  
Referee

April 23, 1990



RETZON ELOHIM:  
A RABBINIC UNDERSTANDING OF GOD'S WILL IN PRAYER  
JUDITH LYNN BRAZEN

Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of Requirements for Ordination

Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion  
Graduate Rabbinic Program  
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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	INTRODUCTION	I
II.	<u>RETZON ELOHIM</u> IN THE BIBLE	4
III.	<u>SEDER RAV AMRAM:</u> THEOLOGICAL	25
IV.	<u>SEDER RAV AMRAM:</u> ANTHROPOLOGICAL	39
V.	<u>SEDER RAV AMRAM:</u> COVENANTAL	76
VI.	CONCLUSION	115
VII.	BIBLIOGRAPHY	122

### Introduction

The following is an analysis of the term ratzon as it applies to God in Seder Rav Amram. I begin my study with a brief background analysis of ratzon in the Bible. I then proceed to my research of ratzon in Seder Rav Amram, in which I trace 119 citations of the term. These citations appear in various thematic and grammatical usages which I have categorized according to my understanding of the prayers. Though these categorizations are to some extent arbitrary, they are based upon thoroughly scrutinized criteria, which will be explained in the following paragraphs of the introductory chapter. My goal here is to extract an authentic rabbinic understanding of retzon Elohim from these prayers. Any such analysis inevitably reflects modern and personal biases. I conclude with my own tentative beliefs, based upon an integration of the following research with my own beliefs as a modern liberal Jew.

Both the nature of God's will and the way in which human beings fulfill God's will are emphasized in the prayers. I have chosen to divide these prayers into the following thematic categories:

A. Theological. These prayers emphasize God's nature. They highlight a rabbinic understanding of what God desires for human beings.

B. Anthropological. These prayers express the

rabbinic interpretation of the way in which human beings fulfill God's will.

C. Covenantal. These prayers emphasize the relationship between God's will and the will of human beings.

I have categorized the prayers according to five basic criteria.

1) Explicit statements defining God's will: While these explicit statements are rather infrequent, they do convey particularly significant information regarding God's will in Seder Rav Amram. One example of an explicit statement is cited in the Kaddish prayer. Here we note that the world was created according to God's will. An additional example of an explicit statement is that God "arranges the stars in their watches in the sky according to His will."

2) Syntactic parallelism: Parallelism is particularly helpful in the chapter concerning the nature of God's will. Noteworthy examples of parallelism are cited below in which the term ratzon is paralleled with the notions of God choosing and God loving Israel. In #4 of the "theological" category we note: "You chose us from all nations. You favored us from amongst all peoples." Similarly, in #5 of the same chapter: "You loved us and favored us."

3) Recurrence of key phrases with ratzon: An example of a common repetition is the phrase b'levav shalem, with a

perfect heart, which is frequently juxtaposed with ratzon. Another recurrent phrase connected with ratzon is "we will offer before you in love according to the commandments of your will." These phrases appear with ratzon with such frequency that we can confidently infer a thematic connection. Also noteworthy in this category is the opening formula, yehi ratzon milfanekha, "may it be God's will."

4) Diverse grammatical manifestations and translations of ratzon: The term frequently appears as the noun, ratzon. Ratzon also appears as a verb, ratzah and in the imperative form, retzeh. Various grammatical forms suggest different meanings for the term. Furthermore, ratzon may be translated as either "will," "pleasure," "favor" or "accept." To some extent the various translations are arbitrary; in each case I have attempted to discern the most accurate English translation.

5) Appearance of ratzon in the same context with such great frequency that we can no longer assume its indiscriminate appearance: One example of this criteria is the frequent juxtaposition of Torah with the notion of ratzon. Other noteworthy examples are the recurrent connection of ratzon with the human heart, with sin and with atonement. When ratzon appears in the same context in a greater than statistically random number of times, it is plausible to infer meaning from this context.



### Retzon Elohim in the Bible

1.

טוב יפיק רצון מידו ואיש מוכות ירשע

A good man earns the favor of the Lord,  
A man of intrigues, His condemnation.  
(Proverbs 12:2)

The term ratzon is antithetically paralleled with yarshe'a, or God's condemnation. A "good man" merits the "favor" of God, but a "man of intrigues" earns God's condemnation. Here we note a direct connection between the character of an individual and the way in which God treats him. God takes personal note of the behavior of each human being. There is nothing whimsical about God's treatment of human beings. God takes pleasure in "good" people and condemns bad people.

2.

מציא אשה כצא טוב ויפיק רצון מידו

He who finds a wife has found happiness  
And has won the favor of the Lord.  
(Proverbs 18:22)

God bestows favor upon a man who finds a wife. Not only does the man find happiness, but God is pleased with him as well. The above Proverbs verse conveys that God desires for human beings to marry. It also infers that God desires "a man" to find "happiness" through union with a woman. An action which brings happiness to a human being is the same action which pleases God. We might also infer that

human beings find happiness in pleasing God.

3.

כִּי-אַתָּה תְּבַרֵךְ צְדִיק יְהוָה כְּצֶלֶה רָצוֹן תַּעֲטֶרֶט

For you surely bless the righteous man, O Lord,  
encompassing him with favor like a shield.  
(Psalms 5:13)

Ratzon is used here with reference to "the righteous man." God blesses the righteous man and encompasses "him with favor like a shield." The righteous man is rewarded with God's blessing and favor. God's favor acts as a shield. The shield connotes protection. Like #1 above, this phrase demonstrates that God takes note of the actions of human beings and rewards the righteous for their exemplary behavior.

4.

תִּעֲבֹת יְהוָה שִׁפְתֵי-שָׁקֶר וְעֵשִׂי אֲבוֹנָה רָצוֹן

Lying speech is an abomination to the Lord,  
But those who act faithfully please Him.  
(Proverbs 12:22)

In this Proverbs verse those who engage in "lying speech" are antithetically paralleled with "those who act faithfully" and "an abomination to the Lord" is antithetical to that which pleases God. Ratzon is the opposite of abomination. Once again, God takes note of the behavior of individuals. God deems lying an abomination but takes pleasure in those who are faithful. Those individuals who are performers of emunah are those who find God's ratzon.

5. זבח רשעים תועבת יהוה ותפלת ישרים רצונו

The sacrifice of the wicked is an  
abomination to the Lord,  
But the prayer of the righteous is His favor.  
(Proverbs 15:8)

As in #4 above, ratzon is antithetically paralleled with abomination. The offerings of the wicked are also antithetical to the prayers of the righteous. God distinguishes between the offerings of the wicked and the prayers of the righteous. God is depicted as taking personal note of these offerings. The righteous please God and also do God's will.

6. זכרני יהוה ברצון עמך פקדתי בישועתך:  
לראות בנכות בחייוך לשבחך בשמחת עמך להתהלל  
עמי בחילתך.

Remember me Lord, when You favor Your  
people;  
take note of me when You deliver them,  
that I may enjoy the prosperity of Your chosen  
ones share the joy of Your nation,  
glory in Your inheritance.  
(Psalms 106:4)

Here "remember me" is paralleled with "take note of me" and ratzon is paralleled with yeshuah, deliverance. We note that God favors and delivers God's "chosen ones." The question remains as to whether ratzon can be applied to people outside the chosen nation. Ratzon is used here to describe the special way in which God relates to the chosen people.

7.

כִּי־רָצוֹן יְהוָה בְּעַמּוֹ יִפְאֹר עֲנִיִּים בִּישׁוּעָה

For the Lord delights in His people;  
He adorns the humble with deliverance.  
(Psalms 149:4)

Here we note that God finding pleasure in "His people" is synonymously paralleled with God adorning "the humble with deliverance." Ratzon is paralleled with "adorns" and "His people" is paralleled with "the humble." As in #6 above, ratzon expresses the way in which God relates to the chosen people. God favors God's people and rewards them with deliverance. God desires humility.

8.

לֹא

בְּגִבּוֹרֶת הַסּוּס יִחְפֹּץ לֹא־בִשְׁוִי הָאִישׁ יִרְצֶה: רָוַץ יְהוָה אֶת־  
וְרָאִי אֶת־הַבּוֹיָהוּם לְחֶסֶד

He does not take pleasure in the  
strength of the horse,  
nor does He take pleasure in the legs of men;  
but the Lord favors those who fear Him,  
those who hope in His goodness.  
(Psalms 147:10-11)

Ratzon appears three times in the above psalms. We note here that God takes pleasure in neither the strength of horses nor men. Rather God only favors those who are God fearing and "who hope in His goodness." This is similar to the notion expressed in #7 above that God takes pleasure in humility. It follows that God is displeased with those who believe they can live without God; these people do not fear

God nor do they seek God for salvation.

9. זמרו ליהוה  
 חסידיו ויהודו לזכר קדשו: כי רגע באפו חיים ברצונו בערב  
 ילון בכי ולבקר רנה

Sing to the Lord, His righteous ones,  
 and give thanks to His holy name.  
 For His anger lasts but a moment,  
 in His favor there is life.  
 One may lie down weeping in the evening;  
 but in the morning there is joy.  
 (Psalms 30:5:6)

In the above psalm we note that anger is antithetically paralleled with ratzon. Weeping is synonymously paralleled with anger while joy is paralleled with favor. God's favor brings life and joy to righteous followers.

10. יהוה ברצונו העמידה להררי עי הסתרת פניו הייתי נבהל:

Lord, by your favor you made my mountain  
 stand strong,  
 when you hid your face, I was frightened.  
 (Psalms 30:8)

By God's ratzon, God enables the psalmist's "mountain" to stand "strong." God's favor is contrasted with God's hiding. While God's favor gives strength to the psalmist, God's hiding frightens him.

11. לעשות רצונו אליהי חסדתי ותורתך בתוך מעי:  
 בשרתי צדק בקהל רב הנה שפתי לא אכלא יהוה אתה  
 ידעת: צדקתך לא יכסיתי בתוך לבי אמונתך ותשועתך  
 אקדתי לא יכחדתי חסדך ואמתך לקהל רב

To do your will, my Lord, I delight;  
 Your Torah is within my heart.  
 I proclaimed righteousness in a great  
 congregation;  
 see, I did not withhold my words;  
 O Lord, you know.  
 I did not hide your righteousness in my heart;  
 I declared your faithfulness and your salvation;  
 I did not hide your goodness and your truth from  
 the great congregation.  
 (Psalms 40:9-11)

Here we note that doing God's will is synonymously paralleled with God's Torah. The psalmist delights in doing God's will; Torah is "within" his heart. The psalmist connects the notion of doing God's will with declaring to the "great congregation" God's righteousness, faithfulness, salvation, goodness and truth.

12. נְדָבָה פִּירְעָה נָא יְהוָה וּמִשְׁפָּטֶיךָ לִמְדֵנִי

Accept, O Lord, the free-will offerings  
 of my mouth;  
 teach me your statutes.  
 (Psalms 119:108)

Here ratzon appears in the imperative verbal form. The psalmist petitions God to accept the "free-will offerings" of his "mouth" and to teach him divine statutes. The notions of God accepting and God teaching are connected here. The psalm suggests the expectation that upon God's acceptance of free-will offerings, God will teach the worshipper divine laws. The above psalm also demonstrates that God distinguishes between human offerings; the psalmist



does not automatically assume that God will accept every offering.

13. חוֹשֶׁה רָצוֹן יְהוָה לְהַצִּילֵנִי יְהוָה לְעֹזְרוֹתִי

Be pleased, Lord, to save me;  
Lord, hasten to help me.  
(Psalms 40:14)

As in #12 above, ratzon appears here in the imperative verbal form. The term expresses a petition to God to save the psalmist. The psalmist hopes that God will desire to bring him deliverance. There is an apparent connection here between God's ratzon and God's salvation. One possible inference from this juxtaposition is the idea that God's will is manifested in God's salvation.

14. בָּרְכוּ יְהוָה  
מִלֵּאכָיו גִּבּוֹרֵי כֹחַ עֹשֵׂי דְבָרוֹ לְשֹׁמֵעַ בְּקוֹל דְּבָרוֹ: בָּרְכוּ יְהוָה  
כָּל־עֲבָדָיו מִסֵּרְתָּיו עֹשֵׂי רְצוֹנוֹ: בָּרְכוּ יְהוָה כָּל־מַעֲשָׂיו בְּכָל־  
מְקוֹמוֹת מִקְדָּשָׁתוֹ בְּרִכִּי נַפְשִׁי אֶת־יְהוָה:

Bless the Lord, His angels,  
mighty creatures who do His bidding,  
who listen to the voice of His word;  
bless the Lord, all His hosts,  
His servants who do His will;  
bless the Lord, all His works,  
in all the places of His dominion;  
bless the Lord, my soul.  
(Psalms 103:20-22)

Here we note that God's servants, God's angels, perform God's will. When angels do God's will, they listen to God's word and perform all that God requests. They are "mighty creatures" who bless God's works. The psalmist suggests that

doing God's will involves listening to the word of God and performing those tasks which God ordains.

15. אִם־עֹלָה קָרְבָנוּ מִן־הַבָּקָר זָכָר תָּמִים יִקְרִיב  
אֶל־פֶּתַח אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד יִקְרִיב אֹתוֹ לְרֹעֵץ לִפְנֵי יְהוָה

If his offering is a burnt offering from the herd, he shall make his offering a male without blemish. He shall offer it at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, that he may be accepted before the Lord.  
(Leviticus 1:3)

In this Leviticus verse, ratzon denotes a specific legal category of acceptance by God. God distinguishes between acceptable and unacceptable forms of sacrifice. In this particular case, an acceptable offering is one which is "a burnt offering from the herd;" the offering is to be a "male without blemish." The worshipper must present his offering at the "entrance of the Tent of Meeting." God deems this offering acceptable when the above criteria are fulfilled.

16. כָּל־אֲשֶׁר־בּוֹ כִּסֵּם לֹא תִקְרִיבוּ כִּדְלָא לְרֹעֵץ  
יְהוָה לָכֵן: וְאִישׁ כִּדְּמִיָּקָרִיב זִבְח־שְׁלָמִים לַיהוָה לִפְלֹא־נֶגֶד  
אוֹ לְנִדְבָה בַּבָּקָר אוֹ בַצֹּאן תָּמִים יְהוָה לְרֹעֵץ כָּל־כִּסֵּם לֹא  
יִהְיֶה־בּוֹ

You shall not offer any that has a defect, for it will not be acceptable for you. And when a man offers, from the herd or the flock, a sacrifice of peace offerings to the Lord for a vow or as a freewill offering in oxen or sheep, it must be perfect to be acceptable

without blemish: there must be no defect in it. (Leviticus 22:20-21)

As in #15 above, ratzon here denotes a specific legal category of acceptance by God. This particular verse from Leviticus demonstrates that an acceptable sacrifice is one without blemish. If an offering has either a blemish or a defect it is not acceptable before God. A sacrifice must be "perfect" in order that God deem it acceptable.

17. יהי לדעונו, אבריימי ודעיון לבי לפניך יהוה צודי ונאלי

May the words of my mouth  
and the prayer of my heart  
be acceptable to You,  
O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. (Psalms 19:15)

As in #15 above, the term ratzon here indicates a specific category of acceptance by God. In this particular case, the psalmist petitions God that the "the words" of his "mouth" and "the meditations" of his "heart" be acceptable before God. In Leviticus the category of acceptance refers to sacrificial offerings to God. Here acceptance refers to prayers. As in #15 above, this psalm demonstrates that God does not accept all prayers.

18. כי בהר קדשי בהר מרום  
ישראל נאם אדני יהוה שם יעבדתי כל בית ישראל כלה  
בארץ שם ארצם ושם אדרוש את תרומתיכם ואת ראשית  
מטאותיכם בכל קדשיכם: כרית נחל ארצה אתכם  
בהוציא אתכם מן העמים וקבעתי אתכם מן הארצות  
אשר נפעתם בם ונקדשתי בכם לעיני הגוים

For on My holy mountain, on the high mount of Israel-declares the Lord God-there, in the land, the entire House of Israel, all of it, will serve Me. There I will accept them, and there I will request your contributions and the choicest offerings of all your sacred things. I will accept you with your pleasing odor; when I bring you out from the peoples and gather you from the lands in which you are scattered, and I will be sanctified through you in the eyes of the nations. (Ezekiel 20:40-41)

As in #15 and #16 above, ratzon denotes here a specific legal category of acceptance before God. This citation from Ezekiel is most similar to the excerpt from Leviticus in #15 above. Like #15 above, the author describes specific characteristics of an acceptable offering before God. The offering should be presented from God's "holy mountain." These offerings should consist of the "choicest" selection of worshippers' "sacred" objects. They should have a "pleasing odor" before God.

19.

שמי

הָאָרֶץ הַנֶּה אֲנִי כֹבֵיָא רְעָה אֱלֹהִים הַזֶּה פְּרִי כַחֲשׁוּבוֹתֶם  
כִּי עַל־דְּבָרִי לֹא הִקְשִׁיבוּ וְתוֹרָתִי וּכְאִסְרוּכֶם: לְמַהֲזֹה לִי  
לְבוֹנֶה כִּשְׂבָא תָבוּא וְקִנָּה הַטֹּיב מֵאֶרֶץ כְּדָחַק עֲלֹתֵיכֶם לֹא  
לְרַעֲיוֹן חֲבֵרֵיכֶם לֹא־עֲדָכוּ לִי

Hear the earth,  
 Here I bring evil upon this people,  
 the fruit of their thoughts,  
 for they did not listen to my words,  
 nor to my Torah, they rejected it.  
 Why does frankincense  
 come to me from Sheba,  
 or sweet cane from a distant land?  
 Your burnt offerings are not acceptable  
 And your sacrifices are not pleasant to me.  
 (Jeremiah 6:19-20)

In this verse from Jeremiah, we note that ratzon again denotes an acceptable form of sacrifice before God. Here "burnt offerings" is paralleled with "sacrifices" and l'ratzon is paralleled with arvu li, or pleasing to me. A sacrifice which is acceptable before God is one which is pleasing to God. In this particular verse, however, the burnt offerings indicated are neither acceptable nor pleasing before God. Once again we note that God distinguishes between acceptable and unacceptable forms of sacrifice. God takes note of the faithfulness of individuals and accepts their offerings accordingly. An unacceptable sacrifice is offered by worshippers who neither listen to God's word nor accept God's Torah. Conversely, acceptable sacrifices are offered by those who are faithful to God and who adhere to God's Torah.

20.

בְּהִיאָמֹר

יְהוָה לַעַם הַזֶּה כִּן אָהָבוּ לָטֹעַ רַגְלֵיהֶם לֹא חָשְׁכוּ וַיְהוּה לֹא  
 רָצֹן עֲתִיד יִזְכֹּר עֲוֹנָם וַיִּסְקֹד חַטָּאתָם: וַיֹּאמֶר  
 יְהוָה אֵלֵי אֶל־תִּתְּפֹלל בְּעַד־הָעָם הַזֶּה לְטוֹבָה: כִּי יִעֲמֻ אֵינִי

טֹבֵעַ אֶל־רַגְלָתָם וְכִי יַעֲלוּ עֲלֵה וּמִנַּחָה אֵינִי רָצֹן לִי בְּחֹרֶב  
 וּבְרָעָב וּבְדִבְרֵי אֲנָכִי מִכֶּלֶה אוֹתָם:

Thus said the Lord to this people:  
 "Truly, they love to wander, they have  
 not restrained their feet; so the Lord  
 does not accept them. Now He will  
 recall their iniquity and punish their  
 sin." And the Lord said to me, "Do not  
 pray for the good of this people." For  
 when they fast, I will not hear their  
 cry, and when they offer a burnt  
 offering and a meal offering, I will not  
accept them, but I will consume them by  
 the sword, and by famine, and by  
 pestilence. (Jeremiah 14:10-12)

As in #19 above, this verse from Jeremiah demonstrates a case in which God neither accepts the people nor their offerings. Here God addresses Jeremiah and instructs him to cease praying on the people's behalf. The first citation of ratzon, in verse ten, suggests that God does not accept those people who fail to "restrain their feet," those who "love to wander." Jeremiah further records that God will not hear the cries of these people when they fast; neither will God accept their burnt and meal offerings. Instead, God will punish the people for their iniquities. The second citation of ratzon is paralleled with the verb shomeah. This demonstrates the connection between God hearing the people's cries and God accepting their offerings.



21.

וְכֵן הִנֵּה הַנְּלוּיִם עֹלֵי־הַדָּבָר לַיהוָה  
 וְהָאֵלֹהִים אֲדֹנָיִם יְהוָה לְהוֹיָת לֹ לְעַבְדֵּי כְלִי־כֶסֶד עֲבָדָה  
 בְּחֵלְלֵי יִצְחָקִים בְּבֵרִיתִי וְהַבְּיֵאֵתִים אֶל־הַבַּיִת קֹדֶשׁ  
 וְשִׁמְרָתָם בְּבֵית הַפָּלֵי עֲלֵיהֶם וּבְחִידָם לְעֵץ לֵבָנִי  
 לִיבְרִי כִי כִי־יִבְרָא בִּי־הַפָּלֵה וְקָרָא לְכָל־הָעַמִּים

And the foreigners  
 who attach themselves to the Lord  
 to serve him and to love the name of the Lord  
 to be his servants  
 everyone who keeps the sabbath and does not  
 profane it,  
 and who take hold of my covenant  
 Even them I will bring to My sacred mount  
 And let them rejoice in My house of prayer.  
 Their burnt offerings and sacrifices  
 Shall be acceptable on My altar;  
 For My House shall be called  
 A house of prayer for all peoples" (Isaiah 56:7)

As in several citations above, here we note that ratzon denotes a specific category of acceptable sacrifices before God. We wrote above that God accepts sacrifices offered without blemish or defect. This Isaiah passage refers to "burnt offerings and sacrifices" which will be accepted at God's "sacred mount." Most significant here is the notion that God accepts the offerings of even "foreigners" who adhere to the covenant. The above passage suggest that the primary criteria for God's acceptance of offerings is adherence to the covenant. God does not accept those sacrifices exclusively offered by Israel.

22. כה | אִמַּר יְהוָה בְּעֵת רָצוֹן עֲנִיתִיךָ  
 וּבַיּוֹם יִשׁוּעָה עֲזַרְתִּיךָ וְאַצִּירְךָ וְאַתֶּנְךָ לְבְרִית עִם לְהִקִּים אֶרֶץ  
 לְהַנְחִיל נַחֲלֹת שְׂכֵמֹת

Thus says the Lord:  
 In an acceptable time I answer you,  
 And on a day of salvation I help you-  
 I created you and gave you for a covenant people-  
 to restore the land,  
 to assign desolate inheritances to their owners.  
 (Isaiah 49:8)

We noted above that ratzon denotes a specific legal category of acceptance by God. Here et ratzon indicates an "acceptable" time for God to answer Israel. Et Ratzon is paralleled with a "day of salvation" and "answer you" is paralleled with "help you." The above parallelism illustrates the meaning of et ratzon. At this "acceptable time" God will answer Israel's supplications. This will be "a day of salvation" on which God will bring help to Israel.

23. וְאֵנִי תַפְלִיתִיךָ | יְהוָה עַת רָצוֹן אֱלֹהִים בְּרַב־חֶסֶדְךָ עֲנֵנִי  
 בְּאֵמֶת יִשְׁעֶךָ: הַצִּילֵנִי מִטֵּיט וְאֶל־אֲטִבְעָה אֲנַעֲלָה מִשְׁנָאִי  
 וּמִמַּעֲמֻקֵּי־מִיִּם: אֶל־תִּשְׁטַפְנִי | שְׁבֹלֶת מִיִּם וְאֶל־תִּבְלַעֲנִי  
 מִצִּילָה וְאֶל־תֹּאטְרֵעֵלִי בְּאֵר פִּיהָ: עֲנֵנִי יְהוָה כִּי־טוֹב חֶסֶדְךָ  
 כְּרַב רַחֲמֶיךָ פָנָה אֵלַי

As for me, may my prayer be to You, O  
 Lord,  
 at an acceptable time;  
 God, in the greatness of your goodness,  
 answer me in the truth of your salvation.  
 Rescue me from the mire;  
 let me not sink;  
 let me be rescued from my enemies,

and from deep waters.  
 Let the floodwaters not sweep me away;  
 let the mouth of the Pit not close over me.  
 Answer me, O Lord,  
 for your love is goodness;  
 in the abundance of your mercy  
 turn to me; (Psalms 69:14-17)

As in #22 above, et ratzon indicates an "acceptable time" in which God will accept the psalmist's prayer. The psalmist petitions God that his prayer be accepted at this time. Here we note that et ratzon is paralleled with "the truth of your salvation." As in #21 above, there is a connection here between this "acceptable time" and God's salvation. The psalmist understands that at the time that God accepts his prayers, God will also deliver him from evil.

24.

למה צמנו ולא ראית ענינו נפשו ולא תדע הן ביום צמכם  
 תמצאנו חפין וכל עיניכם תגשו: הן לדיב וסעה תצמו  
 ולהכות באגרף רשע לא תצמו כיום להשכיב במרום  
 קולכם: הכזה יהיה צום אבחרהו יום ענות אדם נפשו הלכה  
 כאגמן ראשו ושק ואפר יציע הלזה תקרא צום ויום רצון  
 ליהוד: הלוא זה צום אבחרהו פתח חריצות רשע התר  
 אנדות מוטה ושלח רצונם הפשים וכל מוטה תנתקו: הלוא  
 פרס לרעב לחמך ועניים מרודים תביא בית כרתה ערם  
 וכסיתו וכבשך לא תתעלם: אז יבקע כשחר אורך וארכתך  
 מהרה תצמח והלך לפניך צדקך כבוד יהיה יאספך: אז  
 תקרא ויהיה יצנה תשוע ויאמר הנני אסיתסיד מתוכך  
 מוטה שלח אצבע ודבראון

Why have we fasted, and you do not see,  
 why have we afflicted our soul, and you do not  
 take note,  
 Because, in the day of your fast, you pursue your  
 business and exact all your payments,  
 you fast for strife and debate,  
 and to smite with the fist of wickedness.  
 you fast not this day to make your voice be heard  
 on high,  
 Is such the fast I have chosen,  
 A day for a man to afflict his soul?  
 Is it bowing his head like a bulrush  
 And to spread sackcloth and ashes under him?  
 Do you call that a fast,  
 A day which is acceptable to the Lord?  
 But is this not the fast that I have chosen,  
 to loose the chains of wickedness,  
 to undo the bands of the yoke,  
 and to let the oppressed go free,  
 and to break every yoke?  
 Is it not to share your bread with the hungry,  
 and bring the poor that are caste out to your  
 house?  
 When you see the naked, that you should cover  
 him.  
 Then shall you call,  
 and the Lord shall answer,  
 you shall cry,  
 and He shall say,  
 Here I am. (Isaiah 58:3-9)

Here we note the expression Yom Ratzon L'Adonai.

This particular passage concerns a fast day which is  
 unacceptable to God. The fast day is deemed unacceptable  
 because it is not offered in sincerity. The text reads:  
 "...because in the day of your fast, you pursue your  
 business and exact all your payments,  
 you fast for strife and debate, and to smite with the fist  
 of wickedness. You fast not this day to make your voice be  
 heard on high, is such the fast I have chosen, a day for a  
 man to afflict his soul?...Do you call that a fast, a day  
 which is acceptable to God?" We assume here, conversely,

that an "acceptable day" is one "to loose the chains of wickedness, to undo the bands of the yoke, and to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke..." The text states: "Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the poor that are caste out to your house? When you see the naked, that you should cover him...Then shall you call, and the Lord shall answer..." That is a Yom Ratzon L' Adonai, an acceptable day to God.

25. רִחַם  
אֲדַע יְהוָה עָלַי וְיֵצֵן כִּשְׁחַ יְהוָה אֹתִי לְבָשָׁר עֲנִיִּים שְׁלַחַנִי לְחֵבֶשׁ  
לְנִשְׁבְּרֵי לֵב לִקְרָא לְשִׁבּוּיִם דָּרוֹר וּלְאִסּוּדִים פְּקַד־קוֹחַ:  
לִקְרָא שְׁנַת־רִצְוֹן לַיהוָה וַיּוֹם נָקָם לֵאלֹהֵינוּ לְנַחֵם כָּל־  
אֲבֵלִים

The spirit of the Lord is upon me;  
because the Lord has anointed me to announce good  
tidings to the humble,  
He has sent me to bind up the broken hearted,  
to proclaim liberty to the captives,  
and the liberation of the imprisoned,  
To proclaim an acceptable year of the Lord,  
And a day of vindication by our God;  
to comfort all who mourn- (Isaiah 61:1-2)

In #24 above we noted a day which is acceptable to God, Yom Ratzon L'Adonai. Here we cite a year which is acceptable to God, Sh'nat Ratzon L'Adonai. This acceptable year, or year of favor, is a "day of vindication" by God. In that year, God will redeem the captives and will liberate the imprisoned. God sent Isaiah as a messenger of "joy to the humble." This notion of a "year of favor" in which God will liberate the captives is also similar to the notion of

et ratzon in #21 and #22 above. In both cases ratzon denotes God's salvation.



### Summary

The ratzon of God in the Bible may be categorized into three primary usages. The first of these describes that which pleases God or wins God's favor. Several of the passages cited above explicitly describe God's ratzon as well as the opposite of God's ratzon. We learn, for example, that God favors a "good man" whereas "a man of intrigue" receives God's condemnation. God takes pleasure in a man "who finds a wife." God encompasses the righteous man "with favor like a shield." Those who engage in deceitful behavior are an "abomination" to God, whereas "those who act faithfully please" God. God favors "the prayer of the righteous" but "the sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination" to God. Furthermore, God takes pleasure in "His people;" God "adorns the humble with deliverance." God favors "those who fear" God as well as those "who hope" in God's goodness. Anger is the antithesis of God's ratzon: "For His anger lasts but a moment, in His favor there is life." God's ratzon brings strength; when God hides, the psalmist remains frightened. Doing God's will means adhering to the Torah; doing God's will involves fulfilling God's "bidding." God delivers those with whom God is pleased.

The second category of ratzon in the Bible concerns a legal category of acceptable sacrifices to God.

The biblical text stipulates specific criteria for acceptable sacrifices. If an offering is "a burnt offering from the heru," it must be "a male without blemish." It should be offered "at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting." The offering must be without defect or blemish; it "must be perfect to be acceptable without blemish; there must be no defect in it." God accepts only those sacrifices offered by people who adhere to the Torah. The burnt offerings of those who "listen" to God's words are acceptable before God. Conversely, the offerings of "those who love to wander" and who don't "restrain their feet" are unacceptable. - God accepts sacrifices composed of "the choicest offerings of all" sacred objects. They must be offered with a pleasing odor on "the high mount of Israel." Even "foreigners" may offer acceptable sacrifices before God, provided that they adhere to God's covenant.

The third category of ratzon concerns an acceptable time, day or year for God. Et ratzon describes a time when God accepts the psalmist's prayer; at such a time, God will also deliver the psalmist from evil. Et ratzon will be a day of salvation. A Yom Ratzon L'Adonai is a day which is acceptable to God. Such a day is one of sincere affliction of the soul. God answers the cries of those who offer sincere supplication on such a day. A Sh'nat Ratzon L'Adonai is a year of favor for God. In that year, God will redeem the captives and liberate the oppressed.

The above passages indicate that for the biblical writer, God's will is neither capricious or whimsical. There is a direct correlation between human action and human fate. God rewards and punishes human beings in accordance with their faithfulness. God accepts human beings' offerings on the bases of stipulated legal criteria.

Seder Rav Amram: Theological

1. יתגדל ויתקדש שמו רבא. אמן. בעלמא די ברא כדעתיא וימליך מלכותיה בחייכון  
וכימיתון וכו' ויחיתון דכל בית ישראל בעלמא ובזמן קריב תמריד אמן. תענין דעבור אמן  
יהו שמו רבא מברך לעלם ולעלמי עלמיא. האמר יתברך. אמן. וישתבח ויחמיר ויתרומם  
ויתגדל ויתעלה ויתקדש שמו וקדושתו בריך הוא. אמן. לעילא מכל ברכות  
ושייחיה תושבתיא ונחמתיא דאמירן בעלמא תמריד אמן.

Exalted and sanctified be His great name  
in the world which He has created  
according to His will and may He rule  
His kingdom in your lifetime and in your  
days, and in the lifetime of the entire  
House of Israel, speedily and in the  
near future-and say Amen.<sup>1</sup>

The Kaddish prayer expresses that the world was created according to God's will. Ratzon suggests that God created the world according to an underlying ordered plan. God and the act of creation are two connected phenomena in the Kaddish; the act of creation occurred because God willed it to be so.

Ratzon could also be translated as "pleasure" in the Kaddish prayer. This alternative translation expresses that the world was not only created according to God's plan but also to God's acceptance. According to this understanding of ratzon, God created the world in accordance with an accompanying sentiment. God is personally involved with the act of creation.

Creation according to God's will is explicit in the Kaddish. What is not so explicit, but what may be contextually apparent however, is the connection between the

<sup>1</sup> Seder Rav Amram, p.11.

creation of the world according to God's Will and the glorification of God's name in the world. This is evident in the opening lines of the prayer: "Exalted and sanctified be His great name in the world which He created according to His will..." The prayer expresses hope that God's name be praised and sanctified in the world. The juxtaposition of creation according to God's will with the glorification of God's name leads us to postulate that the fulfillment of God's will in the world is the glorification of God's name.

2. ברוך אתה ה' אלהי אשר ברכו מערב ערבים. ברכה פתח שערים ובתבונה פשנה  
אחיים. ומחליף את הזמנים ומסדר את הכוכבים במשפחותיהם ברוך כבודו. ברא יום  
ולילה גלגל אור ספני וחדש ספני אור. מעביר יום ומביא לילה ומבדיל בין יום  
ובין לילה ה' צבאות שמו. ה' וקיים חסד ימלך עלינו לעולם ועד. ברוך אתה ה'  
המשיב ערבים.

Blessed are you, Lord our God, Ruler of the Universe, who at His word causes the evening to fall. In wisdom He opens the gates and with understanding He changes times and varies seasons and arranges the stars in their watches in the sky, according to His will.<sup>2</sup>

We saw above in #1 that God created the world according to God's will and we suggested as a corollary, that the praising of God's name is connected to the fulfillment of God's will. Here we note the connection between the natural order and kirtzono. At the very minimum we can state that the stars in the sky are arranged according to God's will. This is explicit in the text of the prayer: "and arranges the stars in their watches in the sky, according to His

<sup>2</sup> S.R.A. p.52.



true.<sup>3</sup>

In #1 above, we noted that the fulfillment of God's will may be connected to the praise of God's name in the world. In #2 we noted the connection between God's will and the regulation of the organic world. Here we see that the heavenly hosts are particularly associated with God's creative majesty.

The prayer text states that God created heavenly servants and instructed them with specific tasks to fulfill: "...who by His decree created the heavens and with the breath of His mouth all of its servants. He gave them the law and the festival so that they would not change their assignments." The text continues to state: "They rejoice and are happy to do the will of their creator, performers of truth, their works are true." The text explicitly states that these heavenly hosts are happy to do the will of God.

Implicit here is the notion that when the heavenly servants adhere to God's laws they are fulfilling God's will. They do not deviate from the laws of God by altering "their assignments." Rather, heavenly servants adhere strictly to God's "assignments." Also implicit here is the notion that fulfilling God's will entails serving God with joy. The heavenly hosts "are happy to do the will of their creator." The idea that heavenly servants perform works of truth is likewise noteworthy here. The notion of "true

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<sup>3</sup> S.R.A., p.90.



works" suggests that those who follow God's assignments perform works of truth. When heavenly hosts adhere to God's laws, and perform works of truth, they are fulfilling God's will.

4. כָּחַרְתָּנוּ בְּךָ מִכָּל הָעַמִּים וְחָמַדְתָּנוּ בְּךָ  
מִכָּל הָאֲשֻׁמִּים וְקִדְּשָׁתָנוּ בְּצִוְיֶיךָ וְקָרַבְתָּנוּ לְפָנֶיךָ.

\* You chose us from all nations. You favored us from amongst all peoples. You sanctified us with your commandments and brought us near, our King, to your service. 4

Ratzitah appears in the above prayer directly paralleled with bachartah. This is evident in the text: "You chose us from all nations. You favored us from amongst all peoples." Here the notion of God choosing Israel "from all nations" is connected to God favoring Israel "from amongst all peoples." Here we note that God's relationship with Israel is contrasted with God's relationship with other nations and peoples. God has a different relationship to Israel than to the other peoples on earth. Implicit here is the notion that God has particular intentions and sentiments for Israel. The relationship between God and Israel is not just one of circumstance; rather God purposely chose Israel and desired something for her. This notion is especially plausible when we consider the remainder of the prayer text: "You sanctified us with your commandments and brought us near, our King, to your service."

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<sup>4</sup> S.R.A., p.90.



We noted above that ratzon is most appropriately translated as "will," "pleasure" or "favor." Ratzitah seems most fittingly translated as "favored" in the above prayer, precisely because it is paralleled with bachartah. If we were to translate ratzitan as "you willed us from amongst all peoples," however, we would essentially convey the same meaning as "favored." Both English definitions are appropriate and certainly the syntactic parallelism supports "favored" as a fitting translation.

5.

אתה בחרתנו מכל העמים. אהבת אותנו ורצית בנו. ורצפתנו מכל הלשונות וקדשתנו  
במצותיך וקרבתנו מלכנו לעבודתך. ושפך הגדול והקדוש עלינו קראת.

You chose us from all nations. You loved us and favored us. You elevated us from amongst all peoples and sanctified us with your commandments and brought us near, our King, to your service.<sup>5</sup>

6.

אתה בחרתנו מכל העמים. אהבת אותנו ורצית בנו. ורצפתנו מכל הלשונות. וקדשתנו  
במצותיך. וקרבתנו מלכנו לעבודתך.

You chose us from all nations. You loved us and favored us. And elevated us from amongst all peoples. And sanctified us with your commandments. And brought us near, our King, to your service.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> S.R.A., p.110.

<sup>6</sup> S.R.A., p.136.

7.

אתה בחרתנו מכל העמים. אהבת אותנו ורצית בנו. והרמפתנו מכל הלשונות. וקדשתנו  
במיוחד וקרבתנו מלכנו לעבודתך ושמו הגדול הקדוש עלינו קראת.

You chose us from all nations. You loved us and avored us. You elevated us from amongst all peoples. And sanctified us with your commandments and brought us near, our King, to your service and [with] your great and holy name you called upon us.<sup>7</sup>

We noted in #4 above that ratzon is connected with the notion of God choosing Israel. Here we see that ratzon appears frequently with the notion of God's love for Israel. In the above prayers, ratzilah is syntactically paralleled with ahavtah. In #5 we note: "You loved us and avored us." The text of #6 and #7 also both read: "You loved us and avored us."

Here we note that both ratzon and ahavah describe the way in which God relates to Israel. This juxtaposition of ratzon and love expresses the extent of personal relationship between God and Israel. Here God's will in relationship to Israel is specifically typified by love.

8.

אלהינו הלאה נבחרנו רצתנו בו במיוחד. וקדשנו במיוחד וקרבתנו מלכנו לעבודתך. ושכנת  
מסובך ושמו הגדול הקדוש עלינו קראת. ורצית בנו לעבודתך בשמו הגדול הקדוש עלינו קראת.  
שבת קדש. ורציתנו בו כל ישראל אחי שבת. ביום קדש השבת.

<sup>7</sup> S.R.A., p.163.

...Our God and God of our fathers,  
accept our rest, sanctify us by your  
 commandments and give us a portion in  
 your Torah...Give us as an inheritance  
 Lord our God your holy sabbath in love  
 and in favor.<sup>8</sup>

Here we note two different grammatical forms of ratzon in the same prayer. The first ratzon appears in the imperative. Worshippers address God with this verbal form and it describes their expectation of how God should receive their sabbath rest. This could be translated as either "will," "favor," "be pleased" or "accept." All of these English translations convey a similar notion; God takes note of Israel's observance. Worshippers do not presume that God will automatically be pleased and accept their rest.

Just as in #7 above, the second ratzon is juxtaposed with ahavah: "Give us as an inheritance Lord our God your holy sabbath in love and in favor." In this instance, the two terms describe worshippers' expectation of the way in which God should give Israel the sabbath as an inheritance. Be'ahavah and uv'ratzon suggest that in the worshippers' minds, the sabbath is a sign of God's love and favor for them. The sabbath, as a gift from God, is not a neutral inheritance; Israel could not receive the sabbath from God without God's love and favor. In some fashion, the sabbath is an expression of God's feelings for Israel. Once again, worshippers do not presume that God automatically bestows

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<sup>8</sup> S.R.A., p.63.

them with the sabbath "in love and in favor."

9.

ברוך אתה ד' אלהינו מלך העולם אשר קדשנו במצוותיו ורצנו בך רצון ברחמים  
הנבילט וברוך לנצחית ברחמים ואלה לטובת קדש ובר ליצירת מצות. כי בך בחרת  
אומנו קדש כל העמים ורצנו בך ברחמים וברוך הבורא העולם. בריך אתה ד' קדש ורצנו

Blessed are you, Lord our God, Ruler of the universe, who has sanctified us with His commandments and favored us, His holy sabbath He has given us in love, a memorial of the creation, ...For you have chosen us and sanctified us from amongst all nations and your holy Sabbath you have given us as an inheritance, in love and in favor. Blessed are you, O God, who sanctifies the Sabbath. <sup>9</sup>

Once again we note that ratzon appears twice in the same prayer in two different forms. The first form is a verb and describes God's relationship with Israel: "...who has sancitified us with His commandments and favored us..." This could be translated as "willed us," "took pleasure in us," or "favored us." All three translations convey the same basic meaning; God has a distinct relationship with Israel. This is not a relationship of circumstance; God is not indifferent to Israel. If we extend the context of the prayer above, we might also infer that there is some connection between ratzah and God's sanctifying Israel with divine commandments and giving Israel the sabbath. This is likely, especially because ratzon and ahavah appear together frequently in description of the inheritance of the sabbath.

The second appearance of ratzon here is similar to #8

above; in both cases we see an explicit connection between ahavah and ratzon. The above prayer text states: "For you have chosen us and sanctified us from amongst all nations and your holy Sabbath you have given us as an inheritance, in love and in favor." Once again we note that worshippers understand God to have granted them the sabbath as a sign of divine love and favor.

10. תבא לנו יי אלהינו כי אתה אבינו. תעלה עלינו מלכות כי אתה מלכנו. בנבחר ששך תבוא  
הנבחר והנבחר ששך על ישראל ששך וכל יום השבועי נבחרת בו כמנחת רבנו. וכל יום  
צדק ויגן הנבחר ביום מנחתנו. וזה מנחתנו מנחת אהבה ונבחרת מנחת אה  
מנחת רצון ושלום השקט ובטח. מנחת שלמה ששך רצון בן יחיד בן יחיד כי מנחת  
וזה מנחתנו וכל מנחתנו יקריש את ששך.

Grant us rest, Lord our God, for you are our father, and soon rule over us, for you are our king. For your great and holy name's sake that was appointed for Israel your people and on the seventh day we will rest upon it according to the commandments of your will. Let there be no trouble or grief or sigh on the day of our rest. And let our rest be a rest of love and free-will offering, a rest of truth and faithfulness, a rest of pleasure and peace, quiet and safety, a perfect rest in which you take pleasure. Let your children recognize and know that their rest is from you, and by their rest may they sanctify your name. <sup>10</sup>

Again we note here two citations of ratzon in the same prayer. The first instance appears in description of God's commandments. The prayer explicitly expresses the notion that Israel rests on the sabbath in accordance with the commandments of God's will: "and on the seventh day we will

<sup>10</sup> S.R.A., p.79.

rest upon it according to the commandments of your will." The commandments in general and sabbath observance in particular are expressions of God's relationship to Israel. God is not indifferent to Israel's observance of the commandments, since the commandments are the very expression of their relationship. God's will, in description of commandments, suggests that there is some purpose and intention underlying the commandments. It further suggests that God desires something in the fulfillment of these commandments.

The second appearance of ratzon describes worshippers' expectation of how God reacts to the fulfillment of the commandment of sabbath observance. This is evident in the prayer text in description of the sabbath as a "a perfect rest in which you take pleasure." God either "accepts it" or "takes pleasure in it." Both translations convey the same basic meaning; God is not indifferent to Israel's observance of the sabbath. Israel is concerned that God be pleased with her observance yet Israel does not presume that God will automatically accept her rest. Noteworthy is the fact that sabbath rest is described as a rest of "pleasure and peace, quiet and safety." Here we learn that sabbath observance is an explicitly positive experience for its adherents. God gave Israel the sabbath; as its recipient Israel benefits from sabbath observance. If the sabbath is an expression of God's relationship to Israel, we could then

infer that the sabbath is an expression of God's beneficence and favor for Israel.

11. כִּיךָ אָמַר ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מִלֶּךְ הַשָּׁמַיִם הָיוּ אֵל הַשָּׁמַיִם כֻּלּוֹ בְּמִשְׁכַּב בְּמִסְדּוֹ וּבְרִיחוֹתָיו נָתַן לָנוּ לֶחֶם  
כֵּשֶׁר כִּי הָיָה זֶה הַמִּשְׁכָּב לְכָל הַחַיִּים מִן הַלֵּל בְּרִיחוֹתָיו. כִּיךָ אָמַר ה' הָיוּ אֵל הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהָאֵל.  
לָדַח לֶךְ ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ עַל אֶרֶץ הַמִּדְבָּר שָׂרָה וְרַחֲמָה שְׂרָפָה וְהַנְּחִילָה אֶת אֲבוֹתֵינוּ וְעַל בְּרִית  
שְׁשֻׁמָּה בְּבִשְׂרֵנוּ וְעַל הַדָּוָה שֶׁנָּתַן לָנוּ וְעַל הַיָּיִם וְהַדָּג וְהַן וְהַזֶּה שֶׁנָּתַן לָנוּ אֶת כָּל  
זֶה וְעַל כָּל ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ אֲנִי מֵרִים לֶךְ וּמְבָרְכִים אֶת שִׁמְךָ. יִתְבָּרַךְ שִׁמְךָ תָּמִיד עָלֵינוּ  
לְשָׁלוֹם וְחַיִּים. בְּיָמֵינוּ עַל הַמִּשְׁכָּב.

We thank you, Lord our God, for the desirable, good and plentiful land which you took pleasure and gave to our fathers and for your covenant which you have marked in our flesh, the Torah which you have given us, and for life, goodness, kindness and food which you have given us every season. <sup>11</sup>

Here we note ratzon used in reference to the Land of Israel. In the Birkat Hamazon above, the "desirable, good and plentiful land" is an expression of God's relationship to "our fathers." The fact that the land is obviously plentiful and good suggests that ratzilah is an expression of God's beneficence. Like the inheritance of the sabbath above, the land is interpreted as a positive sign of God's relationship to Israel. If we were to extend the context, we might also infer that ample food and general goodness in life is understood by worshippers as a sign of God's good will.



### Summary

The above chapter concerns the nature of God's ratzon or will as expressed in Seder Rav Amram. Ratzon is most commonly translated as "will," "pleasure," and "favor." In most cases, as demonstrated above, all three translations serve to convey the same basic meaning. Ratzon denotes a particular intention or sentiment attributed to God.

The prayer texts cited in the above chapter convey the explicit and implicit meaning of the term ratzon in Seder Rav Amram. The Kaddish prayer explicitly states that God created the world according to God's will. Likewise explicitly stated is the notion that God regulates the stars in the sky according to divine will. We also noted that heavenly hosts perform the will of God. The prayers describe God as granting the sabbath and the Land of Israel to Israel with ratzon. The commandments are described as the commandments of God's will.

The prayers implicitly convey the notion that God's will is connected with the glorification of God's name in the world. As demonstrated above, we also have reason to presume that God regulates all natural cycles, with wisdom and understanding, according to divine will. We noted that ratzon is paralleled with the notions of God choosing and loving Israel. Ratzon describes the manner in which God relates to Israel. The term suggests the nature of this



relationship as highly personal. God's relationship with Israel is distinctively different from God's relationship with the other nations in the world. The sabbath and the land are signs of God's beneficence and favor.

The notion of God's will does not appear indiscriminately in the above prayers. Ratzon describes God's creative and regulating nature. Ratzon also describes a personal relationship between God and Israel. This relationship is typified by God choosing and loving Israel.

Seder Rav Amram: Anthropological

- רבוך כל העולמים ולוי
1. ידעך לפניך שרצוני לעשות רצונך אבל שאר שרצוניה נכבד.

Lord of all worlds, it is revealed and  
known to you that it is my will to do  
your will but the yeast in the dough  
prevents it.<sup>12</sup>

Seder Rav Amram contains numerous supplications which originate in Brachot 16b-17a. Several of these private devotions concern God's will. The above passage seems to express the essence of the human fulfillment of God's will. The text explicitly states that it is the will of human beings to do God's will. Here we note that both God and human beings possess a will. Human beings possess a will independent from God's will. Also indicated is that there is a relationship between the will of human beings and the will of God. Human beings attempt to align their will with the will of God.

What is not clear is the precise dynamic between the will of God and the will of human beings. For example, the "will" of both God and human beings is indicated with the same Hebrew term ratzon. The question could be posed as to what extent the application of the term ratzon to both God and human beings accentuates their similarities. The similarity between God's will and the human will is not clear in the above prayer text. The difference between

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<sup>12</sup> S.R.A., p.37.

God's will and the human will is explicit, however. Human beings fail to fulfill God's will because of the "yeast in the dough which prevents it." The "yeast in the dough" symbolizes the yetzer harah, or the evil inclination in human beings.

The prayer emphasizes the distinct difference between the will of God and the will of human beings. Human beings constantly fall short of doing God's will because of their evil inclination. The evil inclination prevents the alignment of the human will with the divine will and it thereby separates human beings from God.

2. התבודד צורנו מלכנו ומגאלנו מרדא  
קדושים יתנובו שפך לנו מלכנו ידבר משהותם אשר משהותו כלם שופרים ביום שלם  
ומשפטים ביום יחד בעל דברי אלהים חיים והלך שלם כלם אורבים כלם בחרים  
כלם גבורים כלם שופים ביום רבן קדושים

Blessed are you, our Rock, our King and our Redeemer, Creator of holy beings, praised be your name for ever, our King, Creator of ministering spirits, all of His ministering spirits stand in the height of the universe, and with fear proclaim aloud together the words of the living God and eternal King. All of them are beloved, all of them are pure, all of them are mighty, all of them in awe do the will of their master...<sup>13</sup>

The above prayer explicitly states that angels do the will of God. Angels do God's will as a result of the awe they possess before God: "...all of them in awe do the will of their master." The prayer also suggests that angels

<sup>13</sup> S.R.A., p.13.

fulfill God's will by praising God. This notion of praising God as the fulfillment of God's will is not explicit here, but it may be possible to infer the connection from the context. The prayer states: "with fear [they] proclaim aloud together the words of the living God and everlasting King." This is consistent with the underlying motive of Rabbinic angelology; the true purpose of angels is the glorification of God.<sup>14</sup>

Angels are also pure and mighty. Because they are beings worthy of serving in proximity to the throne of God, they are more perfect creatures than human beings.<sup>15</sup> Human beings often fail to do God's will because they are not as pure and strong as angels. Angels are not troubled by the yetzer harah, the evil inclination, which means that they are not susceptible to normal human passions.<sup>16</sup> Yet angels, like human beings, were created by God and they thus can never attain the perfection of God.

## 3.

הללך יי אלהים כל מעשי חסידים  
עשי רצונך וכל עמך בית ישראל כלם ברנה  
יחד ויבטח ויפאנו ויפאנו את שם קדשך.

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<sup>14</sup> Israel Abrahams, A Companion to the Authorized Daily Prayerbook, (Eyre and Spottiswood Ltd., 1922,) p 48.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid p.48.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid p.49.

May all your works be praised, Lord our God, and those who do good deeds who do your will, and all your people the House of Israel, may all of them in joy praise and bless and glorify your holy name. <sup>17</sup>

The above Passover prayer expresses the notion that those who do good deeds fulfill God's will. Chasidei Tzadikim, or pious and righteous individuals, conquer their evil inclination, which prevents them from doing God's will, as stated in #1 above. Here we note that despite the inevitable human inclination to sin, devout and exemplary human beings can conquer their evil inclination. The free will of human beings is emphasized here. If every human being is tempted by the evil inclination, but some of them manage to overcome its allurements, then human beings can potentially choose between succumbing to evil or fulfilling God's will. The context of the prayer further suggests that doing God's will consists of glorifying God's name and praising God's works. In #2 above, angels are upheld as exemplars of fulfilling God's will. Here we note that chasidei tzadikim are upheld as exceptional human beings. Just as in #2 above, these performers of good works fulfill God's will by praising God's name.

4. רבון כל העולמים יהי רצון  
 מלפניך שנתה תודות אומנותי ומלאכותי בכל יום ולא אשנה בך. ואל תצריכני ליד פתח  
 בשר ודם שמתנתם כמותה חרפתי מרובת. שבעני בבקר חסדך ותרננה ותשמחה בכל ימינו.  
 ורצונך יהי חסדך וישעך ותן לנו.

Lord of all worlds, may it be your will  
 that your Torah be my faith and my  
 occupation for every day and that I may  
 not err in it, and cause me not to need  
 a gift of a human being, for their gift  
 is small but the shame they bring is  
 great. Satisfy us in the morning with  
 your grace that we may rejoice and be  
 glad in our days, and show us your great  
 mercy, God, and give us your  
 salvation.<sup>18</sup>

The above prayer, a passage from Brachot 16b-17a, is the first of a number of supplications in Seder Rav Amram beginning with the formula yehi ratzon milfanekha. Several of these supplications originated as private devotions of individual rabbis. Later in the chapter we will discuss the significance of this popular opening in conveying the rabbinic understanding of God's will. Suffice it to say in this case, that yehi ratzon milfanekha indicates that worshippers approach God with submission and with respect. Worshippers address their supplications to God in a personal yet reverent manner.

The above prayer is an appeal to God that it be God's will for Torah to be the fundamental faith and occupation of worshippers. We saw in #1 above that human beings possess a will independent of God's will. In #3 above we also noted that exemplary human beings can exercise their free will in order to conquer the evil inclination and thereby fulfill

<sup>18</sup> S.R.A., p.37.

God's will. Here we see, however, that human beings appeal to God for help in pleasing God. The rabbis understood Torah to be the underpinning for fulfillment of God's will. Israel should allow the Torah to be the sole guiding structure in their lives. They should adhere to its precepts as perfectly as possible. The Torah is far more worthy of a guide for human beings than are other human beings. Human beings are faulty and weak compared to the Torah. Here human beings appeal to God to help them make Torah the center of their lives and thereby fulfill God's will.

5. ברוך אלהים שבראנו לכבודו הנבדילנו מן העושים ונתן לנו תורה אמת וחי עולם נספ בתוכנו והא ישרה לבנו במעוררו וישם בלבנו יראתו לעשות רצונו ולעבדו בלבב שלם. למען לא ניגזר לרשק ולא נלך לבהלה כן יהי רצון מלפניך ה' אלהינו ואלהינו אבותינו שנשפיר חסיד בעולם הזה ונזכה ונחיה ונירש חיי העולם הבא.

Blessed be our God, who has created us for His glory, and has separated us from them that go astray, and has given us the Torah of truth, planted everlasting life in our midst. May He open our hearts to His Torah, and place His fear within our hearts, that we may do His will and serve Him with a perfect heart, that we may not labor in vain, nor bring forth confusion. May it thus be your will, Lord our God and God of our fathers, that we may keep your statutes in this world, and be worthy to live and inherit the life of the world to come. 19

The above passage contains two citations of ratzon. The first appearance of the term expresses worshippers'



desire that God instill fear in their hearts to fulfill God's will. This is similar to the notion that angels do Gods' will with fear, as expressed in #2 above. This idea is juxtaposed with the expectation that God will open worshippers' hearts to Torah and serve God with full hearts. Noteworthy here is the notion that the source for the human fulfillment of God's will is the human heart.

The second appearance of ratzon constitutes part of the yehi ratzon milfanekha formula. As in #4 above, the prayer is addressed to God in a submissive yet personal fashion. Worshippers appeal to God that it be God's will that they observe God's statutes in this world and that they merit life in the world to come. The prayer expresses worshippers' need for God's help to enable them to follow divine laws. They can exercise human free will in choosing whether to observe God's statutes, yet at the same time they need God to help them. It is evident from the context here that doing God's will entails living a life of Torah. Adherence to Torah is the opposite of confusion. When human beings adhere to the Torah and follow God's will, they make themselves worthy for God and for the reward of "the life to come" which God may bestow upon them.

6.

הַלְלוּנוּ לְפָנֶיךָ ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ בְּהַתְּכָה נַפְשֵׁנוּ  
יְהִי רָצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְנִשְׁמַח בְּפָנֶיךָ



And teach us to do the statutes of your will. And give us, Lord our God, in love, upright laws and statutes of truth and good commandments and ordinances, in order that humans can do them and live by them. <sup>20</sup>

Once again, as in #5 above, worshippers appeal to God to teach them the laws of divine will. Worshippers understand that in order to please God they must live a life of Torah, but they also need God to teach them its precepts. It is clear here that the "statutes" are an expression of God's will. God is somehow related to the law. In the above prayer, Torah represents the path of the righteous; Torah is the way of truth, love and goodness.

7. רַחֵם הַמְלִיכִים ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ בַּמְצֻדִים וּבַמִּצְוֹת יוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי הַגָּדוֹל וְהַקֹּדֶשׁ הַזֶּה בְּקִדּוּשׁוֹ  
וּבְמִצְוֹתָיו וְשִׁבְחָתָם בּוֹ תִּגְדַּל בּוֹ מִצְוֹת רַחֲמֶיךָ. וְאֵל תְּהִי צִדָּה וְיִנּוֹן בְּמִצְוֹתֶיךָ.

Be pleased and strengthen us, Lord our God, with your commandments and with the commandment of the seventh day, the great and holy day, through His holiness and His rest, and we will rest on it in accordance with the commandments of your will, and let there be no trouble and grief in our rest...<sup>21</sup>

In #6 above, we noted that God's statutes are described as the statutes of God's will. This sabbath prayer also describes God's commandments as the commandments of God's will. It specifically denotes sabbath rest as being in accordance with the commandments of God's will. Ratzon

<sup>20</sup> S.R.A., p.129.

<sup>21</sup> S.R.A., p.47.

appears here in the imperative form as well. The verb is juxtaposed with the notion of God strengthening Israel with divine commandments. It expresses the expectation that God be pleased and accept Israel's observance of the commandments in general and of the commandment of sabbath observance in particular. The rabbis must have believed that observance of the commandments was the way to please God and thereby fulfill God's will. The observance of the sabbath, an integral component in adherence to the commandments, would then logically be the fulfillment of God's will. The rabbis obviously believed that God took note of their observance. Once again, they address God in a submissive yet personal fashion. The above prayer indicates that the rabbis perceived God as having the potential to strengthen them and the emotional capacity to be pleased with their offerings.

8. תנח לנו יי אלהינו כי אתה אבינו. ושלוח עלינו מידה כי אתה מלכנו. בעבור שמך הגדול  
וגבור חמורא שנקרא על ישראל שמך ועל יום השביעי נשבת כי כפחות רחוקך. ואל יד  
צרה יבטן האנחה ביום מנוחתנו. וזהו מנוחתנו מנוחת אלהים ונרבה מנוחת אמת האסונה  
מנוחת רצון ושלום השקט ובטח. מנוחת שלמה שאתה רוצה בך יכיר בניך וידעו כי פאנך  
היא מנוחתם ועל מנוחתם יקרישו את שמך.

...and let our rest be a rest of love  
and free-will offering, a rest of truth  
and faithfulness, a rest of peace, quiet  
and safety, a perfect rest in which you  
take pleasure. Let your children  
understand and know that this rest is  
from you, and by their rest they  
sanctify your name.<sup>22</sup>

As in #7 above, this prayer describes God's reception of Israel's sabbath observance. Ratzon can be translated here as either "take pleasure," "desire" or "accept." All three translation convey the same basic concept of God's receptiveness. At the very minimum we could state that God is not indifferent to Israel's observance. In extending the text we might also claim that God is personally affected by the observance of human beings. God is depicted as possessing feelings similar to a human being. God accepts and rejects; God is pleased or disappointed. Noteworthy is the fact that God takes pleasure in Israel's "perfect rest." God is pleased with the thoroughness of Israel's obedience. This sabbath rest is also described as a rest of "love and free-will offering, a rest of truth and faithfulness, a rest of peace, quiet and safety..." The rabbis understood their sabbath observance as an expression to God of their love and faithfulness. It is not enough that human beings observe the sabbath to the letter of the law; rather they must do so out of love and faithfulness. Sabbath observance was likewise understood as an act of free-will by human beings. Human beings must conquer any evil inclination which could prevent them from adherence to the sabbath. When they do so, they submit their will to the will of God. This prayer, in addition to #7 above, demonstrates worshippers' understanding that sabbath observance is the way to please God and is thus the fulfillment of God's will.

9. ברוך אלהינו שבראנו לכבודו והבדילנו מן התועים ונתן לנו תורה אמת חיי  
עולם נאמן בתוכנו הוא יפתח לבנו בתורתו וישם בלבנו יראתו לעשות רצונו ולעבדו בלבב  
שלם.

May He open our hearts unto His Torah  
and place His awe within our hearts,  
that we may do His will and serve Him  
with a perfect heart...<sup>23</sup>

We noted in #8 above that for the rabbis, mere observance of the letter of the law was not sufficient before God. Rather God is most pleased with observance which results from love and faithfulness. Here we also note the importance of kavanah, or intent, in fulfilling God's will. This is expressed with the words be'levav shalem, with a perfect heart. The heart is depicted as the source for true observance of the Torah. The heart must be "opened" in order to receive God's awe and in order to prepare Israel for complete adherence to God's will. In this particular prayer, the notions of doing God's will and serving God with a perfect heart are expressed in the same grammatical unit. From this we may presume that doing God's will necessitates serving God with complete faithfulness, or with a perfect heart. God discerns whether or not Israel observes Torah with kavanah. In addition, God exercises some influence in enabling this to occur; God can help facilitate the opening of human beings' hearts and the fulfillment of God's will.

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<sup>23</sup> S.R.A., p.39.

10. וְכָל אֶחָד מֵעַמּוּךְ לִשְׁמַחַת רְצוֹן בְּלִבּוֹ שָׁלֵם.

And everyone will form one community to do your will with a perfect heart.<sup>24</sup>

As in #9 above, we also note here that the fulfillment of God's will requires a "perfect heart." A perfect heart connotes a complete faithfulness or kavanah. This is explicitly stated in the above Rosh Hashanah prayer. Noteworthy here, as well, is the notion that the community is expected to join together to fulfill God's will "with a perfect heart."

11. וְהוֹסַפְנוּ שֶׁבַת וְרֵאשִׁית חֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה בְּעֵשֶׂה  
וְהָקִירָב לְפָנֶיךָ בְּאַהֲבָה מִכָּל רְצוֹן כְּמוֹ שֶׁכָּתוּב עָלֵינוּ בְּחֻמְתְּךָ עַל יַד מֹשֶׁה עַבְדְּךָ כְּמוֹ  
בְּסוּד כְּאִמְרוֹ.

And the additional prayers for the Sabbath and the New Month we will offer before you in love according to the commandments of your will as you wrote for us in your Torah through Moses your servant from the mouth of your glory as it was spoken.<sup>25</sup>

In #9 and #10 above we noted that the expression b'levav shalem indicates the importance of kavanah in observing the commandments and in fulfilling God's will. Here we note another common expression conveying the significance of proper intent for the rabbis: "in love according to the commandments of your will." In this particular prayer the expression refers to the offering of the additional prayers for the sabbath and the New Month.

<sup>24</sup> S.R.A., p.136.

<sup>25</sup> S.R.A., p.90.

The expression indicates that the offering of prayers in love before God is the fulfillment of the commandments of God's will.

One might argue perhaps that not every prayer must be offered to God with love in order to please God. This argument might be compelling were it not for the frequent recurrence of the expression "in love according to the commandments of your will" throughout Seder Rav Amram. This repetition is further substantiated by numerous references to the heart, which is described as the source for the fulfillment of God's will. The above prayer thus communicates that fulfilling the commandments according to God's will entails fulfilling these commandments with love.

12.

אח מוסק יום הכיפורים הזה נשעה ונקריב לפניך באהבה כמצות רצונך כמו שכתבת עלינו  
במרחוק על ידי משה עבדך באמור.

The additional prayer for this Yom Kippur we will offer before you in love according to the commandments of your will as you wrote for us in your Torah by Moses your servant as it was spoken.<sup>26</sup>

As in #11 above, this prayer conveys the notion that the fulfillment of the commandments of God's will requires offering prayers to God with love. This particular prayer indicates that God is pleased with the offering of the additional prayer for Yom Kippur.

<sup>26</sup> S.R.A., p.167.



13. שוב אלינו ברחמי רבים בגלל אבותינו אשר עשו רצונך.

Return unto us with the abundance of your mercy on account of the fathers who did your will. <sup>27</sup>

We noted in #2 above that angels are upheld as models for the fulfillment of God's will. We also postulated in #3 above that chasidei tzadikim are exemplars for the fulfillment of God's will. In this Passover prayer we observe that the "fathers" or patriarchs performed God's will as well. Worshippers request that God return unto them with mercy on account of the patriarchs who did God's will. The prayer expresses that the patriarchs' fulfillment of God's will may even be sufficient reason for God to exercise compassion upon future generations.

Not only does the patriarchal fulfillment of God's will have lasting impact upon future generations, but the patriarchs are upheld as examples for worshippers of the fulfillment of God's will. The patriarchs earned merit as a result of their performance of the will of God. The patriarchs are models for the fulfillment of God's will, perhaps implying that worshippers will also earn God's merit, as a result of fulfilling God's will.

14.      זכר לנו ה'  
 אלהינו את הברית ואת החסד ואת השכר שנתת לאברהם אבינו בזה המצוי. וזאת  
 לסניד עקד את בנו על גבי המזבח וכש רחמי לעשות רצונך בלב שלם.

And remember unto us, Lord our God, the covenant and the goodness and the oath which you promised to Abraham our father at Mount Moriah. And see before you the sacrifice, he bound his son upon the altar and overcame his compassion to do  
 \* your will with a perfect heart.<sup>28</sup>

This Rosh Hashanah prayer upholds Abraham as the paradigm for the Jew who fulfills God's will. As in #9 and #10 above, the fulfillment of God's will involves complete faithfulness, indicated by the words b'levav shalem, with a perfect heart. Abraham demonstrated his devotion to God by obeying God's instructions; he bound his son Isaac and prepared to sacrifice him upon the altar. In order to fulfill God's will, Abraham had to suppress his compassion for Isaac. From this we speculate that doing God's will involves overcoming human inclinations; it entails readily prioritizing divine command over the human relationship. Abraham suppressed his compassion for Isaac, his son, in order to please God, his "Father." Fulfilling God's will necessitates complete devotion to divine command. Worshippers appeal to God for help on account of Abraham's merit. Abraham is the paradigm for the Jew who fulfills God's will with true and complete faith.



15. ברוך אתה יהוה בורך בנביאים טובים ודעת ברכיהם האמרים באמת באי הנבואה בטהרה  
ובמקרה עבדך ובישראל עמו ובנביאי האמת והצדק.

Blessed are you, Lord our God, Ruler of the universe, who has chosen good prophets and has taken pleasure in their words which were spoken in truth. Blessed are you, Lord our God, who has chosen the Law, and Moses your servant, and Israel your people, and the prophets of truth and righteousness.<sup>29</sup>

In this Torah blessing we note that God takes pleasure in the words of prophets. God chose these "good prophets" and their words are "words spoken in truth." Because God chose these prophets, we might presume that their teachings are in keeping with God's will. This notion is consistent with our previous observations as well as with rabbinic thought. We noted above that adherence to the Torah is fulfillment of God's will. Prophets who teach Torah must then also be fulfilling God's will. According to A. Cohen, "the very foundation of the Rabbinic creed is that God made [God's] will known through certain spokesmen who are called prophets."<sup>30</sup> They not only preach words of Torah but they practice its precepts as well. Like the patriarchs above, the prophets are exemplars for worshippers of the fulfillment of God's will.

<sup>29</sup> S.R.A., p.77.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid p. 121.

16. ראשי חודשים לעמך נתת. זמן כפרה לכל תולדותם. בחייתם מקריבים לפניך ובשר רחוק.

New Months you gave to your people. A festival of atonement for all their generations. At those times they offer before you sacrifices of pleasure.<sup>31</sup>

The above prayer refers to "sacrifices of pleasure" to be offered to God at Rosh Hodesh. Zivchei Ratzon could be translated as "sacrifices of pleasure," "sacrifices of will" or "sacrifices of acceptance." The three translations convey the same basic notion of God accepting and thus being pleased with Israel's offerings. Rosh Hodesh is referred to here as a "festival of atonement." The offering of these sacrifices thus seems to be an expression of atonement before God. God gave Israel the New Month in order to atone for their transgressions. The sacrifices indicated are sacrifices which are acceptable before God. God takes note of sacrifices and not every sacrifice is to God's pleasure. Human beings please God when they offer acceptable sacrifices. From this we may assume that God desires for human beings to atone for their sins.

- 17.

. יחד רצון סלפיד שנתה העלתו שנתו כפוללים לרצון חודש לפניך כפרים  
ובנשים כולו הקרבנו אותם על גבי חמבה וחרוב.

<sup>31</sup> S.R.A., p.88.

May it be your will that our prayer that we pray be acceptable, and let it be considered before you as bullocks and sheep, as if we sacrificed them on the altar, and pardon us. <sup>32</sup>

The above prayer originates in Brachot 16b-17a and begins with the yehi ratzon milfanekha formula. The rabbis approach God with submission and respect; they request that it be God's will for God to accept their prayer. Here ratzon expresses the expectation that God be pleased with their prayer and accept their prayer. The rabbis further request that God accept their prayer with the same criteria as God had once accepted sacrificial offerings prior to the destruction of the Temple. The rabbis knew that God wills sacrifice because it is written in the Torah. They did not feel the same confidence concerning prayer offerings. The rabbis appear to be apologetic regarding their offering of prayer; they express the hope that their prayer will have the same efficacy as their sacrifices had once exercised.

Ratzon does not directly refer to the latter part of the prayer referring to sacrifices, "and let it be considered before you as bullocks and sheep, as if we sacrificed them on the altar....," yet the two notions expressed in the prayer are directly connected. The first part requests that God accept the prayer being offered. The second part expresses the hope that God accept the prayer

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<sup>32</sup> S.R.A., p.37.

with the same consideration as God had once accepted sacrifices. The premise of the prayer is that human beings are to offer acceptable and pleasing prayer to God.

18. ייח רצון מלפניך ה' אלהי האלה  
אבותי שלא אחטא. ומה שמאמתי מרוב ברחמיך הרבים אבל לא על ידי יסורי.

May it be your will, God and God of my fathers, that I may sin no more, and that in which I have sinned, cleanse it away in your great mercy, but not by my sufferings.<sup>33</sup>

The above prayer, beginning with yehi ratzon milfanekha, expresses the expectation that it be God's will that the individual not sin. We have previously noted that human beings possess a will independent of God's will. They have a good will and a bad will. Human beings must conquer their bad will in order to align their will with God's will and thus fulfill God's will. Here the individual requests help from God not to sin. While he can exercise his own free will, the individual needs God's help in order to obliterate inherent sinful tendencies. Noteworthy here is the notion that suffering atones for human sin. The prayer petitions God to replace suffering with another form of atonement.

19. בדרך אמת ה' אמת המעיל וכלי שיבה על שני המעשים שנת הדינה על שני המעשים  
על אשון בת עין ושכר כמיתן בת עין. ייח רצון מלפניך ה' אלהי שמעתי לאלה  
המעשים לשלום והתן חלק במעשר המעילי לרוב פנות האל המעילי לרוב עבדות.  
האל הביאני לידי חטא ולידי גזון ולידי בליה. וישלם בי ייח שוב האל ישלם בי ייח  
הרע והמעילי פננת רע והשלום רע והשחרור רע. האל יבאנוי חלומות רעים. והוא מסתי  
שלום לפניך. והוא ענין פן אשון המות. בדרך אמת ה' המעיל לשלום כלו בבבדו.

May it be your will, Lord, my God, to allow me to lie down in peace and let me rise up again in peace and give me my portion in the Torah and make me familiar with that which concerns the commandment and not with that which concerns transgression. And lead me not to sin or into temptation or shame. And may the good inclination rule me and may the evil inclination not rule me and let not evil dreams trouble me, and let my bed be perfect before you. Lighten my eyes so that I don't sleep the sleep of death. Blessed are you, God, who gives light to the whole world in your glory.

34

Like #18 above, this prayer recited upon lying down to sleep is offered by the individual. It also begins with yehi ratzon milfanekha. Here the individual expresses the expectation that it be God's will that he lie down in peace and rise up again in peace. The individual also requests that it be God's will to keep him distant from transgression and to grant him a portion in the Torah. This is directly stated in the prayer with reference to ratzon.

What is not directly stated in reference to ratzon but what appears to be directly connected is the notion that it be God's will to help the individual conquer his evil inclination. The above passage consists of related notions of pleasing God and appears to form a thematic unit. This supports the premise that ratzon describes the above notions. Noteworthy here is that the individual requests God's help in overcoming evil and transgression. The rabbis

understood that in order to fulfill God's will they had to conquer evil, even the "evil" manifested in their unconscious. The rabbis also distrusted the darkness of the night and believed it could lead them astray.

20.

יהי רצון מלפניך ה' אלוהי אבותי שתתן חלקי  
בתורתך ותוריתך במצותך ותחזקני ליראתך וחכמתי את יצורי להשתחבד לך ותרגילני  
לדבר מצות ואל תרגילני לדבר עבירה ואל תביאני לידי חטא ולא לידי נסיון ולא לידי  
ביתר ואל ישלש בי יצר הרע וישלש בי יצר טוב ותנני לתן ולחסד ולרחמים בעיניך ובעיני  
כל רואי וגמלי חסדים טובים בדרך אמת ה' גמל חסדים טובים.

May it be your will, Lord my God and God of my fathers, to give me my portion in your Torah and cause me to cleave to your commandment and strengthen me for your awe cause me to submit my will to serve you and lead me to the way of commandment and do not lead me to the way of transgression and keep me from shame and disgrace and keep me far from the evil inclination and make me cleave to the good inclination, and let me obtain grace and favor in your eyes and in the eyes of all who see me, and bestow lovingkindness upon me. Blessed are you, Lord, who bestows lovingkindness.<sup>35</sup>

The above morning blessing begins once again with the opening yehi ratzon milfanekha. It is interesting here that the worshipper addresses God directly from the perspective of his own self. The individual requests that God give him a portion in the Torah and that God grant him the strength to



revere God with appropriate respect. He asks God to aid him in submitting his will to the will of God. In order to do so, the individual must conquer his evil inclination. He must suppress all shades of transgression and disgrace in order to exercise his good inclination. The individual worshipper beckons God to grant him favor and grace; he acknowledges God's goodness and requests that God continue to bestow him with divine lovingkindness. Implicit here is that God desires the individual to suppress his evil inclination and to adhere to the Torah. The worshipper understands that God wills a life of divine commandment and lovingkindness for him. He expresses his own expectation of what would please God. The individual understands that when he does, in fact, suppress his evil inclination and adheres to a life of Torah, he pleases God. The worshipper also believes that he needs God's help in order to fulfill divine will. Human beings simply can not do it alone; they are dependent upon God's will. The opening "may it be your will" not only expresses the request that God help the worshipper lead a devout life but it articulates the worshipper's understanding of God's will.

21.

יהוה רצון מלפניך ה' אלהי שומעילי מצוי  
 מנים ומעוזות מנים מיום רע ומשכון רע ומחבר רע ומפגע רע ומציק קשה ומבעל דין  
 קשה בין בן בית ובין שאינו בן בית.



May it be your will, Lord my God, and God of my fathers to save me from the arrogant and from arrogance, from the evil inclination, from an evil pledge, from an evil companion, from an evil accuser, from a difficult lawsuit, and from a difficult opponent, whether he is a son of the covenant or not a son of the covenant.<sup>36</sup>

As in #20 above, this prayer begins with yehi ratzon milfanekha and is addressed by the individual to God. This morning\*prayer, originating in Brachot 16b-17a, requests that it be God's will for God to save the individual from arrogance, evil and opposition. The worshipper desires protection not only from external evil but from internal evil as well. The evil inclination in any manifestation is undesirable.

As in #20 above, this prayer also articulates the rabbis' understanding of God's will. They express the belief that God desires goodness for them and thus desires that evil be distanced from them. The prayer does not directly concern the human being's free will to choose between evil and good, yet implicit here is that the individual possesses such free will but needs God's help in conquering evil. Though human beings can exercise free will, they depend upon God for ultimate salvation. This is the reason why arrogance is considered by the rabbis to be a particularly evil human trait. The arrogant individual believes he can live without God's guidance.

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<sup>36</sup> S.R.A., p.3.

22. יי רצון מלפניך ה' אלהי  
 שתשמיד ותבזיז ותרחיק יצר הרע ממני ותשליח ותבזיז ותרחיק ממנתי הארבעים  
 ותסנה אברים שבי ואל יכשילי מרחיך המונות. אלא תן בלבי יצר טוב וחבר טוב  
 לשמר חקי ולעבוד מצותי רצוני בלבב שלם.

May it be your will, Lord our God, to destroy and humble and keep distant from me the evil inclination, to humble it and subdue it and keep it far from my 248 limbs, and do not cause me to stumble from your good ways, but give in my heart to good inclination, and give a good companion, to keep your commandments and to serve you and to do your will with all my heart.<sup>37</sup>

This passage from Brachot 16b-17a, like #20 and #21 above, begins with yehi ratzon milfanekha and requests that it be God's will for evil to be distanced from the worshipper. The prayer expresses the expectation that God destroy, humble and distance the evil inclination from the individual. The evil inclination must be humbled and subdued. The prayer petitions God to help the worshipper follow his good inclination, to have good companions and to keep God's commandments. The worshipper beseeches God for help in doing God's will. Human beings can not achieve goodness without God. Noteworthy here is that the individual aspires to do God's will with all his heart. Once again, the importance of intent and of faithfulness in observing God's commandments is emphasized. The rabbis understood that God not only wills for them good, but that God is pleased with the individual who conquers his evil

<sup>37</sup> S.R.A., p.37.

inclination in order to serve God wholeheartedly. The individual who obliterates evil from his life is the one who fulfills God's will.

23. וְתֵן חֵלְקֵנוּ בְּתוֹרַתְךָ וּשְׁכַנְנוּנוּ בְּסֻכּוֹךְ וְשָׂמַח לִבֵּנוּ בִּישׁוּעָתְךָ וְשׂוּרֵי לִבֵּנוּ לְעִבְדֶּךָ בְּאֵמַת הַתְּחִילָנוּ  
 ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ בְּחֻבְבָּת וּבְרִצּוֹן שְׁבוּתָנוּ קִדְשׁ יִשְׁמְרוּ בָּךְ כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲחֵינוּ שְׂמֵךְ. בְּיָמֵי  
 מְקֹדֶשׁ הַשָּׁנָה וְיִשְׂרָאֵל הָרַחֵם וְהַשְׁעֵם.

And give us, Lord our God, in love, sabbaths for rest and this new month, a day of favor to atone on our behalf.<sup>38</sup>

In several of the above prayers we have noted the rabbinic understanding that the "yeast in the dough," or the evil inclination, prevents human beings from aligning their will with God's will and thereby fulfilling God's will. The obliteration of both internal and external sin has been a recurrent theme throughout these prayers. Seder Rav Amram likewise contains numerous prayers concerning repentance and atonement for sins. In the above prayer, Rosh Hodesh is referred to as Yom Ratzon le'chaper ba'adeynu, "a day of favor to atone on our behalf."

Yom Ratzon could be translated as "a day of will," "a day of pleasure," "a day of favor" or "a day of acceptance." With all four translations Rosh Hodesh is understood by the rabbis as a God-given opportunity for repentance. God is not indifferent to this day, rather there is reason to believe that God is personally involved with human beings on this day.

We have already noted above how the sabbath was understood by the rabbis as a sign of God's love and favor for Israel. Rosh Hodesh appears along with "sabbaths" here; God gave both sabbaths and the new month to Israel "in love." Also significant here is that Yom Ratzon is a day of atonement. One possible inference from this description is that God takes pleasure in atonement. This notion is consistent with the previously stated hypothesis that sin prevents the human fulfillment of God's will. When human beings repent and atone for their transgressions, they succeed in conquering their evil inclination and aligning their will with God's will.

24. יה רצון מלפניך יה אלהינו שנתנו ברכת זו לעמנו  
כבוד לך, ואל יה בך מכשול ורצון מעתה ועד עולם.

May it be your will, Lord our God, that this blessing that you commanded us may be an atonement for us, and may there not be in it any obstacle or sin now and forever.<sup>39</sup>

The priestly blessing had once been part of the Temple service but was later transformed into an integral part of the synagogue service. The above blessing is juxtaposed to the priestly blessing, or the blessing of the "raising of the hands."<sup>40</sup> The priests petition God to accept their blessing as atonement for their transgressions. Like #23

<sup>39</sup> S.R.A., p.35.

<sup>40</sup> David Hedegard, Seder R. Amram Gaon (Sweden: Lindstedts Universitets-Bokhandel, 1951.) pp.122-124.

above, this prayer expresses the notion that God is pleased with atonement. Since sin was viewed as a breach in the covenant with God, atonement was understood as the means to repair the covenantal relationship. Implicit here is the notion that when Israel adheres to God's commandments they are fulfilling God's will.

25. יהי רצון מלפניך ה' אלהי שחמסל לנו על כל עונותינו ומסל לנו על כל פשענו.  
ומכפר לנו על כל חטאותינו.

May it be your will, God of our fathers,  
that you will have mercy upon us for all  
of our iniquities and forgive us for all  
of our transgressions and atone for us  
for all of our sins.<sup>41</sup>

This Yom Kippur prayer repeats a similar expectation that God will have mercy upon Israel for all of their sins and will thus forgive them and atone for them. While the prayer beseeches God to exercise divine compassion, it also articulates an understanding of God's will; God is merciful and forgiving and God desires atonement. Human beings please God and fulfill God's will when they atone for their sins.

26. יהי רצון מלפניך שנתה וסלתנו שנתנו סחטללים לרצון ותחשב לפניך כפרים  
ובנשים כאלו הקרבנו אותם על גבי המזבח ותירצנו.

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<sup>41</sup> S.R.A., p.161.

May it be your will that our prayer which we pray be acceptable and let it be considered before you as bullocks and sheep, as if we sacrificed them on the altar and pardon us.<sup>42</sup>

In #17 above we discussed this prayer and its emphasis upon the notion that God accept worshippers' offerings with the same criteria as God had once received sacrificial offerings. Here we note the connection between God accepting prayer and God pardoning worshippers. Sacrificial offerings served as a means for atonement. Prayer replaced these sacrifices as the primary vehicle towards atonement. Worshippers express the hope that prayer will exercise the same atoning effect as sacrifices had done. They approach God with submission and respect; they request that God accept their prayers but they don't presume that God will automatically do so. They must have believed that God did not accept every prayer; the rabbis understood that there were acceptable and unacceptable forms of offerings. God therefore would not pardon all individuals merely as a result of their prayers. Though human beings petition God for acceptance and atonement, they also recognize the impact of their own human will. God's will does not change, yet the interaction between God and human beings can be altered in accordance with the actions of human beings. The rabbis understood that they had to offer acceptable prayers to God in order to please God and to fulfill God's will.

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<sup>42</sup> S.R.A., p.37.



27. לִפְנֵי יְהוָה יִהְיֶה דְבַר פִּי וּמַחְשַׁבֵּי לִבִּי כִּפְּאוּלָּה.

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable before you, O Lord, My rock and My redeemer. <sup>43</sup>

The above prayer originates in Psalms 19:13-15 and concludes a section concerning sin: "Who can be aware of errors? Clear me of unperceived guilt, and from willful sins, keep your servant, let them not dominate me, then shall I be blameless, and clear of grave offense. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable before you, O Lord, My rock and My redeemer." The passage was later recited as a private devotion of Mar the son of Rabina, who concluded his prayers with its recitation. As in #26 above, we note that there are acceptable and unacceptable forms of prayer to God. Worshipers approach God with awe and submission. They request that their prayers be deemed acceptable by God.



### Summary

The prayers included in this chapter concern the rabbinic understanding of how human beings please God, or fulfill God's will. The term ratzon is translated as "will," "pleasure" and "favor." Ratzon appears in various grammatical and idiomatic forms.

Fundamental to the rabbinic understanding of God's will is that it is the task of human beings to align their will with the will of God. This notion is evident in Brachot 16b: "it is my will to do your will..." We are not entirely clear as to what doing God's will entails from this passage, but we do learn that "the yeast in the dough" prevents such alignment from occurring. The "yeast in the dough" symbolizes the evil inclination within human beings. It particularly symbolizes human arrogance and the attitude that human beings need not depend upon God for their sustenance and salvation.

This notion that the "yeast in the dough," or the evil inclination, prevents the human fulfillment of God's will, is recurrent throughout the above prayers. The rabbis understood that in order to fulfill God's will, they had to obliterate the evil inclination. According to David Abrahams, the "highest conception of the relation between [human beings] and God is given in the idea of self-submission...the Israelite prays that the leaven of the evil

inclination may not stir up and sully [the human being's] heart so as to impede this submission."<sup>44</sup> The "yeast in the dough" explains the recurrent juxtaposition of sin and atonement with the notion of fulfilling God's will. Emphasis upon the evil inclination explains why Rosh Hodesh is referred to as Yom Ratzon le'chaper ba'adeynu.

The rabbis understood human beings to possess a dual nature, that is, both a good and evil inclination. But they also understood that human beings need God in order to conquer the evil inclination and attain goodness. Human dependency upon God is a theme which permeates throughout the above prayers. This emphasis upon dependency explains the recurrent opening formula "may it be God's will." Human beings can not fulfill God's will alone; rather, they must continually petition God for help. Dependency upon God is the antithesis of "the yeast in the dough," or human arrogance. Human beings need God's help in order to overcome the evil inclination. They depend upon God for their sustenance and salvation. Ultimate redemption will only occur with the aid of God's will.

The above prayers repeatedly convey the notion that Torah is the vehicle towards fulfillment of God's will. The significance of Torah is expressed in Brachot 16b: "Lord of all worlds, may it be your will that your Torah be my faith

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<sup>44</sup> Israel Abrahams, A Companion to the Authorized Daily Prayerbook, (Eyre and Spottiswood Ltd., 1922), pp.19-20.

and my occupation for every day and that I may not err in it..." There is also continual reference to human beings' fulfillment of the commandments of God's will. Observance of Torah emerges not only as the way to harmonize one's will with the Will of God, but also as the vehicle towards pleasing God and attaining redemption.

The significance of the Torah in fulfilling God's will for the rabbis can not be underestimated. This is exemplified in the following from Rabbi Simai: "All created beings that were created from heaven, their soul and body are from heaven; and all creatures that were created from the earth, their soul and body are from the earth, except man, whose soul is from heaven and his body from the earth. Therefore, if he observed the Torah and did the will of his Father in heaven, he is like the beings (of heaven) above..Man accordingly holds a position between the higher beings (of heaven) and the lower creatures (of earth) , but he is able wholly to exalt himself and be among the higher beings, if he deserves the Torah and does the will of his Heavenly Father. Contrariwise, if he does not observe the Torah, he becomes like the lower creatures."<sup>45</sup> According to the Tanna Rabbi Simeon ben Eleazar: "When Israel does the will of the Omnipresent, then [God's] name is magnified in the world...and whenever they do not do [God's] will,

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<sup>45</sup> Ephraim Urbach The Sages, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), pp.220-21.

[God's] name is profaned in the world." He is called "the one that does the will of his Father in Heaven" who fulfills the Torah and studies it."<sup>46</sup> And according to another noteworthy rabbinic source, "...Now heaven and earth, sun and moon, stars and planets, early and late do the will of [God] who created them. So, too, do you early and late study words of Torah, and ever do the will of your creator, as it says: "Let us continue to know the Lord."<sup>47</sup>

Richard Sarason further notes that Torah is both the revealed will of God and the vehicle towards alignment of the human will with the will of God. Sarason maintains that the observance of Torah "is perceived by the Jew as an act of bringing his own will, and the collective purpose of Jewish society, into compliance with the will of God, such that human actions and behavior will be in harmony with "the way things really are." Such conformity to the divine will must invariably lead to this worldly welfare and ultimate salvation for the individual, and messianic redemption (and vindication) for the group."<sup>48</sup> Sarason identifies the Torah as "God's emissary," and the vehicle through which God and Israel approaches each other.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid p.360.

<sup>47</sup> CC. Montefiore and H.Loewe, A Rabbinic Anthology, (NY: Schocken Books, 1974), p. 499.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid p.50.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid p.52.

Sarason maintains that according to the rabbis, the way to fulfill God's will is to live a life of Torah: "Perpetual service in one's daily life-joyful obedience to God's norms and attunement of one's own will to that of the Creator of the universe-is perhaps the ultimate form of worship in Judaism. [Human beings are] to be ever mindful of God and to behave accordingly." 50 "Divine paradigms, as laid forth by the rabbis, regulate every human activity. But the ritualization of daily life is experienced subjectively as living in harmony with the cosmic order of things, and as grateful submission to the divine will." 51

There are also recurrent references in the above prayers to the notion that God takes pleasure in sabbath observance. Sabbath observance is a sign of a life of service and submission to God's will. This notion is evident in several prayers, for example: "and let our rest be a rest of love and free-will offering...a perfect rest in which you take pleasure....," and "we will rest on [the seventh day] in accordance with the commandments of your will." Sabbath observance is, of course, an integral component of adherence to God's statutes. The sabbath is not only a sign of God's love for Israel, but is also a sign of Israel's faithfulness to God.

The rabbis also believed that sincere intent is

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50 Ibid p.54.

51 Ibid, p. 54.

necessary in order to fulfill God's will. This notion is expressed with the repeated appearance of the phrase be'levav shalem, with a perfect heart, in juxtaposition to fulfillment of God's will. Similarly, the recurrence of the phrase "in love according to the commandments of your will" denotes the significance of proper intent in performance of God's will. There is repeated mention of the human heart as the source for the fulfillment of God's will. One such example is the following from #9 above: "May He open our hearts unto His Torah and place His awe within our hearts, that we may do His will and serve Him with a perfect heart..." Exodus Rabbah XXI:3 expresses a similar notion: "Whoever performs the will of the All-present and directs his heart to [God] in prayer is heard."<sup>52</sup>

The rabbis believed that in order to fulfill God's will, one must overcome all impediments which prevent submission to divine command. Thus Abraham is upheld as an example of submission to God's will. Abraham overcame his "compassion" for Isaac in order to please God. The patriarchs earned merit as a result of adherence to God's will. Righteous individuals are likewise upheld as exemplary human beings who please God with their faithfulness. These individuals conquer their inherent evil inclination which prevents the alignment of their will with the will of God. Angels are not subject to the evil

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid pp.81-82.



inclination; they thus fulfill God's will with awe and praise.

The above prayers convey a personal relationship between Israel and God. Human beings engage in an ongoing dialogue with God and address God as they would an exalted and powerful human being. There is an understanding that God listens to prayer and can be influenced by the words and actions of human beings. God's will itself does not change, but the transformation of the human will affects the manner in which God responds to human beings.

The prayers portray the relationship between God and Israel with highly personal terms in their depiction of human beings as engaged in a submissive relationship to God. Human beings are frequently described as servants or children of God. Worshippers approach God with humility and respect.

According to Joseph Heinemann, the favorite opening formula of the private prayers of the rabbis, "May it be your will O Lord, my God and the God of my fathers," emphasizes the personal relationship between God and Israel. Heinemann notes that Adonai is used uniformly, followed by the additional phrase "Elohei," "my God." God is invariably addressed in the second person. He observes that all of these characteristics emphasize the "intimate, personal



relationship with God of which the worshipper is conscious."<sup>53</sup>

The worshipper is also conscious that he must petition God in a humble and respectful fashion. This opening is appropriate for it is indirect and modest. According to Heinemann, "...the worshipper does not address God forcefully in language which could be considered too direct and presumptuous, as if it were telling God what to do. A prayer which uses the stylistic device, "May it be [your] will..." expresses an appropriate amount of reverence and restraint, for the worshipper only asks that it be God's will to grant his request, and not that God do his bidding. Behind this formula, then, is the feeling that [people] should not approach God with [their] requests in too forceful a manner."<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Joseph Heinemann, "The Background of Jesus' Prayer in the Jewish Liturgical Tradition," in The Lord's Prayer and Jewish Liturgy, edited by Jakob Petuchowski and Michael Brocke, (New Seabury Press, NY, 1978), p. 83.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid pp.83-84.

Seder Rav Amram: Covenantal

1. .לפניך יהי רצון מלפניך יהי רצון מלפניך יהי רצון

- \* May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.<sup>55</sup>

In the previous chapter we noted the rabbinic understanding of how human beings please God and thereby fulfill God's will. The rabbis understood that adherence to divine commandments, with complete faith and love, is the fulfillment of God's will. The prayers convey the notion that the evil inclination of human beings is what prevents them from aligning their will with the will of God. They must therefore repent for their sins in order to truly fulfill God's will. We also noted above that a distinction was made between acceptable and unacceptable forms of prayer. One example of unacceptable prayer is one which is offered without sincerity. The rabbis believed that God takes personal note of the offerings of human beings; God's will itself does not change but the manner in which God accepts their prayers may be altered in accordance with their behavior. Implicit in the above prayer is the notion that God accepts those offerings which God deems satisfactory. Also implied here is that there is a

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<sup>55</sup> S.R.A., p.28.

connection between what God accepts and what human beings offer. The prayer expresses the hope that God will find the individual's offerings satisfactory and will thus accept his prayers. We noted in #29 above that this particular supplication originates in Psalms 19:13-15 and concludes a section concerning repentance. The psalm reads as follows: "Clear me of unperceived guilt, and from willful sins, keep your servant, let them not dominate me, then shall I be blameless, and clear me of grave offenses. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart, be acceptable before you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer."

In consideration of the psalm in its entirety, we see that the worshipper requests that God find his repentance acceptable. The prayer refers to both "the words of my mouth" and the "meditations of my heart." This is consistent with the rabbinic understanding that God takes note of the actions of human beings as well as of their kavanah, or sincerity. Here we note the relationship between God and human beings. The task of human beings is to offer acceptable prayers to God; God, in turn, accepts suitable offerings. Acceptable offerings in this particular supplication are ones which are presented in complete repentance.

2. אלא יי רצון מלפניך שחזק השלחנו שאנו מתפללים לרצון ותחשב לפניך כפרים  
וכבשים כאלו הקרבנו אחים על גבי המזבח ותריצנו.

May it be your will that our prayer which we pray be acceptable, and let it be reckoned before you as bullocks and sheep, as if we sacrificed them on the altar and pardon us.<sup>56</sup>

We noted in #1 above the notion that God distinguishes between acceptable and unacceptable offerings. Human beings attempt to offer satisfactory prayers with the expectation that God will accept them. In #1 above, we also noted a connection between acceptable prayers and prayers which are offered in complete repentance. Like #1 above, the premise of this supplication is that God accepts satisfactory offerings. When human beings offer the proper prayers, God accepts them. This particular supplication expresses concern that God accept prayers with the same criteria as God had once accepted sacrifices. The prayer petitions God to accept the prayers being offered as atonement for sin.

3. אֵלֹהִים קַבֵּל תְּפִלַּת בְּרִיָּה.

God in the heavens, receive our prayers with favor.<sup>57</sup>

Like #1 and #2 above, this Rosh Hashanah supplication petitions God to accept prayers being offered. It suggests

<sup>56</sup> S.R.A., p.37.

<sup>57</sup> S.R.A., p.154.

that God does not receive all prayers without distinction. God takes note of prayers and God can accept or reject them. This particular prayer beseeches God to exercise compassion and mercy upon Israel and to accept their repentance. Implicit here is the notion that when human beings offer satisfactory prayers and repentance, God accepts them with favor.

4. שְׁמַע קוֹלֵנוּ ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְרַחֵם עָלֵינוּ וְקַבֵּל בְּרַחֲמִים וְהַיְחָן אֶת תְּפִלָּתֵנוּ כִּי אֵל שׁוֹמֵעַ תְּפִלָּוֵינוּ  
וְהַיְחָן אֶתהּ שְׂעוֹלָה בְּדָךְ אֵתהּ ה' שׁוֹמֵעַ תְּפִלָּה

Hear our voice, Lord our God,  
and have mercy upon us and  
receive our prayer in mercy  
and in favor, for you are a  
God who listens to our prayers  
and our supplications forever.  
Blessed are you, who hears  
prayer.<sup>58</sup>

Once again this prayer suggests that when worshippers offer prayers which are deemed satisfactory by God, God accepts them. The prayer petitions God to accept worshippers' supplications "in mercy and in favor." Ratzon is used here, together with rachamim, to describe the manner in which God receives worshippers' prayers. Implicit is the notion that when human beings offer appropriate prayer to God, God exercises compassion upon them and receives their prayer.

In this text, the notion that God receives prayers "in mercy and in favor" is closely connected with the idea that God listens to prayer. Not only does the prayer begin with a

direct appeal to God to listen to prayer, but the expectation that God receives prayer is immediately followed with the explanatory statement that God is "a God who listens to our prayers and our supplications..."

There is reason to believe that God receives the prayers of all who pray, not just Israel. This notion is evident in Targum Amos 90, another significant source for the above prayer:

The assembly of Israel speaks before the Holy One, blessed be He: Sovereign of all the worlds! Merciful God, we beseech you, at all times when we pray unto you, receive our prayers, for you are the Lord our God. Have pity with us in your mercy, and receive our petition in mercy and favor. May we not return empty, our Lord, from before you, for you receive the prayer of all those that pray unto you."<sup>59</sup>

5.

זאת ה' מלכות כבוד ישראל והמלכות חסד עמך לדידך ביום ואשר ישראל והמלכות  
מלכות באמת חסד ביום ואשר לדידך חסד עמך ישראל עמך. והחזיקה עיניו בשבד  
לדידך ברחמים. ביום הזה ה' משיח שכינתו לעד.

Accept, Lord our God, your people Israel and their prayer, and restore the Temple Service to your House, and speedily receive in love and favor their prayer, and may the service of your people Israel always be acceptable unto you, and let our eyes behold your return in mercy to Zion. Blessed are you, Lord, who restores your Presence unto Zion.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>59</sup> David Hedegard, Seder R. Amram Gaon. (Motala: Broderna Borgstoms, 1951) p. 96.

<sup>60</sup> S.R.A., p.26.

The prayer Avodah or "Service/Worship," derives from the Temple in Jerusalem in connection with the sacrificial cult and was altered following the destruction of the Temple. A version of the Avodah was eventually incorporated into the daily synagogue service. Here it retains references to the sacrificial cult. The phrases "restore the Temple service to your House," "let our eyes" and "who restores" refer to the restoration of the Temple in Jerusalem and the reinstitution of the sacrificial cult. <sup>61</sup>

The term ratzon appears three times in the Avodah. First, in the imperative form, beseeching God to accept God's "people Israel and their prayer." The rabbis believed that God accepts Israel and Israel's prayers. The second ratzon, as in #4 above, serves to describe God's acceptance of Israel's prayers. Here ratzon is juxtaposed with ahavah. Worshippers beseech God to accept their prayers with love and with favor. In this case, worshippers request that God receive their supplications speedily. The third ratzon here refers to "the service of your people Israel." Le'ratzon is a category for those offerings which God deems acceptable and pleasing.

All three citations of ratzon in the Avodah convey the notion that God distinguishes between acceptable and

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<sup>61</sup> Isaac Elbogen, Hatefillah B'Yisrael (Tel Aviv: Davir Publishers, 1972), p.43.





Receive in favor our petition, fulfill our prayer in mercy. Let our prayers come up to the residence of your name. May our supplications find grace and goodness and mercy and favor before you, and save us for your name's sake, for we have no other God....<sup>64</sup>

This prayer, as in #6 above, constitutes part of the selichot prayers recited upon reading from the Torah on Mondays and Thursdays. The term ratzon appears twice here. The first ratzon describes God's acceptance of Israel's petition. Ratzon is paralleled with rachamim. Ratzon and rachamim appear to be juxtaposed frequently in the prayers. This juxtaposition further substantiates the hypothesis, as previously stated in #6 above, that God's will is connected with God's compassion. The second ratzon describes the way in which God is expected to receive worshippers' supplications. Once again the term appears together with rachamim. Implicit in #6 above as well as here is the notion that when Israel presents supplications to God, God receives Israel with favor and compassion.

8.

אֵלֵינוּ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְיִשְׁרָאֵל אֱלֹהֵינוּ.

Our Father, Our King, receive our prayers with mercy and with favor.<sup>65</sup>

Like #6 and #7 above, ratzon and rachamim are juxtaposed here in reference to God's accepting Israel's

<sup>64</sup> S.R.A., p.58.

<sup>65</sup> S.R.A., p.139.

supplications. This particular prayer is recited on Rosh Hashanah and beseeches God to accept worshippers' prayers "with mercy and with favor."

Once again, we can state here that there is a connection between God's acceptance (or will) and God's compassion. In exchange for Israel offering prayers of repentance on Rosh Hashanah, God (forgives them and) accepts them with mercy and with pleasure.

9.

אלהינו ואלהינו גמולנו רחם כי נפשונו. וקדשנו בנפשונו וכן חלקנו בחורגנו. ושמנו  
מנוח ושמנו לנו כישועתנו. ומה לנו לעבוד באתה. ומה לנו כי אלוהינו באתה ומה לנו  
אתה קדשנו. ושמנו כי כל ישראל אחיך שמי. ביום קדש השבת.

Our God and God of our fathers, accept our rest, and sanctify us by your commandments, and grant our lot in your Torah, and satisfy us with your goodness...and gladden our hearts with your salvation, and purify our hearts to serve you, and let us inherit, God, in love and in favor, your holy Sabbath.<sup>66</sup>

The term ratzon appears twice in the above sabbath prayer. The first ratzon is used in the imperative and requests that God accept Israel's sabbath rest. It is possible to infer here that God accepts Israel's rest because God is pleased with Israel's observance. In exchange for Israel observing the sabbath, God takes note of this observance and accepts it. The second ratzon appears together with ahavah to describe the manner in which God is expected to grant the sabbath as an inheritance for Israel.

<sup>66</sup> S.R.A., p.63.

God grants Israel the sabbath with "love and in favor." The sabbath is described as "God's holy sabbath." The sabbath is thus a sign of God's love and favor for Israel. One possible corollary to this is that when Israel observes the sabbath, God, in turn, continues to grant Israel the sabbath as an inheritance. The sabbath is thus a sign of God's love and favor for Israel, as well as of Israel's faithfulness to God.

10.

השיבו אבינו לעדנות וקרבנו מלכות למעוןך הושיענו משיבת שמים לפניך. ברוך  
אתה ה' ויחיה משיבת.

Cause us to return, our Father, unto  
your Torah, draw us near, our King, unto  
your service, and bring us back in  
perfect repentance unto your presence.  
Blessed are you, God, who takes pleasure  
in repentance.<sup>67</sup>

Ratzon appears in this Shemoneh Esreh prayer as a verb and describes God's position in relation to the act of repentance. The term could be translated as either "takes pleasure," "favors," "accepts" or "wills." All four translations convey the same basic notion; God desires repentance. Alternatively, we can say that repentance is an act which, when performed by human beings, is in accordance with God's will. Here worshippers request that God help them to return to God's Torah, God's service and God's

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<sup>67</sup> S.R.A., p.24.

presence. The means towards returning to God is repentance.

As we saw in Chapter Two, the goal of human beings is to conquer their evil inclination in order to align their will with the will of God. So here, the prayer expresses the dynamics of the covenantal relationship. The goal of human beings<sup>68</sup> is to maintain a close relationship with God, (which is the fulfillment of God's will.) When that closeness is ruptured as a result of transgression, (the evil inclination,) human beings must repent in order to regain God's acceptance. As a result of the human effort to return, God delights and accepts their repentance.

11. יְהִי רָצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ שְׁמֵךְ בֵּרַכְנוּ ה' שְׁמִינָה  
בְּרַחֲמֶיךָ לֵאמֹר, וְהָלַךְ יָדֵינוּ בְּכִשְׁלֹל וְעָנָה מִפְּנֵיךָ וְעַד עָלֵינוּ

May it be your will, Lord our God, that this blessing that you commanded us may be an atonement for us, and may there, not be in it hindrance and sin now and forever.<sup>68</sup>

This prayer, recited by the priests upon bestowing the priestly blessing, expresses a similar notion as #10 above. Ratzon appears in the yehi ratzon milfanekha opening form. The priests petition God to accept their blessing as an atonement for sin. The prayer explicitly states that the blessing is commanded by God. The priests are to obey God's commandment by invoking the blessing. They petition God to accept their blessing as atonement. The priests expect that

<sup>68</sup> S.R.A., p.35.

in return for offering the proper blessing, God will accept their atonement.

12. יהי רצון מלפניך ה' אר"א שתמחול לנו על כל עונותינו ומחלה לנו על כל פשעים  
ותכפר לנו על כל חטאותינו

May it be your will, Lord our God and God of our fathers, that you will have mercy upon us for all of our iniquities and you will forgive us for all of our transgressions and you will atone for us for all of our sins.<sup>69</sup>

This Yom Kippur prayer also begins with the yehi ratzon milfanekha opening form. The supplication petitions God to exercise mercy upon Israel for all of their transgressions, to forgive them and to atone for all of their sins. The prayer articulates the expectation that God will accept Israel's repentance. Israel expects that God will forgive and atone for their sins as a result of their repentance. The rabbis clearly believed in a compassionate and forgiving God. As in #11 above, the rabbis depict a God who desires and accepts repentance.

- 13.

יהי רצון מלפניך ה' אלהינו ה' אלהינו אבותינו מלך  
רחמן שחשוב ורחום עלינו ועל סקודך ברחמיך הרבים ותבנוה מזהה ותגדל כבודך.

May it be your will, Lord, our God and God of our fathers, merciful King, that you will return and have mercy upon us and for your Temple, in your great mercy, and you will speedily build and magnify your glory.<sup>70</sup>

Ratzon once again appears here in the petition form "May it be your will..." This prayer, recited on Passover, beseeches God to exercise compassion upon Israel and in divine mercy to rebuild the Temple. It appears from the context of this prayer that the rabbis expect God to take note of Israel's observance and to respond to Israel's needs according to their behavior. Israel expects God to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem as reward for their righteous behavior. In this particular prayer, God takes note of Israel's Passover observance. The above passage is followed several phrases later with the following: "And on this Musaf Yom Chag Hamatzot, we will offer before you in love according to the commandments of your will." Israel promises to present offerings before God "in love according to the commandments" of God's will, after God rebuilds the Temple.

14.

וְיָבִיֵא עֲלֵינוּ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ חֵן וְחַסְדִּים וְרַחֲמִים וְיִבְנֶה לָנוּ בֵּית מִקְדָּשׁ כְּקִדְשֵׁינוּ.

You will bring goodness to Zion in your favor and will build the walls of

<sup>70</sup> S.R.A., p.126.



Jerusalem.<sup>71</sup>

In this Rosh Hashanah supplication, we note that God is depicted as favoring Zion with goodness. God will rebuild the walls of Jerusalem as a result of God's will. This particular supplication constitutes part of a unit of appeals to God to forgive worshippers' sins and to redeem Israel. The task of Israel is to repent for their transgressions and to glorify God. The expectation is that as a result, God will bring goodness upon Israel and will ultimately restore the Temple in Jerusalem.

15. רצה ה' אלוקים כענן ישראל והואילום והושב עבדה לדביר ביום ואשי ישראל והואילום  
מורה באומות העקל כרצון ואשי לרצון הפיר עבדה ישראל עמך. והתחילה ציינו בשדך  
לציון כרמית. כרד אנה ה' המשיח שכינע לציון.

Accept, Lord our God, your people Israel and their prayer, and restore the Temple service to your House, and speedily receive in love and favor their prayers, and may the service of your people Israel always be acceptable unto you, and let our eyes behold your return to Zion in mercy. Blessed are you, Lord, who restores your Presence to Zion.<sup>72</sup>

In #5 above, we discussed the usage of ratzon in the Avodah. We noted that God distinguishes between acceptable and unacceptable offerings. God takes note of Israel's offerings and when God does accept offerings, God can do so speedily, with love and with favor. Israel attempts to

71 S.R.A., p.155.

72 S.R.A., p.26.

present satisfactory offerings before God. God, in turn, is expected to receive those offerings which God deems acceptable. Like #14 above, there is also an apparent connection here between God's acceptance of offerings and God's restoration of the Temple in Jerusalem. Implicit here is the notion that when God is pleased with Israel, God will reward Israel with the restoration of the Temple. If this hypothesis is correct, then there is a direct relationship between Israel's behavior and God's will. When Israel adheres to divine commandments and diligently observes the temple service, (and thereby conquers any "evil inclination" in order to fulfill God's will), God bestows divine will upon Israel. This is consistent with the notion inferred in #2 above that Israel is apologetic concerning prayers offered to God. The prayer expresses concern that God will accept Israel's prayer with the same criteria as God had once accepted sacrifices. The ultimate expression of acceptance and pleasure by God would be the restoration of the Temple and the reinstitution of the sacrificial cult.

16.

כן הדין והדין

והקבוצה והמסוף בליחיות להנחת קדש לשמור חקד ולעשות רצונך בלב שלם  
על שמו פדים לו.

Thus be gracious unto us and keep us in life and gather us from the four corners of the world and gather our exiled to your holy courts to observe your statutes and to do your will with a perfect heart, seeing that we give thanks unto you.<sup>73</sup>

As in several citations above, here we see ratzon described with the phrase be'levav shalem. The supplication petitions God to gather Israel from the "four corners of the world" and to gather all of Israel's exiled to Jerusalem. Once in Jerusalem, Israel will observe God's laws and do God's will with a "perfect heart." Israel will then give complete thanks to God. Here we note how God is understood to be pleased with Israel. God takes pleasure in Israel's complete and faithful observance of divine commandments as well as in Israel's thanksgiving to God. In #15 above we noted the connection between Israel's offerings and God's restoration of the Temple in Jerusalem. Similarly, here, we note a connection between Israel's observance and God's ultimate redemption of Israel. In #15 above we speculated that when Israel adheres to divine service, God rewards Israel. The underlying premise of this prayer is that when God redeems the exiled of Israel, the people of Israel will thank God with faithful adherence to God's laws. In #13 above, we also stated that Israel must initiate God's redemption by their observance of divine statutes.

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<sup>73</sup> S.R.A., p.34.



exchange for Israel's observance of divine commandments, Israel requests God to remember them and to bring goodness into their lives. God is also envisioned as redeeming Israel. The result of God's acceptance is blessing and salvation for Israel.

18.

יְהי רָצוֹן מִלִּפְנֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם לִכְתּוֹת אֵל בֵּית חַיִּינוּ וְלַהֲשִׁיב שְׂכִינוֹתָ לְחֹזֵק בְּמִדְתָּ בְּיָמֵינוּ  
הַמְּבֹרָכִים.

May it be the will of heaven to establish the House of our life, and to restore His divine presence in it, speedily in our days, and say: Amen.<sup>75</sup>

This prayer is the first of four supplications beginning with the opening yehi ratzon milifnei hashamaim. These prayers were recited on behalf of the whole community of Israel upon folding the Torah, when the scroll was being prepared to be returned to the ark.<sup>76</sup>

This particular supplication requests that it be God's will for God to restore divine presence to Israel and reestablish the Temple in Jerusalem. The prayer articulates Israel's hope for redemption. In consideration of the fact that these prayers are offered immediately after reading from the Torah, it may be possible to infer a deliberate connection between the reading and the prayer. One possible

<sup>75</sup> S.R.A., p.59.

<sup>76</sup> David Hedegard Seder R. Amram Gaon (Molata: Broderna Borgstroms, 1951) p. 183.

inference is that in the prayer Israel expresses the hope that God will be pleased with the Torah reading and will accept it as an act of devotion to God. God will then reward Israel with the restoration of the Temple and ultimate redemption.

19.

יהי רצון מלפניך ה' אלהינו שתעלה בשמחה לארצנו ותקטענו בגבולנו. ושמך נעשה לפניך את קרבנות חובותינו תמידין כסדרן ומספיק כהלכתן. את מוסף יום המנוח הזה נעשה ונקריב לפניך באהבה כמנחת רצונך. כמו שכתבת עלינו בתורתך על ידי משה עבדך ממי כבודך כאמור. וביום השבת וגו' עד ומנחת ישימנו במלכותך שומרי שבת קוראי עונג עם מקדשי שביעי כלם יושבי ורחמנו מסובך.

May it be your will, Lord our God and God of our fathers, to lead us up in joy to our land, and to plant us within our borders; and there will we prepare before you the offerings to which we are obliged; continual offerings according to their order, and additional offerings according to their rule. The additional offering of this day of rest we will prepare and offer up before you in love according to the command of your will, as you have written for us in your Torah through the hand of Moses your servant, by the mouth of your glory...<sup>77</sup>

The above sabbath prayer requests that it be God's will to lead Israel into the Land of Israel. Once there, Israel promises to present offerings to God. Israel also promises to prepare the "additional offering" of the sabbath for God "in love", in accordance with the commandments of God's will. This prayer is similar to #16 above, where Israel promises to adhere to God's commandments and to do God's will "with a perfect heart" upon the ingathering of the

<sup>77</sup> S.R.A., p.78.



exiles. Here Israel promises to adhere to the Torah and to follow the commandments of God's will. God, in turn, will be pleased and will lead Israel back to the Land of Israel. The people will return to their land in joy. Once there, Israel will present offerings to God as prescribed in the Torah.

20. אדיר במרום שוכן

בגבורה אתה שלום ושמן שלום. יהי רצון שתשים עלינו טובה.

You are majestic on high, who abides in might, you are peace and your name is peace. May it be your will to bestow good upon us.<sup>78</sup>

The above supplication expresses the expectation of worshippers that it be God's will to bestow good upon them. Here we note that God is understood as a being who desires good for Israel. Worshippers both petition God to bring good to them as well as articulate the belief that God's will is to bestow good upon them.

The question remains as to whether God bestows good upon Israel irrespective of Israel's loyalty to God and to God's commandments. The premise of this analysis, up to this point, has been that God's will itself does not change, but the manner in which God responds to human beings changes in accordance with their behavior. For example, God's will is believed by the rabbis to be merciful and forgiving, yet

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<sup>78</sup> S.R.A., p.36.





demonstrates the importance of Torah study for the rabbis. As evident here, the rabbis believed that God takes special note of Torah scholars. These scholars devote their whole lives to the occupation of Torah study and thereby, to the fulfillment of God's will. God is particularly pleased with Torah scholars and is thus understood as granting them special protection. The underlying premise of this supplication is that those individuals of Israel who devote their whole lives to Torah (and to the fulfillment of God's will), receive noteworthy and exceptional protection from God.

22. יי רצון מלפניך ה' אלהינו ואלהי אבותינו  
שנשמך חקיד בעולם הזה ונזכה ונחיה ונירש חיי העולם הבא. למען חסדך כבוד ולא

May it be your will, Lord our God and  
God of our fathers, that we may keep  
your statutes in this world, and be  
worthy to live and inherit the life of  
the world to come... <sup>80</sup>

The above prayer expresses the hope that it be God's will for Israel to observe divine commandments in "this world" and that they "be worthy to live and inherit the life of the world to come." Implicit here is the notion that God desires Israel to adhere to God's laws in this world. Likewise inferred here is that individuals who do, in fact, adhere to God's statutes, will be rewarded in the "world to come." Human beings can thus affect their fate with their

actions in "this world." God takes note of individuals' actions. Human beings petition God for help in keeping divine laws, and thereby in fulfilling divine will. Human beings are not automatically worthy of the "life of the world to come." They must earn their worth through adherence to God's statutes. The rabbis evidently believed that God wills reward for those individuals who live their lives in accordance with divine law. Conversely, God does not will the same reward for those individuals who fail to observe God's commandments.

23.

רצו והחליצו ה' אלהינו במצותיך ובמצות יום השביעי הגדול והקדוש הזה בקדושתו  
ובמנוחתו ותשבות בו תנוה בו כמצות רצונך. ואל תהי צרה ריגון במנוחתנו. ושלכות בית  
דוד מרתה תחזור למקומה ובנה ירושלים עיר קדשך במהרה בימינו ונחמנו בנחמתה כי  
אתה בעל הנחמות. ברוך אתה ה' בונה ירושלים.

Accept your commandments, Lord our God,  
and strengthen us by your commandments,  
and by the commandment of this great and  
holy seventh day. Through His holiness  
and His rest, and we will rest on it in  
accordance with the commandment of your  
will, and let there be no trouble and  
grief in our rest...And let the kingdom  
of the house of David speedily return to  
its place, and rebuild Jerusalem, your  
holy city, speedily in our days and  
comfort us with comfort for you are the  
God of comfort. Blessed are you, who

builds Jerusalem. 81

In #9 above, we noted that ratzon indicates God's acceptance of Israel's sabbath rest. We also stated that God takes pleasure in Israel's adherence to the sabbath. God rewards those who observe the sabbath with the continued bestowment of its inheritance, in love and in favor. The sabbath is thus a sign of God's love for Israel as well as of Israel's faithfulness to God.

The above prayer is also recited on the sabbath, as part of the grace after meals. Ratzon appears twice here. The first ratzon is in the imperative form and serves to request that God "accept" or "be pleased" with the commandments being observed, and in particular the "commandment of the seventh day." The rabbis believed that God desires adherence to the commandments and to the sabbath commandments. They depict God as taking pleasure and accepting Israel's adherence to the commandments. The second ratzon refers to sabbath rest, which Israel will observe "in accordance with the commandment of [God's] will." Once again, we observe the notion that the commandments are an expression of God's will and that adherence to the commandments is a demonstration of faithfulness to God.

Implicit in the above prayer is the belief that as a result of Israel's adherence to God's commandments, God will strengthen Israel with them. Also inferred here is that God

will reward Israel for its faithfulness (as demonstrated by their adherence to God's commandments and in particular sabbath rest.) God's reward will be the redemption of Israel, i.e., the restoration of Jerusalem and the Kingdom of David. God will compensate Israel with comfort.

24. (ובשביעי רצית)

בן וקדשתי חמדת ימים אותך קדשתי. אלהיך רצית בך במעלותיך וקדשתי במעלותיך  
ותן חלקך בתורתך ושבחך מסובך ושמח לבנו כי שפעתך וסוד לבנו לעבוד בנאמך והענינו  
ה' אלהינו באהבה וביראתך שבתך קדשך וישמח בך כל ישראל אחיך ששך. באי  
מקדש השבת ישראל וראשי חודשים.

You favored the seventh day and sanctified it, you called it the most desirable of days. Our God and God of our fathers, take pleasure in our rest and sanctify us with your commandments and give us our portion in your Torah and satisfy us with your goodness and make our hearts joyful with your salvation and purify our hearts to serve you in truth and bestow upon us, Lord our God, in love and in favor, your holy sabbaths that we may rejoice in you, all of Israel, the lovers of your name. Blessed is God, the one who sanctifies the Sabbath and Israel and the New Month.<sup>82</sup>

The term ratzon appears in three instances in the above sabbath/Rosh Hodesh prayer. The first citation of ratzon indicates that God favors the ~~seventh~~ day. The second appearance of ratzon serves to request that God be pleased and accept Israel's rest. The prayer expresses the hope that God will, in fact, accept Israel's rest. It also states the underlying premise of the prayer; God is

understood as desiring Israel's faithfulness as manifested in their adherence to the sabbath. The third citation of ratzon describes the manner in which God is expected to grant Israel the sabbath, with love and with favour.

Implicit in the above prayer, is the notion that God takes note of Israel's observance and God relates to Israel in accordance with their loyalty. God is described as rewarding Israel by continuing to sanctify them with divine commandments. God will grant Israel their "portion in the Torah" and will also endow Israel with goodness. God will insure Israel's happiness through divine salvation and will purify Israel's hearts. God will continue to grant Israel the sabbath and the festivals. As thanksgiving to God for all this goodness, Israel promises to glorify God's name.

25. וְלִמְדֵנוּ לַעֲשׂוֹת חֻקֵּי רְצוֹנְךָ. וְתֵן לָנוּ ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ בְּחֶסֶד וּבְרַחֲמִים  
יְהוָה וְחַסְדֵּךָ אֵלֶּיךָ וְנִשְׁמַח בְּכָבוֹדְךָ וְנִשְׁמַח בְּחֻקֵּיךָ וְנִשְׁמַח בְּחֻקֵּיךָ

And teach us the laws of your will. And give us, our God, with love, upright statutes and laws of truth, laws and good commandments. Thus man will do them and live by them.<sup>83</sup>

Implicit in the above Passover supplication is the notion that God teaches Israel the commandments of God's will in order that they adhere to them and live their lives by them. God teaches the commandments to Israel. Israel

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<sup>83</sup> S.R.A., p.129.







27.

לְרַחֵם לָךְ ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ עַל אֶרֶץ הַמִּדְבָּר טוֹבָה וְרַחֲבָה כִּרְצוֹנָהּ וְהַעֲלֵתָ אֹתָ אֲבוֹתֵינוּ וְעַל בְּרִיתְךָ  
שֶׁשָּׂמַת בְּבִשְׂרֵנוּ וְעַל תּוֹרַת שְׁנֵתָ לָנוּ וְעַל חַיִּים וְחֵן וְחֶסֶד וְחַן וְחַסְדֵּי שְׁמֹתָ מְלֹחַ אוֹתָנוּ בְּכָל  
עֵת. וְעַל כָּל ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ אֲנִי מוֹדִים לָךְ וּמְבָרְכִים אֹת שִׁמְךָ. יְהִבְרַךְ שִׁמְךָ תָּמִיד עָלֵינוּ  
לְשֵׁלֶם וְעַד. בָּאֵי עַל הָאָרֶץ וְעַל הַמִּזְבֵּחַ.

We thank you, Lord our God, for the desirable, good and ample land which you were pleased to give to our fathers, and for your covenant which you have marked in our flesh and for the Torah which you have given us, and for life, grace, mercy and goodness which you have lent us in every season. For all these things, Lord our God, we thank you and bless your name.<sup>85</sup>

This prayer, recited as part of grace after meals, indicates the notion that God was "pleased" to grant the Land of Israel to Israel's patriarchs. The Land of Israel is understood as a sign of God's love for Israel. The prayer is an expression of thanksgiving to God for granting Israel the land as well as the Torah. Worshipers likewise express thanksgiving to God for "life, grace, mercy and goodness."

The premise of this analysis has been the following: God grants Israel the Torah and the land as a sign of God's love for Israel, but God rewards and punishes Israel in accordance with their behavior. The land, the Torah and the "goodness" indicated in the above prayer, are all understood as expressions of God's pleasure and acceptance of Israel.

<sup>85</sup> S.R.A., p.45.

Israel promises to thank God and to glorify God's name.

28. רבונו של עולם חסדאי לפניך. ידי רצון מלפניך ה' אלהינו אבותינו שתתן לנו לב טוב וחלק טוב ורחם נפוכה ונפש ששלה וחבר טוב. ואל יתחלל שמך בגו האל תעשינו שיחה בפי כל הבריות. ואל תעשינו קללה בפני כל הבריות. ואל תשי אצרינו לחסידה ונקונו למסח נפש. ואל תצרינו למתנה כשר ודם האל חסדאי מוזהרנו ביד כשר ודם. ששננו מעוטה וחרפתם מרובת וזעזע חלקנו במדותך עם עשרי רצונך. ובזה ביתך תציר והיכלך ומקדשך מורה בימין (עכ"ל). מר ענו וחדנו מכל גזרות קשות והצדק ברחמיך הרבים משיח צדקך וחסדך.

Lord of all the worlds, I have sinned before you. May it be your will, Lord our God and God of our fathers, that you will give us a good heart and a good portion and a humble spirit and soul and a good friend and let your name not be profaned among us, and let us not be disgraced in the mouth of all the community, and make us not curse before all men, and may our end not be destruction and our hope not be despair, and cause us not to need the gifts of human beings, and let not our nourishment be dependent upon the gifts of human beings, for their gift is small but their shame is great. And give us our portion in your Torah with those who do your will. And build up your house and your city and your temple and your sanctuary, speedily in our days. Speedily answer us and redeem all hard decrees and save us in your great mercy your righteous savior and your people.<sup>86</sup>

The above prayer was composed by Rabbi Yannai and constitutes one segment of the "Tachanumim" or "supplications."<sup>87</sup> These supplications generally begin with a confession of sin and express the "sinfulness and miserable state" of human beings.<sup>88</sup> This particular prayer

<sup>86</sup> S.R.A., p.37.

<sup>87</sup> David Hedegard Seder R. Amram (Molata: Broderna Borgstroms, 1951,) p.128.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid p.127.

begins with an admission of sin and then continues to petition God that it be God's will to grant worshippers a "good heart," a "good portion," a "humble spirit and soul" and a "good friend." The prayer text continues to express the hope that God's name not be profaned nor disgraced within the community of Israel. The prayer discourages dependency upon other human beings for "nourishment" and, conversely, implies that the only redeemable savior for human beings is God. The prayer then continues to state that those individuals who do God's will should receive Israel's portion in the Torah. Worshippers petition God to rebuild the Temple and redeem the people of Israel.

The first ratzon expresses the hope that God desires good for Israel. It also articulates an underlying belief of the rabbis, which is that God's will is to bestow goodness upon Israel. The second ratzon appeals to God to give Israel's portion in the Torah to those who do God's will. This is very important to understanding God's will in the covenantal relationship. It also supports our previously stated hypothesis: God takes note of Israel's faithfulness and rewards them accordingly. The restoration of the Temple must be initiated by human beings. The destruction of the Temple was believed to be a punishment for Israel's transgression. When Israel repents and returns to God and God's commandments, God will restore the Temple. The prayer petitions God to reward those who do God's will

with a portion of the Torah. The rabbis evidently believed that God does, in fact, reward those who fulfill God's will. The reward is not only a portion of the Torah, but also the restoration of the Temple and messianic redemption.

29. והבנס לסד, בכוונתו אומר: יהי רצון מלפניך ה' אלהי שחכניסני לכרך זה לשלום. בקש לצאת אומר: יהי רצון מלפניך ה' אלהי שתוציאני מכרך זה לשלום. יצא לשלום אומר: מדה אני לפניך ה' אלהי שתוציאני מכרך זה לשלום. וכשם שתוציאני לשלום כך חכניסני לביתי לשלום ותסמכני לשלום ותצדיקני לשלום ותצילני מכף אויב ואורב בדרך ותתנני לחן ולחסד ולרחמים בעיניך ובעיני כל ראי. באי שומע תפלה.

May it be your will, Lord my God, that you will cause me to enter this city in peace; May it be your will, Lord my God, that you will cause me to depart from this city in peace. When he departed a city in peace he says: I thank before you, Lord, my God, for causing me to leave this city in peace. And just as you caused me to depart in peace, enable me to enter my home in peace and may my support be peace and my steps be peace, and deliver me from the hand of an enemy and ambusher on the way and grant me goodness and mercy in your eyes and in the eyes of all who see me. Blessed are you, O Lord, who hears prayer.<sup>89</sup>

The above two supplications are recited by the individual upon entering and departing from a city. They each begin with the yehi ratzon formula opening, yet each is addressed from the perspective of the individual, ie. "Lord my God...cause me..." The prayers petition God for protection of the individual upon entering and leaving a city. The petitions convey the rabbinic expectation that God does, in fact, will peace and protection for individuals.

<sup>89</sup> S.R.A., p.183.

There are several ways of understanding this passage, however. One interpretation might suggest that God desires peace and protection for every individual. An alternative understanding would state that God protects those individuals who pray to God, who live their lives according to God's statutes and who essentially live their lives in accordance with God's will. The question remains as to whether God relates to each individual with the same "will", regardless of their faithfulness. The premise of this analysis has been that God's will itself never changes for the rabbis, yet what God specifically desires for individuals may vary in accordance with their loyalty to God.

30. והמחלך במקום סכנה מתפלל תפלה קצרה אחרים אומרים צרכי עמך ישראל  
 שרבוין ודעתן קצרה יי רצון מלפניך ה' אלהי שתתן לכל אחד ואחד כדי פרנסתו  
 לכל גויה וגויה די מחסודה הטוב בעיניך עשה בא"י שומע תפלה א"ר ורנא

The needs of Israel are great but their knowledge is small. May it be your will, Lord, my God, to give to everyone enough to support himself and to every creature according to his need. May every one do good in your eyes. Blessed are you, O Lord, who hears prayer. 90

The above prayer is recited by an individual when walking in a place of danger and serves to replace the tefillah prayer in an emergency situation. As in #29 above, this supplication is recited from the perspective of the individual, ie. "May it be your will, Lord, my God..." This

90 S.R.A., p.183.

particular petition requests that God enable every individual to be self-supporting and independent. The prayer also beseeches God that every individual "do good" in God's "eyes."

As in #29 above, there remains the question as to whether God supports everyone with the same "will" or whether some individuals receive more divine protection than others. One possibility is that God supports those with whom God is pleased. This seems likely in consideration of the petition, "May everyone do good in your eyes." This is also supported by the personal depiction of God in the above prayers. God is not oblivious to the faithfulness of individuals; God takes note of them. Individuals are aware that God observes their demonstrations of devotion as well as their transgressions; thus the continual emphasis in prayer upon pleasing God and repenting for sins. Worshipers believed that God relates to them in accordance with their behavior. This seems to be the case in the above personal prayer. Thus God is understood as protecting those individuals who are most loyal to God's will.

31.

ועבנס לזקין דס אמש: יד רצון מלפניך וזי אלז שיזא עסק נח לי לרשעה  
והרשעני. כי רשעא תנח אתה וכשיזא אמש: ברוך אתה וזי רשעא תנח.

May it be your will, Lord my God, that this procedure will be for me healing and will heal me. For you are a generous healer. 91

Once again we have a personal petition to God. This prayer is recited upon blood-letting and requests that God heal the individual. God is depicted as desiring the recovery of sick individuals. The question remains here as well: Does God heal all individuals in the same fashion? Or does God heal only those who have demonstrated loyalty to God's commandments? It seems probable that the rabbis understood God to respond to faithful individuals in a different and more attentive fashion than non-believers. Once again, this hypothesis is supported by the personal depiction of God and by the continual emphasis in the above prayers upon pleasing God. The rabbis seemingly believed that God rewards those who are faithful to God with divine healing.

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91 S.R.A., p.195.



### Summary

The prayers included in this chapter best demonstrate, with the term ratzon, the dynamics of the covenantal relationship. The covenantal relationship describes the dynamics between God and Israel as well as their mutual responsibilities.

According to the prayers, Israel understands what their responsibilities are to God. It is clear to Israel what they are to do in order to please God and to fulfill God's will. Human beings are to align their will with the will of God. They must conquer the "evil inclination" which prevents them from doing so. Israel is to adhere to God's statutes as instructed in the Torah. Amongst these statutes is the commandment to observe the sabbath. Israel's task is to present offerings to God with sincerity and with love. Israel is to repent for any transgression from divine commandments.

The above prayers express the rabbis' expectation for how God rewards those who fulfill God's will. God hears and accepts worshippers' offerings. God bestows favor and goodness upon those who are faithful. Similarly, God continues to sanctify Israel with divine commandments and the sabbath. When Israel upholds their side of the covenant, God accepts Israel's supplications with compassion. God rewards individuals with peace and protection. God also rewards Israel with the Land of Israel

and with "good tidings." In divine mercy, God rewards Israel with the ingathering of the exiles, the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem, the reinstitution of the sacrificial cult and messianic redemption.

As summarized in #16 above, the dynamics of the covenantal relationship are as follows: Israel fulfills God's will through adherence to divine commandments. God takes note of Israel's observance and rewards Israel accordingly. The ultimate reward for Israel is the ingathering of the exiles, i.e. messianic redemption. Israel promises to thank and praise God for this act of deliverance. At that time, Israel will completely and faithfully fulfill God's will through adherence to divine service.

The underlying premise of this analysis has been that God takes personal note of the actions of human beings and responds to them accordingly. God's will is neither capricious nor whimsical. Rather the manner in which God exercises divine will can change in accordance with Israel's faithfulness. For the rabbis, there is nothing arbitrary about God's will.

According to the rabbis, there is a direct relationship between what human action and God's will. Israel understands what their responsibilities are, and when they fulfill them, they expect that God will continue to bestow divine will upon them. Heinemann writes: "According to the Talmudic

Sages, there is no conflict between the will of God and the will of man, for, if man does God's bidding, he has reason to believe that God will also do his bidding. Rabbinic Judaism puts primary emphasis on the role of man and the demand that he will "perform the will of his Father in heaven."<sup>92</sup>

A. Cohen expresses the dynamics of the covenantal relationship as follows: the "kinship between God and man, which results from his spiritual equipment, places upon him the responsibility of proving himself worthy of this heavenly gift. If honour has been conferred upon man by his having been created in the divine likeness, a corresponding obligation rests upon him of living his life so as to win the approval of his maker. Faith is the principle upon which the whole relationship of man with God rests."<sup>93</sup>

God expects Israel to serve as "guardians of [God's] reputation in the world. The rabbis believed that "it was the paramount duty of the Jew to guard [God's perfect holiness] from profanation by discreditable conduct on [their] part. They maintained that Jews brought credit upon

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<sup>92</sup> Joseph Heinemann, "The Background of Jesus' Prayer in the Jewish Liturgical Tradition," in The Lord's Prayer and Jewish Liturgy, edited by Jakob J. Petuchowski and Michael Brocke, (NY: The Seabury Press, 1987), p.87.

<sup>93</sup> A. Cohen Everyman's Talmud, pp. 78-79.

God and sanctified God's name through their worthy actions.<sup>94</sup>

The purpose of the world's creation, in fact, was the glorification of God's name through the medium of the Torah. As the recipient of the Torah, Israel has more responsibility than other nations.<sup>95</sup>

According to Baruch Graubard, God elected Israel out of divine grace. "Yet somehow the sanctification of the divine name through the people is essential so that the dominion of God should become manifest and recognized in our world."<sup>96</sup> Human beings bear the responsibility for God's dominion. Graubard writes that human beings become "the subject for the dominion of God in the world of material objects."<sup>97</sup> Israel's task is to devote herself to the cause of God in this world. "Life and death is understood as existence in the light of God."<sup>98</sup> "The sanctification of the divine name, man's "subjection to the dominion of God hasten the redemption of mankind and of the world." People are free to enter into God's kingdom and to "accept the yoke of the kingdom of heaven." People do so by fulfilling the

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid p. 23.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid p. 60.

<sup>96</sup> Baruch Graubard, "The Kaddish Prayer," in The Lord's Prayer and Jewish Liturgy, edited by Jakob Petuchowski and Michael Brocke, (The Seabury Press, NY, 1978), p. 68.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid p. 66.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid p.66.

commandments and living under God's law.<sup>99</sup> Graubard writes:

Israel lives in this world which is at the same time good and evil, which God created according to [divine] will, and for which [God] drew up a future plan for happiness in peace and justice. That is the vision of the prophets. This future is the concern of God and [human beings.] The kingdom of God, free from enmity between [human beings] and between nations, free from suffering, from misfortune and perhaps from death, will ripen in the course of time through human action and divine grace.<sup>100</sup>

God depends upon Israel to do God's will on earth. At the same time, if Israel fails to live up to her obligations to God, the covenantal bond abides. Graubard notes: "A bond of holiness exists between God and Israel. We cannot make statements concerning God's holiness, however we can concerning that of the people who were given the law and the commandments. Even when the people of Israel falls away from its obligations through disobedience, they remain within the circle of holiness which is not broken."<sup>101</sup>

Thus Israel's responsibility is to uphold their side of the covenant. They do so by adhering to divine commandments and by glorifying God's name. God, in turn, rewards Israel with ultimate redemption.

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid p.66.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid p.66.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid p.67.

### Conclusion

I have attempted to extract an authentic rabbinic understanding of God's will in Seder Rav Amram. In order to analyze ratzon with objectivity, I had to glean out my own modern biases, which have inevitably influenced my inferences. In conclusion, I would like to integrate these tentative conclusions, based upon my research, with my own beliefs as a modern liberal Jew.

Throughout the course of my analysis, I have continually posed the question: to what extent does the notion of God's will have relevance for modern liberal Jews? I believe that God's will can, in fact, persist as a profoundly meaningful notion for Jews today. The traditional understanding of retzon Elohim, as expressed in Seder Rav Amram, has induced me to evaluate the term's meaning in light of modern beliefs.

The notion that God has a will is an integral aspect of my own personal theology. To me, God's will means that God has a plan and intention for the universe. Creation is not whimsical but according to a plan. Like the notion of ratzon in the traditional prayerbook, for me God wills not only creation but the continual process of creation as well. God wills the regulation of the organic world and the perpetuation of all its creatures.

In the traditional prayerbook, God's ratzon denotes



God's personal relationship with Israel. The notion of God's will is paralleled with God's loving and choosing Israel. For me, God's will denotes God's personal interest in every human being, irrespective of religion or race. God's will means that God takes a personal interest in people and desires good for them. God's will means that God loves every human being.

The notion that God possesses a will suggests that God is neither indifferent to the universe nor to its creatures. Similarly, God's existence is reduced to neither a scientific formula nor to a cerebral exercise; God's will is not an idea devoid of personal interest and feeling. God's will is that aspect of God's nature which I can most directly and personally address. God's will is what makes God most accessible as a compassionate, receptive and loving being. The notion that God possesses a will suggests that God is similar to a thinking and feeling human being who is capable of relating to an "other."

The traditional prayerbook contains a passage from Berachot 16b, stating that it is the human will to do God's will, but the "yeast in the dough" prevents it. From this we hypothesize that the task of human beings is to align their will with the will of God. Human beings must conquer their evil inclination in order to achieve such alignment.

Personally I find this concept of alignment quite meaningful. Modern social science has instructed us as to



just how complex human nature can be. Most people would agree that human nature is composed of a great deal more than the rabbinic dichotomy of the good and evil inclination. Nevertheless, God's will can symbolize an ideal for righteous living. Human beings can struggle to obliterate the "evil" in their lives which prevents them from achieving such righteousness. Believing in a God who takes note of human action and who is pleased with goodness can provide profound incentive for human beings to improve the quality of their interactions.

Similarly, the belief in a God whose will is predictable is a timeless human need. Unlike the will of God, the will of human beings can be capricious and impulsive. The notion of a predictable order behind the universe can have a comforting and stabilizing effect upon Jews in the modern world. The traditional notion of aligning the human will with God's will can provide a paradigm for human beings as to how to build a more stable environment, both in their personal and global world.

There is continuous debate concerning whether or not there is absolute good and evil in our universe. Despite varying definitions of good and evil, human beings have a tremendous need to hope for the obliteration of hate, sadness and destruction. Faith in goodness and the struggle to achieve such goodness can be expressive of an attempt to align one's will with the will of God.

Attempting to align one's individual will with the will of God can be meaningful for yet another reason. When we engage in such a struggle, we inevitably consider the existence of another will besides the self. We extend our consciousness to a "will" beyond ourselves yet including ourselves. When we acknowledge a power that extends beyond the personal will of "I", we also build community strength and cohesiveness. At the same time, too, we acknowledge an ethical foundation which applies to all creation.

The concept of the "yeast in the dough" emphasizes the importance of humility. Belief in a God who "wills" can help us acknowledge that we human beings do not constitute our whole universe. I do not accept, however, the rabbinic notion of inherent human evil and human submission to God. I believe in the importance of humility before God, yet without the rabbis' acute attentiveness to human sinfulness.

The prayers in Seder Rav Amram clearly express that Torah is the vehicle towards fulfillment of God's will. I believe that Torah is important as a foundation for living an ethical life. Torah is also a guide by which Jews can connect both to God and the Jewish people. Torah can elevate the commonplace in human existence to a level of holiness and awareness of God's existence. Unlike the rabbis, however, I am not sure that I believe in a God who desires for human beings to adhere to 613 commandments each day of their lives.

I believe in a God who desires that human beings live with an awareness of their own mortal weaknesses. This God wills for human beings to continuously question their behavior and to strive for improvement. God wills for human beings to live with a continual awareness of the divine presence. For me, a perpetual awareness of God's presence can be achieved in other ways besides observance of commandments.

The God in whom I believe wills for human beings to attain both self-awareness and self-consciousness. Such a God desires that human beings struggle to conquer evil in their internal and external lives. This God wills for human beings a self-awareness, which would serve to prevent their aggressive instincts from triumphing over their loving instincts. Such a God desires that human beings never tend towards complacency; rather God wills for human beings continuously to exercise their free choice and free will.

I also believe that the rabbinic emphasis upon kavanah, or intent, can be very meaningful for us today. The notion that God takes note of our intentions and desires complete sincerity is both comforting and encouraging. I believe that modern Jews are starving for a belief system which validates a faith founded upon "nonrational" expression. By "nonrational" I mean a faith which is based upon an emotional experience of God's reality, but at the same time not contrary to rationality.

I mentioned above my belief that God does not discriminate between people of different religions. That is to say, the God in whom I believe favors all human beings. This notion departs from the traditional Jewish belief that God favors the Jewish people as a chosen people. Biblical and rabbinic Judaism are founded upon the notion of the covenantal relationship between God and the Jewish people. Despite my differing beliefs, I maintain that the spirit of the Torah provides the foundation by which human beings can best lead ethical and religious lives. In this respect, I believe that God does discriminate and takes pleasure in those who adhere to the spirit of the Torah.

Biblical and rabbinic Judaism are founded upon the premise that God rewards the righteous and punishes the evil. This theological tenet is clearly expressed throughout the prayers cited above. The rabbis maintain that human suffering is a result of human transgression. God does not will evil for human beings; rather human beings bring suffering into their lives due to their own evil will.

I find this postulate impossible to maintain. I do not believe in a direct connection between human action and human fate. Yet the question of God's will in relation to evil remains. If God wills creation, does God also will a "flaw" in creation? Does "evil" in our universe and in our lives express that God no longer loves us? I do not imagine a God whose will is omnipotent. I do, however, believe in a

God whose will is compassionate and righteous. The God in whom I believe desires goodness for human beings. For all these reasons, therefore, these are questions which, for me, remain without answer.

In conclusion, I believe that God wills for human beings to utilize their intellectual and emotional energies to their fullest potential. To be a thinking and feeling human being in the modern world means to be a questioning human being. Similarly, to be a modern Jew who believes in God, also means to be a questioning Jew. The God in whom I believe wills for human beings to forever speculate and question the meaning of their existence and the quality of their universe. Perhaps that is the reason why no one amongst us knows the true essence of God's will.

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