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Know Before Whom You Stand and Know Among Who You Are Standing: Rabbinic Understandings of Humans in Communal Prayer

Rabbinic Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment for requirement for ordination

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Los Angeles
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Chapter One: Introduction

Human beings and their needs animate the rabbinic reimagination of Judaism. Important religious values of honoring one's fellow human and seeking peace in human relationships found voice time and again; they ground the rabbinic understanding of humans in the system of communal prayer. Introduced early on in rabbinic literature, honoring the human participants became so immersive as Jewish liturgical practice evolved over time it became inseparable for what it meant to live and pray as a Jew in community.

Faced with an unprecedented challenge to create a Jewish way of being in the world when all of the structures for reaching God--human and physical--were destroyed, the rabbis replace sacrifice with communal prayer. From its beginning, sophisticated rabbinic understandings of human behavior shape the system of communal prayer, a system that as it evolved over centuries sustained the Jewish people from the period following the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem to this time. Through making prayer communal the system is religiously effective while simultaneously reinforcing Jewish cohesiveness wherever Jews found themselves.

This innovation could only work because the rabbis thought both about what it would take to sustain the religious behavior of the Jewish People and what happens when people encounter each other, as individuals and as part of a group. This type of consciousness may seem obvious to our modern sensibilities, but that it was thoroughly ingrained in Judaism's reinvention is remarkable. For this rabbinic understanding of hu-

mans when they come together to pray underscores an profound religious value of humanity's being created in the image of God, that humans are to honor each other, and that peaceful relationships among humans are to be highly valued.

Weaving a New Cloth

Communal prayer is woven from threads that are both biblically- and rabbinically-based. The rabbis base the obligation to pray on Torah. The system by which prayer would replace Temple sacrifice is a rabbinic invention, one that echoes both the times that the Patriarchs prayed and also the time of the daily sacrifices in the Temple. In ordaining that prayer would be done communally, the rabbis create a mechanism that forces people to come together, promoting Jewish cohesiveness and survival. Ideally, it would bind people together no matter where they found themselves, taking the place of a centralized site for worship in Jerusalem. It had to work without the Temple's priestly elite, functioning autonomously with the members of the prayer community.

In bringing people together, the rabbis recognize that, for the system to function and endure, they must account for both its religious underpinnings, the God-human plane, and its human underpinnings, how people behave when they come into contact with other humans individually and as part of a group.

This thesis' examination of these understandings will begin near where the Mishnah begins: how honor allows the purposeful interruption to respond to a person's greeting during the recitation of the *Sh'ma* and its blessings. In what could be considered a pedantic recitation of when one could interrupt as important a prayer rubric as

the *Sh'ma* and its blessings, one sees early-on how the rabbis understand that it would, in practice, be interrupted[1]. What makes this such a radical idea is that in forming a new system, one could imagine the rabbinic impetus to create strict rules and few, if any, exceptions. Here an exceptional exception is made because of the value of human beings. A pray-er can interrupt his prayer for human cause. What this accommodation acknowledges is that even though the God-human relationship in prayer is extraordinary and rarefied, the real world that the human being finds himself in can not be completely displaced. A pray-er can go back to praying to God; a missed opportunity to greet someone who one fears could put one in mortal danger. Ignoring the greeting of one's fellow, however, diminishes the greeting issuer's honor.

Similarly, the rabbis create a radically egalitarian structure that replaces the formal Temple worship and the priestly structure thereby empowering the individuals who comprise the praying communities. The *tzibbur*, the community of ten or more pray-ers as assembled, is given agency to make decisions on behalf of the group. Within each *tzibbur*, the community members choose a knowledgeable member to lead it in prayer. This representative of the community, known as the *sheliach tzibbur*, is no higher and no lower than the people with whom he prays and is responsible for the correct recitation of the prayers; the praying community is allowed to remove him if he makes mis-

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1. Human beings and their protection is a theme that is repeated throughout rabbinic literature. Almost all *mitzvot* can be suspended when a human life is at stake to save the life. With respect to this thesis, however, we are looking at how the rabbis' understanding of humans is built-in to the new system of communal prayer that gives the system a strong foundation to persevere while simultaneously emphasizing core religious values. *Sh'ma*

takes, and can prevent him from even serving in the position if his presence (physical, emotional) makes him distracting to the congregation. In the new system, knowledge is not a barrier to participating. The prayer leader is allowed to recite prayers on behalf of community members who, by responding "amen" to the prayers, are considered as having fulfilled their responsibilities.

In recognizing that humans do not have infinite patience and that sometimes humans can act in ways that work make others choose to stop participating, the rabbis require that behavior considered detrimental to the assembled community should be avoided. The way the *sheliach tzibbur* prays and the way in which the prayers are performed could not be done in such a way that imposes a burden on the community. Doing so is a disincentive for the praying community to continue or cohere.

Finally, the rabbis recognize that humans, being humans, crave recognition and honor. A system for accounting for honor was established according to the principle "for the ways of peace" *(mipneh darchei shalom)*. This system allows communities to honor the hereditary leadership, the descendants of the Temple's priests, as well as grant to other status-based recognition for various reasons. This is not, the rabbis cite, because of the intrinsic honor attaining to these individuals and how they represent themselves to the community. Rather it is for the overall weal of the community itself, the overarching idea of promoting peaceful relations among humans.

For contemporary Jews, much of what constitutes the corpus of rabbinic literature is seen as being obscure, irrelevant, misogynistic, even unsophisticated. Through

this thesis, I seek to make the case for liberal contemporary Jews that the rabbis' sophisticated understanding of human nature, at least insofar as it relates to people coming together in prayer, allows them to create a system that perseveres to our time[2]. Prayer, and the praying community, are not just about the "what and how" of praying. It is also about the "who" of praying and the "whoness" of the praying community. It is an understanding of humanity that allows the rabbis to reconstitute a system whole cloth, keeping in mind at all times that it is human beings who come together to pray to God, not the inverse. God may be inscrutable, but humans are quite knowable and their behavior in certain circumstances predictable. As perhaps one of the most ironic unintended consequences to the genius of this system, it has been adapted in our time to include women fully in the praying community.

Following this introduction framing this thesis, Chapter Two begins with a review of Jewish prayer's foundation and how the rabbis found the obligation to pray through interpreting verses from the Torah. While these verses are used to ordain prayer as required, in the Torah prayer and prayer-s are different than the communal system the rabbis innovated. Most people portrayed as praying in the Torah and the Hebrew Bible overall are individuals appealing directly to God. Abraham and Moses have direct, intercessory relationships with God and are able to affect a changed outcome by their intercession. Hannah prays to God and is granted a child. Other figures, such as the

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2. Fortunately the system is adaptable to modern sensibilities where egalitarianism also means the full and equal participation and leadership of women and men. I acknowledge that the creators of the system could never have envisioned the system expanding thusly.

heroic David, are seen praying on behalf of themselves and their charges. Further, we see ample evidence that prayer was part of the everyday part of the lived experience where people utilized their everyday language to construct the prayer(s).

It is not until Ezra, after the destruction of the First Temple and during the reconstitution of the Jewish community in Eretz Yisrael do we see a prayer offered in the first-person plural, the standard that the rabbis would adopt as the standard for Jewish prayer. Ezra's prayer provides a model of a communal prayer, but it not what the rabbis use to ground the obligation for communal prayer.

While we have elements of prayer that may have been used collectively, such as the Psalms during the time of the Temple, or the evidence of the praying community found at Qumran, there is no evidence of a system that indigenously coalesced into a sustainable system of communal prayer.

In Chapter Three, we see how the rabbis weave together the Torah requirement to pray with the value of praying communally. These sources are derived from the rabbinic tradition. As teachers of a new system, the rabbis praise communal prayer and reinforce its value, providing the textual undergirding for the system's adoption and

longevity[3]. We also see how this system was held up in later literature throughout the Medieval period.

Chapter Four begins the discussion of the human element of the new system: an individual can interrupt his recitation of the *Sh'ma* to respond to the greeting of another human being. The rabbis recognize early-on that human beings will find themselves in situations where the human experience will have equal (if temporary) standing with the praying experience. The God-human relationship can be interrupted to preserve human life[4], and here to respect the intrinsic human dignity in responding to the greeting of another.

Chapter Five shows the rabbis' genius for replacing a system where a hierarchy is responsible for the implementation of Jewish sacrifice with a prayer community that is given agency to act as a corporate entity, and in so doing, appoint its own representative from within to lead it in prayer. No longer was an expert from a sanctified class required for praying. Only a capable person, one who the community itself appoints, takes on this responsibility. The rabbis built a fail-safe into this system: if the person appointed makes mistakes, he can be removed and replaced on the spot by the praying community. Similarly, a person who looks different for whatever reason is not an ac-

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3. Given the time of the system's innovation, it does not account for fully engendering the entire praying community. Overtime the system has demonstrated, in some cases, its inherent flexibility to be adapted to the needs of the praying community, many such communities fully enfranchising both men and women.

4. b. Sanhedrin 74a notes that all *mitzvot* can be suspended, except for three, in favor of preserving life.

ceptable person to lead the community; however, if the defect (say purple hands) is one that is common because most community members engage in the same trade, then he is allowed to serve. In the main, this allows the system of communal prayer to be portable and self-administrating.

Chapter Six discusses the performative nature of the congregation. The first is that the community, as a praying community, deserves intrinsic honor. For it to stay in tact and persevere, it cannot become overly or unnecessarily burdened. Honoring the community is known as *kevod tzibbur* and burdening the community, and thereby decreasing the honor afforded it, is known as *tircha d'tzibbura*. The thesis concludes with the great emphasis placed on peaceful relations among and between human beings. This value of "for the ways of peace" *(mipneh darchei shalom)* permeates ever aspect of Jewish life. When people come together communally to pray, peaceful relations among them is vital for the system to function and endure.

Taken together, one sees how the rabbinic understanding of human agency functions in the new invention that is the system of communal prayer, a system that is highly praised for its efficacy, and one that should be rightfully admired for its exceptional attention to the human needs of pray-ers.

Chapter Two: The Roots of Rabbinically-Ordained Prayer

It is through prayer, not sacrifice, that a Jew reaches God. This, in abbreviated form, describes the reinvention of Jewish worship that led to the system of communal prayer. Yet the obligation to pray was not instantly obvious, nor was there a system in place when the Temple was destroyed. A way of religious life was eviscerated with the inability of the priests and the sacrificial system to function, and the rabbis were faced with a gaping problem. What would replace sacrifice? Who would do it? How, when and where would it be done? In what ways would it be experienced as authentically Jewish? Ruth Langer writes:

> Any new system desiring to attract adherents must be designed in a careful dialectic between the old and the new, the accepted and the innovative. The rabbis did not have to wean anyone away from a previous mode of worship--the sacrificial system of the Torah and the Temple were suddenly unavailable--but they did need to develop their new form of worship in such a way that Jews would understand the necessity for participation. Therefore, they had to define their liturgical system in connection to and in opposition to the Temple, incorporating language and rituals with which the people already felt comfortable (Langer 5).

Langer's "careful dialectic between the old and the new" describes the completely unique situation in which the rabbis found themselves. The way to worship and be in relation to God would have to change on every level. The rabbis would have to create a system that flattened access to the system in all places that Jews found themselves. No longer was the priestly class functioning and no longer was their a central place for worship. Worship would now be made available to all, wherever they were, without the intercession of a priest. The destruction of the Temple forced the need for a reformula-

tion and massive restructuring of the relationship between a Jewish person and God. This reformed relationship had to have legitimacy and authenticity, which meant it must be rooted in both Torah and in the system of Temple worship as both experienced and incorporated into the historical memory of the people.

The rabbis therefore had to (1) find a Torahitic basis for their new system (2) transform it into a communal praxis and (3) create the sociological framework through which it functions. It was accomplished by: (1) grounding the Torah obligation to pray to the concept of serving God (2) ordaining that prayer would happen reflecting both the times that the Patriarchs prayed and to the times of the offerings in the Temple and (3) that it would take place communally and be governed thusly.

The Rabbinic Obligation to Pray: Service of the Heart

Prayer, the "service of the heart," is the rabbinic replacement for the sacrificial system. To have the standing to take its place, the rabbis source the obligation to pray from the Torah itself, the same source from which the sacrificial system was derived.

B. Berakhot 21a states: "The recitation of *Sh'ma* and *Birkat HaMazon* is Biblical law, the prayer[5] (*amidah, shomeh esray)* is rabbinic." Maimonides, in his redaction of Talmudic and other rabbinic dicta in his Mishneh Torah, begins the Laws on Prayer with

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5. What is commonly known today as the "Amidah," the "standing prayer" in the liturgy was commonly known throughout rabbinic literature as the "Tefilla," the "prayer."

the prooftexts from the Torah, followed by the famous rabbinic interpretation from B. Ta'anit 2a that would forever transform Jewish worship:

> "It is a positive Torah commandment to pray every day as states:
>
> ועבדתם את יהוה אלוהיכם
>
> 'You shall worship YHVH your God (Exodus 23:25).'
>
> "Tradition teaches us that this service is prayer:
>
> ולעבדו בכל–לבבכם ובכל–נפשכם.
>
> 'And serving Him with all your heart (Deut. 11:13).'
>
> "And our Sages said: 'Which is the service of the heart? This is prayer'" (b. Taanit 2a).

Yet Maimonides notes that while prayer itself is obligated by Torah, its application, the "what" of prayer, the "when" it is to be done, and the "how" for the environment of the prayer is rabbinic:

> The number of prayers is not prescribed in the Torah, nor does it prescribe a specific formula for prayer. Also, according to Torah law, there are no fixed times for prayer (Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Tefilah, 1:1).

The "When" of Prayer

When prayer was to take place gave rise to a famous dispute that illustrates the dialectic Langer discusses above: whether the obligation[6] to pray is tied to the time and

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6. "What is the service of the heart? This is prayer." The *Sifri, Ekev*, questions: "Does the verse refer to the service of the Temple -i.e. sacrifices--or the personal service of prayer? It answers that the phrase "with all your heart" indicates that the service is one that is carried out within a

number of sacrifices in the Temple, or whether they are derived from the Patriarchs. Ultimately, bridging both Torah and sacrificial practice, the rabbis choose to relate the time of prayer to both.

First, the Patriarchs. In b. Berakhot 26b there is a disagreement between Rabbi Yossi ben Rabbi Chanina who understood that the daily prayers corresponded to the three patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (morning, afternoon, evening, respectively). Almost simultaneously, the tradition also connects the times of prayer to the sacrifices in the Temple, demonstrating how evening prayer corresponds to the sacrifices even though no sacrifices were offered at that time:

> They also decreed that the number of prayers correspond to the number of sacrifices, i.e. two prayers every day, corresponding to the two daily sacrifices. On any day that an additional sacrifice was offered, they instituted a third prayer, corresponding to the additional offering.. They also instituted a prayer to be recited at night, since the limbs of the afternoon offering could be burnt the whole night as (Lev. 6:2) states: "The burnt offering shall remain on the altar hearth all night until morning." In this vein (Psalms 55:18) states: "In the evening, morning and afternoon I will speak and cry aloud, and He will hear my prayer" (Hilchot Tefila 1:5-6).

Thus, the morning service would correspond to Abraham and the morning sacrifice; the afternoon service would correspond to Isaac and the afternoon sacrifice; and the evening service would correspond to Jacob and the embers and limbs of the afternoon sacrifice yet on the altar that burned until morning.

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person's heart, i.e. prayer. (Hilchot Tefilah, notes, p.97)

The "What" of Prayer in the Torah: The Prayer of the Individual

Even though the sourcing of the obligation to pray is rooted to Torah by the rabbis, they are hard-pressed to similarly find a model for mandating communal prayer. What is seen in the Torah, and the Prophets and Writings as well, is personal prayer that is largely situational. Something is happening, the pray-er prays.

Whether or not the rabbis themselves were conscious of the extent of prayers and who is representing praying in the Bible, they did have, as part of Israel's narrative, examples of people praying, both heroic patriarchs like Abraham and Moses, and roughnecks[7] such as Samson; even pagans are portrayed as formulating a petitionary prayer according to his need (Greenberg 17). Prayer is seen mainly as: (1) the prayer of the Biblical character, such as Abraham and Moses who have an extraordinary relationship with God and is able to intercede directly with God to affect an outcome (2) the prayer of the Biblical character who addresses God because of his or her standing, such as Samson, Hannah, David, Solomon, and Ezra, and (3) in the day-to-day life of the Biblical individual who situationally is prompted to pray.

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7. Moshe Greenberg's description.

The Unique Prayer of the Biblical Intercessor: Moses

Paradigmatic of the intercessory relationship is that of God and Moses. Moses time and again intercedes directly with God to alter God's originally expressed intentions.[8] All of Moses' interventions came about directly on behalf of the people after their actions in one way or another displeased YHVH. Moses most famously intervenes with God after the incident of the Golden Calf. Moses implores:

> Let not your anger, YHVH, blaze forth against Your people whom You delivered from the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand. Let not the Egyptians say 'It was with evil intent that He delivered them, only to kill them off in the mountains and annihilate them from the face of the earth.' Turn from Your blazing anger, and renounce the plan to punish Your people. Remember Your servants, Abraham, Isaac and Israel, how You swore to them by Your Self and said tot hem: I will make your offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven, and I will give to your offspring this whole land of which I spoke, to possess for ever (Ex. 32:11-13).

In Numbers, one again sees Moses' direct intervention on behalf of the people after their ill-conceived behavior:

> The people took to complaining bitterly before YHVH. YHVH heard and was incensed: a fire of YHVH broke out against them, ravaging the camp. The people cried out to Moses. Moses prayed to YHVH and the fire died down (Numbers 11:1-2).

Here it is left to our imagination what Moses may have said. Yet the story demonstrates that Moses' intervention altered the outcome. Similarly, Moses is portrayed as specifically praying on behalf of his sister, Miriam: "O God, pray heal her!"

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8. See, for example, Ex. 32.9 when Moses implores YHVH on behalf of the people at the incident of the Golden Calf.

(Numbers 12:13). She is healed, but only after a week outside of the camp. In the case of the Scouts (Numbers 14), Moses again intervenes, this time by appealing to God's interests:

> But Moses said to YHVH "When the Egyptians, from whose midst You brought up this people in Your might, hear the news, they will tell it to the inhabitants of that land. Now that they have heard that You, O YHVH, are in the midst of this people; that You, O YHVH, appear in plain sight when Your cloud rests over them and when You go before them in a pillar of cloud by day and in a pillar of fire by night. If then You slay this people to a man, the nations will have heard Your fame and say 'It must be because YHVH was powerless to bring that people into the land He had promised them on oath that He slaughtered them in the wilderness.' Therefore, I pray, let YHVH's forbearance be great, as You have declared saying, 'YHVH: Slow to anger and abounding in kindness; forgiving iniquity and transgression; yet not remitting all punishment, but visiting the iniquity of fathers upon children, upon the third and fourth generations.' Pardon, I pray, the iniquity of this people according to Your great kindness, as You have forgiven this people ever since Egypt. And YHVH said, 'I pardon, as you have asked' (Numbers 14:13-20).

The tradition recognizes that Moses' prays as well. Psalm 90 is given the superscription "A Prayer of Moses, a Man of God," reflecting (perhaps) Moses' unique relationship with as a pray-er vis-a-vis God.

The Prayers of the Petitioners: Hannah, David, Solomon, Samson

In other places in the Tanach, prayer is petitionary, rather than intercessory.

Samson prays for God to remember him and take revenge on his enemies (Judges 16:28). Hannah prays to God for a son (1 Samuel 2ff). David prays to God offering gratitude and supplication after he encounters the prophet Nathan who tells him that he is to be king (2 Samuel 8:17-29). Solomon is portrayed as offering an extensive

prayer at the dedication of the First Temple on behalf of the people and their new house (1 Kings 8ff). Each of these prayers are explicit in being directed toward God by the pray-er and is done for a specific purpose.

The Prayers of the People: Biblical Prose Prayer

The prayers of the named individuals are not the only place that prayer is seen in the Hebrew Bible. Prayer in the Tanach is prolific according to Moshe Greenberg. Greenberg writes of "biblical prose prayer", prayer that is embedded in the biblical text that reflects the way people communicated to each other, adapted for use in the God-pray-er relationship. The vast majority of the prose prayer that Greenberg identifies is petitionary in nature and is seen throughout the entire Hebrew Bible.

> As used here, prayer refers to non-psalmic speech to God. . .it includes petition, confession, benediction and curse. . .What distinguishes all the prayers is that they appear to be freely composed in accordance with particular life-settings; their putative authors and their function are supplied by their context (Greenberg 7).

As opposed to constructed literary rubrics, Biblical prose prayer is constructed out of the diction of daily life:

> Speaking in the second person is only the most elemental form of biblical man's speech to God. When he prays, he uses words in patterns, and these patterns follow the analogy of inter-human speech patterns in comparable situations. The inter-human situation of petition may be analyzed as comprising the following elements: a need or distress; an unequal division of goods between petitioner and petitioned, leading the former to resort to the latter; affirmation of the given relationship between the two: the petitioner does not intend to destroy the relationship, but to maintain himself on its basis; reliance on some common interest, some ground for solidarity between the two (Greenberg 20).

What Biblical prose prayer is not, however, is communal in its orientation.

Communal Prayer Largely Unknown in Tanach

> Communal prayer is largely unknown in the Tanach. Langer writes:
>
> Although there is no unambiguous evidence for widespread formal communal prayer on the rabbinic model before the destruction of the Temple, the concepts and rituals available to the rabbis almost certainly included the recitation of *sh'-ma*, the ritual reading and exposition of Scripture, especially Torah in the synagogue setting, and probably an expectation that appropriate prayer language would be in Hebrew, largely derivative of the language of the Bible, especially Psalms, and structured as a series of blessings (Langer 5).

Even though these concepts and rituals may have been known, as Langer writes, it is unclear as to whether or not to fulfill the obligation one could say them alone or had to say them in some form of community[9]. Whatever the case, one looking for an example of communal prayer in Scripture does not find ample evidence. In fact, one finds the first prayer written in the communal voice near the end of the canonized Hebrew Bible, in the book of Ezra. It is here that the first prayer appears in the first-person plural, the voice of most Jewish prayer as it would become known in the communal system. It begins in the characteristic first-person singular voice that has been seen before, but quickly becomes plural (the added emphasis that follows is mine), developing a cadence that is familiar to the pray-er of today[10]:

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9. This is also true of the Psalms that may have been part of the Temple liturgy. Even though some of them are phrased in the plural, their exact role in the functioning of the Temple complex cannot be ascribed to a system of communal prayer incumbent on all pray-ers.

10. Even though it is not considered a prayer, a similar shift in voice can be seen in Deuteronomy

O my God, I am too ashamed and mortified to lift my face to You, O my God, for ***our*** iniquities are overwhelming[11] and ***our*** guilt has grown high as heaven. From the time of our fathers to this very day ***we*** have been deep in guilt. Because of ***our*** iniquities, we, ***our*** kings, and ***our*** priests, have been handed over to foreign kings, to the sword, to captivity, to pillage, and to humiliation, as is now the case.

But now, for a short while, there has been a reprieve from YHVH our God, who has granted ***us*** a surviving remnant and given us a stake in His holy place; ***our*** God has restored the luster to our eyes and furnished us with a little sustenance in our bondage. For bondmen ***we*** are, though even in ***our*** bondage God has not forsaken ***us***, but has disposed the king of Persia favorably toward ***us***, to furnish ***us*** with sustenance and to raise again the House of our God, repairing its ruins and giving ***us*** a hold in Judah and in Jerusalem.

Now what can ***we*** say in the face of this, O our God, for ***we*** have forsaken Your commandments, which You gave ***us*** through Your servants the prophets when You said, 'The land that you are about to possess is a land unclean through the uncleanness of the peoples of the land, through their abhorrent practices with which they, in their impurity, have filled it from one end to the other. Now then, do not give your daughters in marriage to their sons or let their daughters marry your sons; do nothing for their well-being or advantage, then you will be strong and enjoy the bounty of the land and bequeath it to your children forever.' After all that has happened to ***us*** because of our evil deeds and our deep guilt--though You, our God, have been forbearing, [punishing us] less than ***our*** iniquity [deserves] in that You have granted ***us*** such a remnant as this--shall ***we*** once again violate Your commandments by intermarrying with these peoples who follow such abhorrent practices? Will You not rage against ***us*** till ***we*** are destroyed with out remnant or survivor? O YHVH, God of Israel. You are benevolent, for ***we***

26:5-9 going from "my" to "us" to "we": "My father was a fugitive Aramean. He went down to Egypt with meager numbers and sojourned there; but there he became a great and very populous nation. The Egyptians dealt harshly with us and oppressed us; they imposed heavy labor upon us. We cried to the Eternal, the God of our ancestors, and the Eternal heard our and saw our plight, our misery, and our oppression. The Eternal freed us from Egypt by a mighty hand, by an outstretched arm and awesome power and by signs and portents, bringing us to this place and giving us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey."

11. lit: "are numerous above the head."

have survived as a remnant, as is now the case. ***We*** stand before You in all our guilt, for ***we*** cannot face You on this account."

Notice the abundant use of words "us" "we" and "our." This prayer is articulated by Ezra, yet its import is clear: he is praying on behalf of his community, yet not with a sense of "I" or "me" but rather in the plural singular voice of the community: "us" "we", "our."

A Work in Progress

As discussed, prayer is clearly an indigenous part of the Jewish religious experience. Be that as it may, it does not explain how the rabbis were to ordain a system of communal worship from the prayers and style of praying that was known.

Prayer would be the vehicle for post-sacrificial worship system. Yet how prayer would be offered would itself be the context for sustaining Judaism. It would be a system that gathers Jews together, no matter where they find themselves. The rabbis create a system that is effective, designed with the emphatic support of the rabbis themselves and designed to be self-sustaining. In its design, one sees the rabbinic genius in understanding human nature--not the "what" or "when" of prayer--but the "how" and the "who."

Chapter Three: Communal Prayer: Reaching the Heavenly Plane

The number of prayers is not prescribed in the Torah, nor does it prescribe a specific formula for prayer.

Maimonides, Mishneh Torah

"With respect to Torah law, some are explicit, some hang by a thread."

Mishnah Hagigah 1:8

In creating a system of communal prayer, the rabbis considered two planes of existence: the God/heavenly plane that pray-ers were trying to affect with their prayers, and the earthly plane where the humans and their interactions "do" prayer. In the following chapters, this thesis will look at the genius of the rabbis in understanding how humans behave when they come together in groups, and how in anticipating this behavior, the rabbis were able to build-in aspects of the communal prayer system that were able to be flexible enough to account for human behavior.

First, however, one must look at how the Sages framed the heightened religious value of communal prayer. The communal system of prayer "hangs by a thread" in that it is largely a rabbinic innovation. How it is woven into a system requires the strongest possible emphasis on its religious value. The principle rabbinic themes are:

- Communal prayer as intrinsically holier than individual prayer.
- Communal prayer as the most efficacious kind of prayer: God always hears the prayers that are prayed in community.

- Praying in a synagogue in a minyan of ten is the ideal.
- Communal prayer provides pedagogic reinforcement to teach the pray-er how to pray Jewishly in a time before printed prayer books
- Prayers are always offered in the the plural, even if one is praying by one's self.
- One may fulfill one's obligation to pray by responding "amen" to another person's prayer.

These rabbinic themes were able to arise because of the authority that the rabbis gave themselves to recreate Judaism after the sacrificial system was destroyed.

Flexibility to Innovate

The Sages of the Mishnah gave themselves the flexibility to reinvent Judaism, to innovate not from what was rooted in Torah, but also from how they imagined practice would look in the ideal. The religious values enumerated above come from a rabbinic consciousness.

In the first redaction of rabbinic dicta after the Temple's destruction, the rabbis articulate : "With respect to Torah law, some are explicit, some hang by a thread" (m. Hagigah 1:8). What is explicit appears obvious; what hangs by a thread is tenuous and needs to be more fully woven into rabbinic Judaism for humans to affect the intent. So it is with prayer and communal prayer: it was an idea that was hanging by a thread, and it was to the rabbis to weave it into a wholistic system.

Once the rabbis were able to ordain prayer as required, they were able to construct a system that would support prayer in its central role in post-Temple Jewish life

both in the land of Israel and throughout the Diaspora. By making prayer a replacement for sacrifice[12] and by making it possible to pray locally, the rabbis diminish the role that the central worship site played in Jerusalem and promote the religious idea that God is available to people wherever they find themselves. Jews could be Jewish anywhere and God would hear their prayers. Making prayer communal ***required*** that Jews would seek each other out to pray no matter where they found themselves.

As seen above in the overview of prayer and pray-er in the Bible, the rabbis had little precedent for making prayer communal. While Levine cites that synagogues did exist pre-destruction, the liturgical worship patterns were unclear, especially with respect to the number of people required (if there was such a requirement) and the nature of the worship (its fixity versus its spontaneity) (Levine 73).

A Compelling Religious System

It was the Sages of the Talmud who were able to harvest the Mishnaic seeds to shape further and reinforce how communal prayer would function with respect to its religious dimensions. Several kinds of prayers or actions can only take place when there are ten (men) gathered:

> They do not recite the *Sh'ma*, they do not pass before the ark, they do not raise up their hands, they do not read in the Torah, they do not conclude with a prophetic lection, they do not observe the stations, bless mourners, express con-

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12. See chapter two of thesis for discussion of b. Berekhot 21a, b. Ta'anit 2a, b. Berekhot 26b.

> solation to mourners, a blessing of a wedding couple, and they do not invoke the name of God in the *birkat hamazon*, less than ten (m. Megillah 4:3).

This mishnah indicates the core concept that there are certain ritual activities that can only take place in a communal gathering. What follows are rabbinic texts that establish, reinforce, and laud communal prayer for its religious value. One sees that the entire corpus of rabbinic literature reinforces the high value of communal prayer over time.

Communal prayer as intrinsically holier: D'var Sh'b'Kedushah

Mishnah Megilla 4:3 is a prooftext for the higher value of certain communal prayers. These prayers and situations, known as "*devar sh'b'kedushah*" (דבר שבקדושה) literally the "thing that is holy," underscore the special standing of the community assembled in prayer. Petuchowski describes the impact as making prayer an act in which the entire community participates:

> First in that list is the public recitation of the Sh'ma, but it is described as *porseen et sh'ma* (פורסין את שמע), a phrase to which many different meanings have been variously assigned. On the basis of the evidence in other Tannaitic passages, however, there can be little doubt that the phrase refers to a kind of responsive recitation, the leader reciting the first part of a verse in the *Sh'ma*, and the *tzibbur*, apparently repeating that part and completing the verse. The public recitation of the *Sh'ma* was, therefore, a corporate act; that is, an act in which every member of the *tzibbur* was an active participant (Petuchowski 136).

Langer writes that the later Sages of the Talmud understood that it took a community of ten for a higher degree of sanctification:

> There is no question that the Amoraim understood the rituals listed in Mishnah Megillah to be *devairm sh'b'kedushah*, matters involving a higher degree of sanctification, but the talmudic texts do not directly address the meaning or the extent

of this category. It is evident, though, that the greater sanctity invoked by the presence of the community of ten creates a more efficacious setting for prayer (Langer 20).

Communal Prayer's Higher Value

As the corollary to the *d'varim sh'b'kedushah*, that there are parts of the service that require the higher holiness conveyed by ten, the rabbis made communal prayer *overall* more effective. The rabbis stressed that communal prayer would not only correspond to Temple worship in terms of efficacy, but also ***exceed*** the weight of an individual praying alone. Simply put, God responds more powerfully to the prayers offered in community:

> Although the rabbis always recognized the legitimacy of-and the necessity of legitimating individual Jew's fulfillment of prayer obligations when alone, they consistently placed a ***higher value on prayer in the communal setting*** (emphasis mine). The prayers of the individual must be the same of those of the congregation (b. Taanit 13b; p. Berakhot 5:2; p. Taanit 1:1, 63d) ideally recited at the same time (b. Berakhot 7b-8a) (Langer, 19).

This shows that communal prayer is both the "norm" and the "standard." Jacobs, commenting on the Talmudic passages cited above in Langer, calls the rabbis stress of the importance of communal prayer "hyperbolic" in saying that when prayers are offered in a congregation God will never reject them (Jacobs, online). Jacobs and Langer are surely referencing this aggadic discussion that emphasizes the importance of communal prayer[13] :

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13. Note that this is not a subject of a legal discussion or disagreement but rather a story told with a protagonist and a story arch. It is a literary genre within the Talmud to vividly illustrate the point that is being made of the value of communal prayer.

> Rav Yitzchok asked Rav Nachman: "Why did you not come pray in the synagogue?"
>
> [Rav Nachman] answered him: "I was unable to."
>
> He said: "Gather ten men together and pray."
>
> He responded: "The matter is a bother to me."
>
> [Rav Yitzchok] suggested: "Tell the leader of the congregation to let you know when it is the time for prayer."
>
> He said: "Why is all this trouble necessary?:
>
> He replied: "Rabbi Yochanan said in the name of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai: What is [the meaning of Psalm 69:14] 'As for me, let my prayer be to You, God, at an auspicious time'? When is an auspicious time? The time when the congregation is praying" (b. Berakhot 7b-8a).

The value of communal prayer is reinforced over time which demonstrates, in part, that once the system began, it continued to evolve and build on itself. A later example is demonstrated vividly in the following midrash from Deuteronomy Rabbah, dated to around the year 900[14]:

> 12. Another explanation: AS THE LORD OUR GOD. This bears out what Scripture says, "But as for me, let my prayer be unto Thee, in an acceptable time (Ps. LX!X, 14). R. Hanina b. Papa asked R. Samuel b. Nahman: 'What is the meaning of the verse, "But as for me, let my prayer be unto Thee in an acceptable time"?' He replied: 'The gates of prayer are sometimes open and sometimes closed, but the gates of repentance always remain open."
>
> He then asked him: 'Whence [do ycu know this]?' [R. Samuel replied]: 'Because it is written, *With wondrous works does Thou answer us in righteousness, O God of our salvation; Thou the confidence of all the ends of the earth, and of the far distant seas* (ib. LXV, 6). Just as the ritual bath is sometimes open and sometimes closed, so too are the gates of prayer sometimes open and sometimes closed; but as the sea ever remains open, so is the hand of God ever open to receive the penitent.'

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14. Which is nearly a millenia after the rabbis successfully create the system of communal prayer.

R. Anan said: The gates of prayer also are never closed, for it is written, AS THE LORD OUR GOD IS WHENEVER WE CALL UPON HIM; and CALLING is nothing else but praying, as Scripture says in another context has it, 'And it shall come to pass that, before they call I will answer' (Isa. LXV, 24). R. Hiyya the elder said: It is written: *Wait for the Lord; be strong and let thy heart take courage; yea. wait thou for the Lord* (PS XXVII, 14); pray and pray again, and you may light upon the hour when your prayer will be answered.

Another explanation: 'But as for me, let my prayer,etc." David, because he prayed as an individual, said "In an acceptable time"; ***but the prayer of a community never remains unanswered*** (emphasis mine). This is the force of the expression AND THE LORD OUR GOD IS WHENEVER WE CALL UPON HIM. (Deuteronomy Rabbah 2:12 (Vaethchanah) 40-41).

In Rambam's Mishneh Torah[15], the efficacy of communal prayer is redacted from the Talmudic context referenced above:

> Communal prayer is always heard. Even when there are transgressors among [the congregation], the Holy One, blessed be He, does not reject the prayers of the man. Therefore, a person should include himself in the community and should not pray alone whenever he is able to pray with the community (Mishneh Torah. Hilchot Tefilah, chapter 8.)

The medieval Jewish philosophic tradition carried these themes forward. In the 12th century, Judah Halevi's *Kuzari*, a defense of Judaism in the form of an imaginary dialogue between the kind of the Khazars and a Jewish sage, emphasizes the value of communal prayer as being mutually-beneficial to the pray-ers, at the same time sagaciously noting that sometime individual pray-ers do not always pray that beneficial things befall their fellow prayer-ers. Jacobs recounts:

> The king asks, why all this emphasis on communal prayer? Would it not be better if everyone recited his prayers for himself where, on the contrary, there is greater concentration and purity of thought without distraction? The sage replies that an individual, praying on his own, may pray for others to be harmed, but a community

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15. Translated and commented on by Rabbi Boroch Kaplan.

will never pray for harm to come to one of its members. Furthermore, an individual may make mistakes when mouthing the words of the prayers whereas when people pray together they make up for one another's shortcomings (Jacobs, online).

Echoing earlier traditions,the Zohar, the 13th century text of Jewish mysticism, offers the mystical reasoning for the value of communal prayer:

> The Zohar gives a mystical reason. When an individual prays, his prayers do not ascend to God until there has first been a heavenly investigation to determine whether he is worthy for his prayers to be accepted. Communal prayers, on the other hand, ascend immediately to the heavenly throne without any prior investigation (Jacobs, online).

One can hardly think of a higher motivation to pray communally than to know that the prayer of a community never remains unanswered. It is a powerful incentive.

Praying in a Synagogue With a Minyan of Ten is the Ideal

God dwells where people pray together, and the rabbis preferred location is the synagogue. B. Berakhot 6a speaks of God's indwelling presence is found in the synagogue when ten pray together:

> A person's prayer is heard only in a synagogue. For it is said (1 Kings 8:28): "To hear the song and the prayer" in the place of song, there prayer should be. Ravin bar Rav Adda said in the name of R. Yitzchak: From where [is it] that the Holy One, Blessed is He, is found in a synagogue? For it is stated God stands in the Divine Assembly. And from where that when ten men pray, the Divine Presence is with them. For it is stated: God stands in the Divine assembly (Psalms 82:1)(b. Berakhot 6a).

The emphasis on the synagogue may be because it was a structure that was known to local communities well before the Temple's destruction as a place of communal meet-

ing[16]. That role was dramatically magnified once the central worship site in Jerusalem was destroyed.

> Although some rabbis were loathe to mix with the commoners in the synagogue, the Talmud carefully presents them as negative examples, recording the rebukes they received from their colleagues (b. Berakhot 6b-8a; p. Berakhot 5:1, 8d). Participation in the synagogue and public identification as members of the community, then, was expected of Jews from all ranks of society. This egalitarianism can be seen as a "meta-principle" that underlies the entire category of general laws pertaining to the communal nature of prayer (Langer, 19).

The Communal as Pedagogy: Teaching the People How to Pray Properly

Communal prayer also had an extraordinarily important pedagogic function. In a time before the printing press, it was the performative nature of prayer that functioned to reinforce what was proper. Observing people pray correctly was necessary for the system to function properly. For example, one who could not properly recite *Sh'ma* was considered as ignorant and negligent of the law, an *am haaretz* (lit: a person of the earth, a commoner, used here to denote someone ignorant of religious responsibilities). Petuchowski writes:

> Calling attention to the baraita (b. Berakhot 47b) which defines an *am ha-aretz* (one who is ignorant and negligent of the law) as one who does not recite *Sh'ma*, Ginzberg points out that there were Jews who could not recite the *Sh'ma* and that this was especially true in Galilee until toward the close of the tannaitic peri-

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16. Levine comments that the influence of rabbinic authority was probably not that strong early-on. He writes:"Recent studies have indicated that there is little evidence that rabbinic authority was widely recognized during this period, or that second-century sages usually addressed major social, political, or religious issues of the institutions of their day. In fact, rabbinic sources make no claim, either directly or indirectly, that the sages had any significant influence whatsoever over synagogue practice. The Mishnah and Tosefta mention the synagogue only infrequently, a most surprising fact given the institution's centrality in Jewish life. When the synagogue is noted, however, it is often in connection with its communal role" (Levine 524).

od. The corporate recital enabled the untutored to join in *Keria't Sh'ma* and was a pedagogic device as well, by means of which they could learn the *Sh'ma* (Petuchowski 136).

Prayers Are Almost Always Offered in the Plural at the Times When People Are Praying Together

Irrespective of the aspects of the new prayer system that ordains what to pray, the voice of Jewish prayer became a communal one. Prayer would be offered mainly in the first-person plural voice, in a community of ten Jews. Communal prayer is the vehicle through which the post-Temple Jews were made to come together as communities, no matter where they found themselves. The ingenious sociological innovation meant that in requiring a nucleus of ten individuals, Jews would have to join together as a corporate body, a critical mass. It is also an important device for enfranchising all members of the praying community. Langer writes:

> Prayer must always be composed in the first person plural, for one must always view oneself within the context of the community b. Berakhot 29b-30a discussing the traveler's prayer; m. Berakhot 3, b. Berakhot 49b-50a with reference to the invitation to *birkat hamazon*. Note the lack of objection to the singular phrasing of the bedtime and waking prayers discussed in b. Berakhot 60b. As Heinemann has demonstrated in his Prayer in the Talmud, chap. 7, the more private a prayer, the more likely it is to be allowed to deviate from otherwise well-established laws of composition (Langer, 22-23).[17]

Abraham Milgram comments on how communal prayer is both egalitarian with respect to is participation, but also with respect to the concerns of the pray-ers:

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17. Langer is referencing a conversation about prayers that are said before bed and first thing in the morning, usually when one is by one's self and usually when one is at one's residence.

> One of the remarkable characteristics of Jewish prayer is its formulation in the plural. The worshiper prays for the community of Israel. Not that the private needs of the individual are unimportant; but the individual's well-being is so intertwined with that of the community of Israel that the well-being of both is regarded as identical. Another underlying principle is that man should "associate others" in his petitions. The principle is presented in an incisive talmudic pronouncement: "A man should always associate himself with the congregation [even when reciting a prayer on a journey]. How should he say [his prayer]? 'May it be Your will, O Lord our God, to lead us forth in peace, etc.' [b. Berakhot 29b-30a]The prayers of the synagogue are almost entirely in the plural. Even when a person cannot join a congregation and worships privately the prayers are in the plural. (Milgram 31).

Communal Prayer Can Fulfill the Obligations for Others

Another compelling religious innovation is of any eligible adult Jewish person could be included as part of the *tzibbur*, whether or not he knew how to pray. In this system, one needs only respond "amen" to be considered as if he had fulfilled his obligation to pray provided that the person praying was also obligated. This not only has a pedagogic function, as above, but includes people who might otherwise believe that because of their ignorance they could not fulfill their religious responsibilities:

> While communal prayer has an elevated level of sanctity, it also serves the more mundane function of creating a mechanism by which those who cannot themselves recite the prayers, from lack of education or lack of ability, can meet their prayer obligations. Already at Yavneh it was assumed that a prayer leader could function as the representative of another in performing a ritual or liturgical act, so long as he himself was obligated to that act (m. Rosh Hashanah 3:8; b. Berakhot 20b). Although the principle applies broadly to all prayer, including home rituals, it is particularly important for the *amidah* and its promulgation. (b. Rosh Hashanah 34b-35a--for Medieval discussions, see OH 124:1 and 591).
>
> What is required of those who rely on another to fulfill their obligations? The Mishnah already presupposes-and hence does not discuss explicitly--the principle that people may fulfill their prayer obligations simply by responding *amen* to another's blessings; the tannaitic traditions see this response as minimally equal to or even more praiseworthy than offering the blessing oneself. (b. Berakhot 53b) (Langer 20-23).

Religiously Sound and Humanly Sophisticated

Clearly the religious import of communal prayer was given its strongest possible foundation in rabbinic and subsequent texts. Yet that was only one (important) part of the system that the rabbis thought about. They were also keen observers of the human condition. They understood human behavior when human beings came together, that humans will always be social creatures. This understanding led the rabbis to considering the needs of the humans who would be praying and making accommodations for them. Their genius in understanding humans and what happens when humans come into contact with each other is what follows in the next chapter.

Chapter 4: Disrupting the Recitation of Sh'ma and Its Blessings for Honor

"Let the honor owing to your fellow be as precious to you as the respect owing to you yourself." (m. Avot 2:10)

"Let the honor of your pupil be as dear to you as your own, and your fellow student's honor as that of your teacher (m. Avot 4:12).

"Great is the honor due to mankind; it supersedes a prohibition of the Law' (Ber. 19b)

Honor is due to the assembly (b.Yoma 70a, b.Sotah 39b; b.Moed Katan 21b)

Honor is one of Judaism's most venerated values. It is a cornerstone of Jewish belief that humans are God's creation, reflecting God's image, and are worthy of respect, dignity, and honor. Humans, who imitate Godly attributes, are to honor each other.

For people to be able to come together in groups or community, they must be able to relate to each other in a harmonious fashion. People must have the ability to communicate and acknowledge each other. The earliest progenitors of the rabbinic system understood that when people came together in prayer, there would be times when the human plane would interrupt the heavenly one. This is evident from the beginning of the Mishnah where the concept of honor of one's fellow human was given a privileged place in what may otherwise be interpreted as a somewhat mechanical discussion of when one could interrupt their recitation of the *Sh'ma* and its blessings.

The Beginning of Communal Socialization

Communal prayer became a coherent system over the span of hundreds of years. Beginning with the imagined nomos that the rabbis articulate in the Mishnah, the system continued to be shaped through the debates of the Talmud, the responsa of the Geonim, the Medieval commentators, and the lived experiences of the praying communities. While the religious value of communal prayer is made explicit in rabbinic endorsements (as elaborated above), for the system to function, people required socialization, that is, people needed to have awareness of how they are to be when they are praying as part of a community.

Socialization takes on many forms: what prayers could be interrupted and where in the recitation; how one is to behave around other pray-ers; the choreography of the prayer service; who could lead prayer; what to do when a prayer leader is creating a prayer environment that is a burden to the congregation; how to find a way to honor appropriately members of the congregation during prayer. Taken together, these elements recognize that for communal prayer to manifest its religious values, the human underpinnings must be based in the reality of how humans behave when they come together.

It was from the very earliest stage of the rabbinic system that this socialization begins. A "seed" is implanted for what happens when the human plane takes precedence over the heavenly one. That the Mishnaic sages chose to address this issue from the very beginning is an important cue to the entire rabbinic corpus that is to

follow. Prayer is done by humans, and ideally, among humans. Prayer is how humans communicate with and to God. It is, essentially, a holy act that humans undertake to be in relationship with God while simultaneously being in relationship with the other humans around them.

Until today, the main prayer rubrics of the morning services are the Amidah (the recitation of which cannot be interrupted) and the section known as *Kri'at Sh'ma* and its blessings. Its centrality in the service twice-daily makes it the first subject of the Mishnah and the Talmud. To be sure, its recitation is a time-bound religious obligation. Yet through its obligation and the discussion of how it is to be recited, the rabbis early-on emphasize the value of honor *bein adam l'chavero*, the honor that attends to the relationship between one person and another. This is so pervasive a value that they find cause to interrupt as central a religious obligation as the recitation of the *Sh'ma* and its blessings.

Interrupting the Recitation of the *Sh'ma*

After a lengthy discussion of the what, when and where of the obligation of reciting the *Sh'ma*, the Mishnaic authors turn their attention to the "who" as in for whom can one interrupt the recitation of *Sh'ma* and under what circumstances.

That the *Sh'ma* and its blessings could be interrupted is itself notable, for it demonstrates from the earliest time of the reimagining of Judaism that there would be times when a pray-er would find himself unable to finish the three paragraphs of the

Sh'ma and surrounding blessings without interruption[18]. In the main, this Mishnaic promulgation is more about the integrity of fulfilling the obligation to recite the *Sh'ma*, than what is going on in the life of the pray-er. Yet it does recognize that on the human plane, there are times, however delimited, when pressing human needs interrupt prayer. There are two main reasons articulated where interruption is acceptable: fear and honor. As will be evident throughout the human elements of the system, honor is a common trope. While fear is one reason for interrupting one's prayers to respond to a greeting of one who is feared, it is honor that is the hegemonic rabbinic reason for responding to a greeting.

The Mishnah's Idea of Purposeful Interruption

Whether or not the Mishnah actually prescribed or described behavior, it is important to note that its focus on interrupting prayer is ultimately with respect to the honor of another human being. The text itself may be somewhat elliptical in terms of original intent, but it is clear with respect to the value of honor:

> בפרקים שואל מפני **הכבוד** ומשיב, ובאמצע שואל מפני היראה ומשיב, דברי רבי מאיר. רבי יהודה אומר, באמצע שואל מפני היראה ומשיב מפני הכבוד, בפרקים שואל מפני **הכבוד** ומשיב **שלום לכל אדם.**

> "At [the breaks between] the paragraphs [of the *Sh'ma*] one may inquire (about his fellow) out of honor and may respond, and in the middle inquire [only] out of

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18. It is also notable that this is even part of the Mishnaic imagination. There would have been no analogous instance in the functioning of the Temple as there was no mixing of a praying community. The sacrifices were offered in an inner-sanctum that was available only to the priests.

> fear and respond, the words of Rabbi Meir. Rabbi Judah said in the middle inquire out of fear and respond out of honor, and between paragraphs inquire out of honor and respond to the greeting of any person (m. Berakhot 2.1).

One can see that there are two *explicit* reasons for interrupting one's recitation and responding: honor and/or fear. R. Judah says that a pray-er can greet openly out of fear and respond out of respect, but he widens it mightily with respect to response: one may interrupt and respond to the greeting of *any* man. The condition of *fear* does not color the response: only the intrinsic dignity of the person who offers the greeting.

The Talmud on this mishnah involves a lengthy discussion about what type of person one may greet in return. This mishnah does not specify except to say that one may interrupt and inquire about another's welfare for the sake of that person's honor, and he may also return a greeting. It first clarifies that the mishnah's intent is that a person may inquire about a person for the sake of that person's honor and return the greeting of *any* person. It is quite an egalitarian statement of human acknowledging human, attributed to Rabbi Meir, a fifth generation Tanna:

> בפרקים שואל וכי: משיב מחמת מאי? אילימא מפני הכבוד השתא משאל שאיל, אהדורי מבעיא?! אלא: שואל מפני הכבוד ומשיב שלום לכל אדם.

> In the paragraphs [of the *Sh'ma*] one may [interrupt and] inquire etc. (about another's welfare for the sake of that person's honor, and one may also return a greeting)." For the sake of what may one return [a greeting]...If we say for the sake of (a person's) honor [that cannot be]! Now [as for the] one [that] may actually inquire, it is necessary [that] he may return [a greeting]? Or may one inquire for the sake of honor and one may return a greeting to any person? (Rashi--even to one who is not esteemed). Rather [this is what R. Meir means]:[In between the paragraphs of the *Sh'ma* and its blessings] one may inquire [about another's welfare] for the sake of [that person's] honor. And one may return a greeting to any person (b. Berakhot 13b-14a).

The Sages say that one returns a greeting because of honor, but that one would be returning a greeting out of fear in some cases. So why teach that one returns the greeting (if fear is an obvious motivation)? Again, the emphasis is on honor of the person who originally inquired.

> אימא סיפא: "ובאמצע שואל מפני היראה ומשיב",משיב מהמת מאי? אילימא מפני היראה השתא משאל שאיל אהדורי מבעיא?! אלא מפני הכבוד.
>
> Consider the latter part [of R. Meir's statement in the mishnah]: And in the middle [of reciting Sh'ma or one of its blessings] one may [interrupt and] inquire [about another's welfare only] on account of fear [he has for his life] and he may return [a greeting]. For the sake of what may he return [a greeting in this case?] If we say for the sake of fear [he has for his life, this cannot be for] now [that] one may actually inquire [about another's welfare to save one's own life,] is it necessary [to teach that] he may return [a greeting for that purpose? Of course he may!] Rather, [this is what R. Meir means: While in the middle of a paragraph of the *Sh'ma* or one of its blessings, one may return a greeting] for the sake of [a person's] honor (b. Berakhot 13b-14a).

In concluding its discussion on the matter, the Talmud says that the mishnah teaches that in between the paragraphs of the *Sh'ma* one may interrupt and inquire about another's welfare for the sake of that person's honor and it is not necessary to say that he may return that person's greeting. If one is in the middle of a paragraph or one of its blessings one can interrupt only on account of fear for his life and it is not necessary to say that he may return that person's greeting. R. Yehudah says that he may interrupt n the middle of the blessings or the recitation of the *Sh'ma*, he may interrupt only to inquire about another's welfare only on account of fear, but is more liberal in his approach, saying that hey may return a greeting even for the sake of

another person's honor. In other words, while R. Meir tries to limit the greeting and response amidst the paragraphs only to the fear one is experiencing, R. Yehudah sees the value of honor trumping even that. A greeting must be responded to wherever one is in the recitation.

Finally there is one more part here where the Sages emphasize honor--that of teachers and anyone "greater" than the individual. In this case the pray-er may interrupt between the paragraphs. Only fear would allow one to interrupt amidst the paragraphs.

> ובפרקים שואל מפני הכבוד ומשיב שלום לכל אדם. תניא נמי הכי: שמע ופגע בו רבו או גדול הימנו בפרקים שואל מפני הכבוד ואין צריך לומר שהוא משיב. ובאמצא שואל מפני היראה ואין צריך לומר שהיא משיב, דברי רבי מאיר. רבי יהודה אימר באמצע שואל מפני היראה ומשיב מפני הכבוד. ומשיב שלום לכל אדם.

> And in the paragraphs he may inquire for the sake of honor and he may return a greeting to any person. It was also taught in a Baraita: One who is reciting the *Sh'ma* and is encountered by his teacher or anyone greater than himself, in the paragraphs he may inquire for the sake of honor and it is not necessary to say that he may return and in the middle he may inquire on account of the fear and it is not necessary to say that he may return--the words of R. Meir (b. Berakhot 14a).

The discussion above does not debate the point first raised in the mishnah: that the recitation of the *Sh'ma* could, in fact, be interrupted. The concern of the Sages here is the conditions under which a person would interrupt to proactively greet someone and under which a person may reactively greet. That the conversation presumes that interruption is possible demonstrates that the underlying idea introduced by the Mishnah is accepted by the Sages in Bavel. Here they are trying to better understand

the conditions that the Mishnaic sages were imagining. In the Talmud, the sages support the idea of interruption to either greet or respond to someone for the *sake of honor* of that person[19].

The Halacha on Interruption in the *Mishneh Torah*

The *halacha* on the interruption of the recitation of the *Sh'ma* is summarized by Rambam in the Mishneh Torah following from where the Talmudic sages left the discussion over 500 years prior:

> [The following rules apply when] one encounters other people or is approached by them while reciting the *Sh'ma*. If he is between sections, he should stop and greet those he is obligated to honor - e.g., his father, his teacher or anyone greater than he in learning. He may return the greetings of any person who initiates the friendly exchange (Mishneh Torah Hilchot Kri'at Sh'ma 2:15).

Rambam maintains the stringency for greeting out of fear when one is in the midst of a section, but not between paragraphs, while returning the greeting similarly to one who he is obligated to honor:

> If one is in the middle [of a section], he may stop and initiate an exchange of greetings only with someone of whom he is afraid -- e.g., a king or tyrant. However, he may return the greetings of those he is obligated to honor, e.g., his father or his teacher[20] (Mishneh Torah Hilchot Kri'at Sh'ma 2:16).

Finally, the Rambam notes that one *initiates* an exchange for one who is duty-

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19. The Talmud notes a *kal vachomer* argument: the recitation of *Sh'ma* is a Scriptural obligation, thus is there a question that the Hallel (a Rabbinic obligation) can be interrupted? R. Chiyah said: "One may interrupt and there is nothing wrong with that" (b. Berakhot 14a)). Again, the principle underlying said interruption is not common talking, but rather, out of fear of one's fellow or to respond to the greeting of someone out of respect for their honor.

20. Note that a person cannot stop in the middle of a section to respond to any person, only one he is obligated to honor.

bound to honor but may respond to anyone:

> These are the intervals between the sections: between the first blessing and the second; between the second [blessing] and *Sh'ma;* between the first and section sections of *Kri'at Sh'ma;* between the second and third sections of *Kri'at Sh'ma.* Between these sections, one initiates an exchange with one whom it is his duty to honor and responds to the greetings of anyone. However the interval between the end of the third section of *Kri'at Sh'ma* and [the paragraph beginning with] *Emet v'yatziv* is considered the middle of a section, and one may interrupt only to greet one of whom one is afraid, or to respond to the greetings of someone one is obligated to honor (Mishneh Torah Hilchot Kri'at Sh'ma, 2:17).

Rambam notes that one responds to the greetings of anyone between the paragraphs, but does not elaborate *why* one does so. Perhaps Rambam was uncomfortable with how both the Sages of the Mishnah and the Talmud stressed honor over a strict praxis during this liturgical rubric, or perhaps by now the system of communal prayer had so further evolved that a stricter standard needed to be in place to maintain some level of decorum in the synagogue environment. Whatever the case, the value of honor remains compelling as a reason to interrupt, and therefore it remains as it is first articulated from the Mishnah over a thousand years later in the Mishneh Torah.

Interruption In the Shulchan Aruch

The compendium of Jewish law by Rabbi Josef Karo, the *Shulhan Aruch*, supersedes the *Mishneh Torah* in terms of what constitutes Jewish law. In its articulation of the principle discussed above, it summarizes the *halacha* as it has evolved from the time of the Mishnah:

In between the sections [paragraphs] one may greet a respected person and

> return a greeting to anyone. In the middle of a section [amidst a paragraph], one may only greet someone whom one fears such as one's father, one's Torah teacher or a person who is greater than oneself in Torah wisdom and certainly a king or a violent person. However one may return the greeting of a respected person. This even applies if one is in the middle of a verse, with the exceptions of *Sh'ma yisrael* and *Baruch sham kavod*, during which one should not make any interruption whatsoever, unless because of someone one fears may otherwise kill him (Shuchan Aruch Orach Hayyim 66).

As a guide for people who needed a source book to explain the "how" of being Jewish, especially after the expulsion from Spain where the majority of Jews found themselves in the Ottoman Empire, this brief recapitulation makes it clear, without equivocation, that interruption between the sections to respond to the greeting of a respected or feared person is allowable, and one may respond to the greeting of anyone . The Mishnah Berurah notes, however, that since most recitation of the *Sh'ma* and its blessings is done in the synagogue environment, people would in all likelihood not seek to interrupt a person during their recitation.

Interrupting for Honor

This chapter shows how the rabbis, from the beginning of rabbinic Judaism, place honor at the cornerstone of a system that will develop into communal prayer. From the Mishnah through the Talmudic argumentation to the legal codification by Rambam and Rabbi Karo, the principle of honor that is articulated is transmitted as an enduring value. Ideally a pray-er should strive to recite the *Sh'ma* and its blessings without interruption to focus one's intention, one's *kavana* on accepting the "yoke of heaven."

Yet what began as a discussion about what the breaks are between the

paragraphs of the *Sh'ma* and what seemed to be a mechanical discussion about these breaks is instead an important statement of what happens on the human-human plane when people come together as a praying community. One may greet out of fear, interrupting amidst the paragraphs. One may respond to the greeting of any person out of that person's honor between the paragraphs. By recognizing the concomitant importance of how the praying human beings are to behave toward one another, the rabbis demonstrate their sophisticated understanding of how humans behave when they come into contact with other human beings, and that respect for one's fellow human is an essential building block for a system based in community.

Chapter Five: The Honor of the Tzibbur

The rabbis make it possible for communal prayer to take place anywhere ten Jews could assemble, thus building the flexibility and mobility needed. Prayer could happen in any place. There was no need to be at a central location in Jerusalem or elsewhere, nor was there the need for a priestly class to perform the ritual functions on behalf of the community. Having created a mechanism for a Judaism that could be practiced anywhere, the rabbis turned their attention to how each individual prayer community would function given the geographic autonomy. In understanding the dynamics of humans when they come together, the rabbis understood that a prayer community would need to be self-governing so that anarchy would not ensue. Prayer communities and their leadership had to be re-imagined and empowered.

Each prayer community would have to self-regulate, yet they were not free to make up the rules as they went along. For the system to function, each individual in a praying community had an obligation to fulfill and this needed to be facilitated.

Sparking Creativity: Mishnah Rosh HaShanah Introduces the Sheliach Tzibbur

Rabbinic creativity teases out the *sheliach tzibbur*[21] (שליח ציבור) from a mishnah that ostensibly has nothing to do with maintaining a system of communal prayer:

> כשם ששליח ציבור חייב, כך כל יחיד ויחיד חייב. רבן גמליאל אומר: שליח צבור מוציא את הרבים ידי חובתן.
>
> Just as the *sheliach tzibbur* is liable, so each individual is liable. Rabban Gamliel says, "The *sheliach tzibbur* **carries out the obligation on behalf of the community** [so in the present instance the individuals do not have to sound the shofar as well] (m. Rosh Hashanah 4:9).

This mishnah says nothing about representing the community, nor does it say who appoints the *sheliach tzibbur*. It specifically discusses the obligation of hearing the sounding of the *shofar* on *Rosh HaShanah* (the mitzvah being not the *sounding* of the *shofar*, but the *hearing* of it.) It clearly articulates the idea that the responsibility for carrying out the obligation for the sounding of the *shofar* falls to the *sheliach tzibbur*--the people fulfill by listening.

From this mishnah a magnificent kind of leadership role is created. It begins with the naming of the position itself: *sheliach tzibbur*. An emissary of the congregation literally connotes that the person fulfilling this responsibility is drawn from the praying community and is appointed to that role as the one who is acting on behalf of the congrega-

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21. This is similar to what the rabbis did in showcasing the concept of honor between human beings in allowing humans to respond to the greeting of another during the recitation of the *Sh'ma* and its blessings.

tion. The development of the *sheliach tzibbur* in the system of communal prayer made that designation explicit. In this term itself are the kernels of two of its most important dynamics: first that when the community comes together, it acts as a corporate body, a *tzibbur* and second that it is lead by someone who is considered the *sheliach*, the emissary of the *tzibbur*. Each community is its own *tzibbur*[22]. Each *tzibbur* can choose its own *sheliach*. The dynamic, then, is multi-valent and inherently flexible.

Naming the Community as One: The *Tzibbur*

Ten people (or more) coming together to pray is a fundamental building-block of creating Jewish community no matter where Jews are located. Specifically, within the context of prayer, what makes the ten or more a building block is that it allowed to function as if it were one, a singular entity. The rabbis recognize this and convey upon each *tzibbur* special status where the *tzibbur*, as a body, is worthy of being honored:

> It [*tzibbur*] is a concept of relationship, referring to the group as a corporate entity, a collectivity, in contradistinction to the individual member. Being a concept of relationship, *tzibbur* is a cognitive concept often fused with the value concept of Israel. When the word *tzibbur* is used, the value concept of Israel is made concrete, embodied in a living human group (Kadushin 131)[23].

By virtue of relating to one another and demonstrating a level of cohesiveness, the *tzibbur* as an entity gives Jewish life heft, but more importantly, agency. The *tzib-*

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22. In Modern Hebrew it means public.

23. Covenantal Jewish theology experiences God and the Jewish people as being in relationship. This relationship is one where considers the Jewish people an *am segula*, a treasured possession. Here, the relationship is made manifest through the community coming together as a *tzibbur*, a physical manifestation of the people Israel.

bur's acts on behalf of the community and on behalf of the people Israel to affect communal religious practice. Symbolically each communal grouping embodies what is to be Israel, the people. Here, they come together with a specific purpose, to affect that fulfillment of the obligation to pray and in so doing, glorify both God's creation and God on a higher level. Acting corporately, the *tzibbur* alters the religious experience:

> A *tzibbur* is a corporate entity, that is to say, it has a character which is often expressed in corporate acts. A corporate act is an act which, as a unitary entity, is performed by the *tzibbur*, but in which the individual members participate in definite and varied ways. Further, despite only sharing in the performance of the act, each individual has an experience of the act as a whole. Acts of communal worship require a face-to-face group. . .the face-to-face *tzibbur*, in the very process of a corporate act, bring to its members a vivid awareness of God's holiness. The *tzibbur* enables the individual to achieve an experience of worship he could not otherwise have achieved (Kadushin 131-132).

In Kadushin's construction, one can see that *devairm sh'b'kedushah*, those liturgical acts with intrinsic holiness requiring ten to be present, is not the only reason why ten or more come together. There also needs to be community to which to belong, in which one participates, and that is necessary to fulfill one's obligation, individually within community. The whole is, literally, greater than the individual parts in the function of the system of communal prayer. Seeing the face of the other and joining together raises awareness, as Kadushin so beautifully states, of God's holiness, an awareness that is made more acute by seeing others having a similar experience.

Naming the Leader: Sheliach

In Hebrew, *li-shloach* (לשלח) means "to send." A *shaliach* is one who is sent. When connected to the *tzibbur*, a *sheliach tzibbur* is the "one who is sent by the congregation." Each time that it gathers to pray, a congregation, acting as a *tzibbur*, is entitled to select a *sheliach* to lead it. This person is one who is competent in the prayers and who can lead the praying community in actuating them. Moreover, the *sheliach* is one of their own:

> . . .the role of the "Prayer Leader" (*sheliach tzibbur*), literally "Emissary of the Community" is merely a formal one--to recite the prayers aloud. For this task, no professional officiant is needed. On the contrary, every member of the community is judged worthy and fit to represent his peers (Heinemann 16.)

By its very design, the *sheliach tzibbur* is drawn from the praying community each time it assembles. Complementing the idea that the praying community could assemble anywhere, the *sheliach tzibbur* promotes sustainability of a communal prayer by having built-in leadership. This means that the *tzibbur* would not have to rely on outside expertise or people who might represent themselves as descendants from the Temple's power-structure. It could not function if it had to wait for a traveling prayer leader to come periodically to the community. A person would be appointed by the praying community who the community felt was capable of leading them in that moment.

The ability of the *tzibbur* to make such an appointment presumes two important points with respect to its functioning: (1) that acting together the *tzibbur* can make corporate decisions and (2) that there is a person within that particular praying community

competent to lead the prayers and who otherwise holds no special standing, priestly, rabbinically, or otherwise.

The Sheliach Tzibbur: Praying For or With the Tzibbur?

The Mishnah introduces the idea that a person who is obligated in prayer can have that obligation fulfilled by the *sheliach tzibbur*, provided that the pray-er is present when the prayer is being performed. This is where the Gemara picks up. Commenting on the above mishnah (that Rabban Gamliel says that the *sheliach tzibbur* discharges the public's obligation for them), the Gemara introduces a baraita which elaborates on whether or not, in fact, the *sheliach tzibbur* can fulfill a person's obligation:

תניא: אמרו לו לרבן גמליאל: לדבריך למה צבור מתפללין? אמר להם: כדי להסדיר שליח צבור תפלתו. אמר להם רבן גמליאל: למה שליח צבור יורד לדבריכם לפני התיבה? אמרו לו: כדי להוציא את שאינו בקי. אמר להם: כשם שמוציא את שאינו בקי כך מוציא את הבקי! אמר רבה בר בר חנה אמר ר' יוחנן מודים חכמים לרבן גמליאל ורב אמר עדיין היא מחלוקת.

> The rabbis taught in a baraita: They said to Rabban Gamliel: According to your opinion, why does the congregation pray [silently before its *sheliach tzibbur* prays out loud]? [Rabban Gamliel] replied: [it is] so that the *sheliach tzibbur* can prepare [for] his [own] prayer] while the congregation is thus occupied. Rabban Gamliel said to [the rabbis]: According to your opinion, why does the *sheliach tzibbur* descend before the ark [to repeat the prayer?] They replied: [It is] so that he may discharge [the obligation of] one who is not competent. [For although those who are able to pray cannot fulfill their obligation through listening to the *sheliach tzibbur*, those who are incompetent may fulfill their obligation in this manner.] [Raban Gamliel] replied to them: Just as [you admit that] he can discharge [the obligation of] one who is incompetent, so can he discharge for one who is competent! Rabbah bar bar Channah said in the name of R. Yochanan: The Sages conceded to Rabban Gamliel [that even those who are competent in prayer may fulfill their obligation through listening to the *sheliach tzibbur*. But Rav said: It is still a dispute (b.Rosh Hashanah 34b).

This argument distills how the role of *sheliach tzibbur* would become multi-valent

facilitating both the *tzibbur* as a collective and the pray-er as an individual. Through the agency of the *sheliach tzibbur*, the pray-er is not relieved of the obligation to pray. Each person, whether or not competent in the prayers and the way of praying, is *required* to participate, to be part of the *tzibbur*. Similarly, each member of the praying community has to fulfill his[24] own obligation to pray. This can be done two ways: (1) through praying the prayers one's self and (2) by responding to the prayers of the *sheliach tzibbur*. How the individual fulfills this obligation does not necessarily depend on the individual's ability to know or even perform the prayers for himself. That responsibility devolves to the enhanced performative power of the *sheliach tzibbur*. By performing the prayers, a pray-er can respond "amen" and be considered as fulfilling the obligation to pray. This is considered active participation, where the pray-er is not just sitting as a passive observer, but participating at a level of competence:

> Although there were undoubtedly many people who were not fluent in the fixed prayers (being unable to remember those prayers which had been formulated by others, or to compose their own prayers according to the rules set down by the Sages), and who were thus necessarily dependent on hearing the prayers recited by the Prayer Leader in order to fulfill their obligation, nonetheless, their participation through listening was of an active nature, which found expression in the frequent responses "Amen!", "Blessed be the Lord to whom blessing is due forever and ever," "May his great Name be eternally blessed", "Blessed be the name of his glorious kingdom for al eternity," etc. (Heinemann 16).

Moreover, by so responding, the pray-er's response allows one to identify as a member of the corporate body, of the *tzibbur*:

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24. Today women, in liberal streams of Judaism, also have the obligation to pray.

> The role of the response in public prayer is, then, a vital and substantial one: through his response, the listener identifies himself with the prayers of the community and becomes an active participant in its worship, though he may himself be unable to recite these prayers (ibid).

As we saw in chapter three where the rabbis laud communal prayer for its intrinsically higher value (and thereby reinforce the new system they are creating), the rabbis repeatedly praise the one who responds as a member of the community:

- "There is nothing more which the Holy One, blessed be he!, values more than the 'amen!" with which Israel responds" (Deuteromony Rabbah, VII, 1).
- "Greater is he who answers, "Amen" than he who pronounced the benediction" (b. Berakhot 53b).
- "The gates of Paradise are opened for anyone who answers, "Amen!", with all his might (b. Shabbat 119b).
- The hour of public worship in the synagogue is the occasion when the individual is given permission to raise his voice (Numbers Rabbah, IV, 20) and to join in with the entire community; for prayer is not complete except in the synagogue at the hour when the community holds its service (b. Berakhot, 6a, 7a; j. Berakhot, V, 8d; and numerous other passages)

Instead of a person feeling incompetent in his praying, the multi-valent nature of the *sheliach tzibbur's* functioning actually allows each individual to leave a service having fulfilled his[25] obligation. This is empowering to the pray-er because it does

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25. I try to use language that denotes human beings wherever possible. I do so by using words such as "individuals" instead of men, "pray-er" instead of him, and other terms that attempt to work around the maleness of what is being described. Even though I am using such language, it is not because of naivete that it was only men that the rabbinic and subsequent texts were discussing when they arrived at such matters. Rather, it is an attempt to demonstrate that their inventiveness and understanding of the human being when they come together in community for prayer would later on evolve to include in liberal Judaisms both men and women. Thus, the system, as it evolved, continued to have standing as it included the entire Jewish community, male and female.

not allow one to absent one's self from the praying community because of a lack of knowledge. The lack of knowledge is obviated as an excuse not to pray. Rather, to shore up the coming together of ten individuals, membership in a *tzibbur* was not predicated on each pray-er having specific knowledge to participate fully. Their responses would allow them to fulfill their obligation. It also underscores the honor of each person in the praying community. A person's education level normally would exclude someone from participating if they did not have the requisite understanding of the proceedings. In this construct, a person who did not have the education was both a part of community and valued just for responding to the prayers.

This lack of education, however, disqualifies these individuals from serving as *sheliach tzibbur*. Depending on the number of uneducated people, a prayer community may sometimes (or oftentimes) lack the flexibility to change out who is appointed as *sheliach tzibbur*. Having knowledgeable people to lead was not a given. During the communal prayer system's first 1,000 years of development, there was no printed *siddur*, a prayer book with the order of prayer. For the subsequent 500 years, there were prayer books, but the printing press would not arrive until the 1500s, resulting in the fact that most prayer services would be either memorized by the *sheliach tzibbur* or that he would use one handwritten copy.

Thus the *sheliach tzibbur* had a third role, a pedagogical one. In repeating the liturgy and performing it correctly, the congregation becomes habituated to the

correct manner of Jewish prayer[26].

From an Idea to a Way of Being: Codification of a Relationship

From the nucleus of the mishnah regarding the blowing of shofar, the *sheliach tzibbur's* role became firmly established in Jewish law (if not also in practice) as recorded in the *Shulchan Aruch Orach Hayiim* 124: "The law as regards how a community prayer should act with respect to the 18 blessing prayer and the law as regards the responding of amen (אמן.)" One sees in the articulation of the "how" of the *sheliach tzibbur* that there is a psychological component required of the pray-er who is fulfilling his obligation through the recitation of the *sheliach tzibbur*:

> After the congregation have finished their praying of the *shemoneh esrei* the sh'tz[27] should repeat the prayer. The purpose of this repetition of the prayer is that if there is somebody present who does not know how to pray the prayer, he can apply his mind to what the sh"tz is saying and thereby fulfill his obligation. A person who fulfills his obligation by means of the sh'tz must apply his mind to everything that the sh"tz says from beginning to end. He may not make an interruption and may not speak and must step three steps backwards at the end of the prayer, just like a person who prays for himself (Shulchan Aruch Orach Hayiim 124:1).

The profundity of the relationship between the *sheliach tzibbur* and the pray-er is indicated in the gloss to the following, that at least one person should respond "amen." Again, this reenforces the idea that one who is not educated has a valuable role to play:

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26. The correct "manner" of Jewish prayer evolved over the first 1,000 years from the time of the Mishnah. Certain prayer formulas, while not yet fixed, were known and used.

27. *"sh"tz"* is an acronym for "sheliach tzibbur"---the prayer leader in Orthodox and Conservative congregations is still referred to as the "shatz" and the repetition of the Amidah is known as the *hazarat hashatz*, the repetition of the shatz.

> When a sh"tz enters the synagogue and discovers that the congregation have already prayed the *shemoneh esrei* quietly and he needs to officiate before the Holy Ark instantly, he should descend in front of the holy ark and pray aloud for the congregation he does not need to pray the prayer again quietly. *Gloss: Likewise when it is a time of pressing need, such as when they are afraid (7) that the time for praying the prayer will elapse before they have prayed it, the sh"tz may pray immediately aloud and the congregation should pray together with him quietly, word by word, until after the words* הקל הקדוש. *It is desirable that there should be at least one person who will respond* אמן *to the sh"tz* (Shulchan Aruch Orach Hayiim 124:2).

The Sages were also aware that there was a delicate balance between the individual recitation of prayer and the repetition by the *sheliach tzibbur*. There was a "dance"--one would wait for people to conclude, or at least for the majority of the people to conclude. However, that time was not infinite and the *sheliach tzibbur* was not required to wait until every pray-er has concluded:

> When a community have prayed the *shemoneh esrei*, then although they are all capable of praying the prayer for themselves, a sh"tz should descend in front of the Holy Ark and pray the prayer again in order to fulfill the ordainment of the Sages. *Gloss: If there are individuals in the community who take long over their praying of the prayer the sh"tz should not wait for them before he starts to repeat the prayer. This applies even if they are city notables. Likewise, once there is a minyan in the synagogue they should not wait before they start praying for a notable or distinguished person who has not yet arrived* (Shulchan Aruch Orach Hayiim 124:3).

Similarly, the congregation must maintain a level of appropriate behavior during the *sheliach tzibbur's* repetition. Intentionality is important, and as the text below states, without proper intention, the *sheliach tzibbur's* blessings could be offered in vain:

> When the sh"tz repeats the *shomeneh esrei* the community are required to be silent and apply their minds to the blessings made by the chazan and respond אמן to them. If there are not nine people applying their minds to his blessings, the blessings are almost vain blessings. Therefore, everyone should behave as if there will not be nine people doing so without him and apply his mind to the blessing the chazan is saying. *There are authorities who say that all people should*

stand while the sh"tz repeats the shemoneh esrai (Shulchan Aruch Orach Hayiim 124:4).

The *tzibbur* itself is always in a kind of constant tension between the davening of the *sheliach tzibbur* and the individual's davening. This is why whenever a blessing is offered, the members of the *tzibbur* are enjoined to make a response:

> Upon hearing any blessing anywhere, a person should say *baruch who ovaruch shmo* (ברוך הוא וברך שמו) (Blessed is He and blessed is His Name)(Shulchan Aruch Orach Hayiim 124:5).

Similarly, every blessing uttered by the *sheliach tzibbur* is responded to by the congregation with "amen." The recitation of "amen" cannot be merely formulaic, but rather, must be done with intention:

> The congregation should respond amen (אמן) to every blessing when the sh"tz repeats the *shemoneh esrai*. This applies both to those who have fulfilled their obligation as regards the praying of the prayer and to those who have not fulfilled their obligations. The amen should be responded with application *b'kavanah* (בכוונה), i.e. one should have in mind that the blessing said by the person who made the blessing is truth and one believes it (Shulchan Aruch Orach Hayiim 124:6).

Finally, there is the priority placed on how people are to behave within the prayer community environment. People talk in synagogue which may make it hard for those who need to hear the *sheliach tzibbur* to do so if they are trying to respond to the blessings. It is also rude to those who are there not to talk, but to pray:

> One should not talk ordinary conversation while the sh"tz repeats the *shomeneh esrai*. If one does talk such conversation he is a sinner. His iniquity is more than can be borne and he should be rebuked. *Gloss: one should teach his small children to respond amen* for as soon as a child responds amen he has a share in the world to come (Shulchan Aruch Orach Hayiim 124:7).

In this gloss on teaching small children, one sees the importance of habituating children to the workings of a system from an early age. Even before children can read or write, they can understand from repetition that there are times when to respond "amen." With this understanding it is possible for a person to fulfill his obligation to pray from the age of 13 whether he knows the prayers or not through the sh'tz facilitating his saying "amen" after the sh"tz recites a prayer.

The *sheliach tzibbur* has corresponding responsibilities--it is not all placed in the hands of the *tzibbur* itself with respect with how to acquit the respective responsibilities. There are extensive *halachot* with respect to the proper execution of the *sheliach tzibbur*'s prayers. If a mistake is made, depending on what kind of mistake it is, the congregation is required to immediately replace the *sheliach tzibbur*. There are other opportunities where the sh"tz has the opportunity to go back and fix an error as well. The *sheliach tzibbur* is not given unlimited power through his designation by the congregation. In fact, he is enjoined from burdening the congregation. More about this will be explored in the following chapter.

Rabbinic Ingenuity in Enfranchising Humans as Pray-ers

The genius of the taking of the idea of a *sheliach tzibbur* and extending it to the system of communal prayer should be viewed as one of the great feats of rabbinic imagination and vision. In fleshing out the idea, the rabbis are able to convey to the praying communities that each of them has the ability to be self-sustaining, that every Jew, no matter who they are or what they know, can pray and fulfill his obligation, and that even people who know how to pray can have his or her obligation fulfilled as well. Truly, the elaboration of the role of *sheliach tzibbur* promoted the idea of self-sustaining groups coming together with the ability and the authority to legitimately function.

What happens, however, when a *sheliach tzibbur* becomes excessively burdensome to the congregation? What happens when a *sheliach tzibbur* distracts the congregation? What happens when the functioning of the prayer environment becomes an imposition? What reasons would there be for disallowing this? The rabbis and later Jewish law provided for that, and this is where we next turn our attention.

Chapter Six: Kavod v'Shalom: For All My Paths are Paths of Peace

Kevod Tzibbur/Tircha d'Tzibbura: Honoring the Congregation

Complementing the honor of the individual is the honor that Jews accrue as an assembled prayer community. Through acting on this agency, each *tzibbur* becomes itself worthy of honor as a manifestation of the People Israel. Even though the *tzibbur* is self-administrating, it cannot function without certain limits placed on behaviors that would be damaging to the system's perpetuation. As Ruth Langer writes :

> Formation of a liturgical system acceptable and accessible to the community must also ensure that, at an emotional level, people will react well to what is being promulgated. What otherwise might be permitted or desired by individuals must be restrained in light of the honor of the congregation (Langer 23).

As individual pray-ers, the members of a praying community are not free to follow whatever *minhag* (custom) or rules that are convenient to them. For the multivalent role of the *sheliach tzibbur* to function, there needs to be an understood "rules of engagement" that allow for the individual and the community to move along the prayer service in a fairly simultaneous time-frame. The Talmud gives an example of how even the greatest of rabbis, Akivah, would adapt his prayers when he was acting as *sh"tz* so as to not burden the congregation:

תניא: אמר רבי יהודה: כך היה מנהגו של רבי עקיבא כשהיה מתפלל עם הצבור — הטה מקצר ועולה , מפני טירח צבור.

> It was taught in a Baraita: R. Yehudah said: This was the custom of Rabbi Akiva: When he would pray together with the congregation, he would shorten and finish because of the burden upon the congregation (b. Berakhot 31a)

The concept of *tircha d'tzibbura* reflects "the desire not to overburden the congregants, especially to the point that they might be dissuaded from attempting to fulfill their own *halakhic* obligations" (Langer 24). In offering up its rabbinic exemplar *par excellence* in Rabbi Akiva, the Talmud makes its point clearly: If Rabbi Akivah does not desire to burden the congregation, how much more so any other person acting in the role of *sheliach tzibbur*.

Still, there remains a balance to be affected in how the *sheliach tzibbur* goes about his duties. Done one way, the *sh"tz* is inspiring and increases the focus and intention of the community. Done another way, the *sh"tz* burdens the community:

ש"צ שמאריך בתפלתו כדי שישמעו קולו ערב, אם הוא מחמת ששמח בלבו על שנותן הודאה להש"י בנעימה, תבא עליו ברכה. והוא שיתפלל בכובד ראש ועומד באימה וביראה. אבל אם מצוין להשמיע קולו, ושמח בקולו, ה"ז מגונה. ומ"ם כל שמאריך בתפלתו לא טוב עושה מפני טורח הצבור.

> The *sheliach tzibbur* who extends his prayers because he wants everybody to hear his nice voice, because he is happy in his heart because he gave glory to HaShem, May His Name be blessed, in a pleasant voice, upon him will be a blessing. And this also applies to the one who prays with intention/seriousness, and is full of fear of God, but if he just wants to hear his voice and is pleased with his voice, this is obscene. In any event, the one who makes his prayer longer, he is not doing well because of the *tirchat tzibbur* (Shulchan Aruch Orach Hayiim 53:11).

One acting as *sheliach tzibbur* is not allowed to be a "*tircha*," to act in such a way that burdens the congregation. Ego cannot and should not affect the *sh'tz* in the performance of his functions; the *sh"tz* cannot let his authority "go to his head" or become overwrought . A *sh"tz* must keep in mind at all times that leading a community and making people *halakhically* fulfilled in their prayers requires a high degree of responsi-

bility, both in terms of the correct performance of the prayers themselves, but also to the people whom they are leading.

The *sh"tz* is to lead in a way that makes ritual practice more meaningful, and pragmatically speaking, within the congregation's patience. It requires consciousness on behalf of the *sh"tz* as to how he is being received while he leads the prayers. A leader cannot become an island, separate and apart from the community. Even though the *sheliach tzibbur* is the emissary of the congregation, it is not a role that places one above the congregation. Nor should the *sh"tz* be allowed to improvise in such a way that what he is doing becomes unrecognizable to the *kahal*.

Sometimes a *sh"tz* will make a mistake. In some cases, he can return and redo the mistake (Shulchan Aruch Orach Hayiim 126:3) without it being considered a *tircha* to the community. Yet there are still other cases where correcting the mistake would entail a burden on the community. This applies mostly when the *sh"tz* makes a mistake in his private prayer and not in the public recitation that would fulfill the prayers of one who responds "amen":

אם טעה ש"ץ כשהתפלל בלחש, לעולם אינו כוקר ומתפלל שנית מפני טורח הצבור, אלא סומך על התפלה שיתפלל בקול רם, והוא שלא טעה בג' ראסונות, שאם טעה בהם, לעולם חוזר כמו שהיחיד חוזר.

> If a *sheliach tzibbur* erred when he prayed the eighteen-blessing prayer quietly, he should in no circumstances go back and pray it quietly again because of the burden to the congregation that this would involve (Shulchan Aruch Orach Hayiim, 126:4).

In another example, there is the case of Rav in the role of *sheliach tzibbur* who did not recite a blessing before reading and after the reading of the Torah. All those present fell to the floor to recite *tachanun*, personal supplications. Rav did not because it was a stone floor and, citing Leviticus "And a stone covering you shall not place 'in your land' to prostrate yourselves upon it" (Lev. 26:1). Rav could have walked to another place to where the floor was not made of stone, but did not. The Gemara asks and answers:

קמיה דרב הואי וליזיל לגבי צבורא ולינפול על אפיה? לא בעי למיטרח ציבורא.

> [The stone floor] was in front of Rav, [Rav] should have gone to the congregation and fall on his face. He did not wish to inconvenience the congregation [which would have had to rise for him in respect] (b. Megilla 22b).

Here it would have been the respect that the congregants would have had to pay to Rav that would have disrupted what they were doing. Being sensitive to this, Rav did not move to a place where there was no stone covering.

The idea of the *tircha d' tzibbura* is also cited in the shaping the system of required prayers. In a discussion of what would be included in the three paragraphs of the *Sh'ma*, the exclusion of the paragraph of Balak is cited because its length would be unnecessarily burdensome to the community:

אמר רבי אבהו בנ זרטרתי אמר רבי יהודה בר זבידא: בקשו לקבוע פרשת בלק בקריאת שמע, ומפני מה לא קבעוה — משום תורח צבור.

> R. Abahu ben Zutarti said in the name of R. Yehudah bar Zevida: They sought to establish the passage of Balak in the reading of the *Sh'ma*. And why did the not establish it? Because of the burden on the congregation (b.Berakhot 12b).

The emotional currency of the *tircha d'tzibbur* carries it to this day as a reason for why certain behaviors are just not done by the one leading the congregation. Leaving it construed broadly is an important strategy, as this looseness or flexibility allows the idea of a *tircha d'tzibbura* to have a broad application. What may bother one community may be different from what bothers another.

Thus, even though the radically-egalitarian nature of the *sheliach tzibbur* gives each praying community the flexibility to appoint its own leadership, the one who gets the nod is not given complete latitude to do whatever desired. The *sh"tz* does his job in concert with the community; they work together on behalf of the community's honor, and in so doing, mutually reinforce the overall system.

Efficient Functioning Honors the Congregation

Honor to the congregations is not just to how the *sheliach tzibbur* fulfills his responsibilities. The honor of the [praying] community (*kevod tzibbur)* is what motivates the adaptation of how liturgical practices are done to convey to those assembled that there is great meaning to what they are doing. Honoring the *tzibbur* is the reason given for why:

- Only a ritually fit Torah scroll can be used in the synagogue (b. Gittin 60a): A Torah with any kind of error in it is rendered unfit for use because the honor of the praying community demands that the Torah be *kasher*, that is, fit for use.

- A second (or third) scroll is used instead of making the community wait to roll one scroll from one place to another if there is an additional reading from another place in the Torah (b. Yoma 70a). Here it assumes that the praying community would have more than one *sefer Torah*. There are many occasions that call for reading the regular weekly portion and then a special maftir reading. The community would be burdened by having to wait while a Torah scroll is rolled from one place to another.

- People who are not dressed properly are excluded from reading the Torah (B. Megillah 23a, 24b). This is not done out of a sense of honor to the Torah (although it is there), but to the overall assembled community. The disrespect of improper dress is experienced by the people present, not the scroll.

- One reads from the Torah scroll and not from a printed chumash (MT, Hilchot Tefilah, 12:23). This, of course, is a later addition once the ability to print a chumash made reading from it possible. Still, the evolving tradition still drew on the idea of the honor of the *tzibbur* to require that the Torah scroll be read, that the richness of the symbolism of reading from the Torah scroll itself maintained a tradition.

- A pray-er is prohibited from distracting others by praying out loud (or loudly). This practice most likely fell by the wayside as the *minhagim* of people were incorporated into praying--in Ashkenazic prayer practice, the individuals would pray orally but would quiet down and they pray aloud again. The point here, however. is in all cases never to be so loud that it becomes distracting to everyone around.

- One is prohibited from making everyone wait during one's prolonged or very physically active prayer (Tosefta Berakhot 3:5; b. Berakhot 31a). The moving of the body, largely in place, is a later addition to Jewish prayer practice. The prohibition here most likely dealt with those who would prostrate themselves or other physical enactments during prayer.
- Using discretion for replacing the *sheliach tzibbur* when a mistake is made (b. Berakhot 27b). Here is where discretion comes into play. The community retains within it the authority to remove a *sheliach tzibbur* for certain types of error. When a situation arose that would require such a removal, the entire proceedings would come to a stop while the existing sh"tz would be removed and a new one appointed. This practice suggests that there are certain errors that are more grievous than others. Not every error should require the replacement of the sh"tz and the people should not become the "prayer police." Discretion is necessary in order to honor the praying community so that interruptions do not become so routine that the performance of the prayer cannot happen.

Sensible Regulation Produces Human Sustainability

Regulating communal prayer, therefore, comes from the community on behalf of the community, not some outside power. In heightening the *kavod tzibbur*, the community not only reinforces its sense of worth, it also finds the mechanism through which to function.

Mipneh Darchai Shalom: For the Ways of Peace

Honor is a pervasive and highly-lauded value in the system of Jewish communal prayer. Sharing this distinction is one other value, a value that prayer-s ask that God fulfill for the world and that which is in the hands of humans to actually enact. That is peace, the goodwill and harmonious relations between God's human creations. Just as honor, either to the individual or to the assembled community, is given as the motivating factor for why something is or is not done, so too are peaceful relations *mipneh darchai shalom* (מפנה דרכי שלום) for the ways of peace.

In the same way that honor is based in the conception of human beings are made reflecting God's image, *mipneh darchai shalom* is the pervasive value of Torah *writ large* in the life of the Jew and the Jewish community. These words are regularly uttered each time after the Torah is read:

דרכיה דרכי נעם וכל נתיבותיה שלום.

It [the Torah] ways are ways of pleasantness and all of its paths are peace (Proverbs 3:17).

In communal situations where there is the potential for conflict, *mipneh darchai shalom* is cited for affecting a solution. This is seen today, for example, when a praying community wished to give out a honor. The Sages recognize that there are people within communities who the other members wish to honor for their learning, contributions, leadership, financial support, or any other reason to single-out a member of the praying community when it is assembled. Most frequently, the honor given in prayer services is

with respect to the reading of the Torah where *aliyot* are given out (three on weekdays, seven on Shabbat).

כהן קורא ראשון יאחריו לוי ואחריו טשראל מפני דרכי שלום.

> And these rules did they state in the interests of peace: A priest reads first, and afterward a Levite, and afterward an Israelite, in the interest of peace. . . (m. Gittin 5:8)

Commenting on this verse Rashi says: "In order that members of the community not come to strife, the sages ordained this order of *aliyot*. Since it is a rabbinic ordinance, it is not possible to change it, and thus, it prevents one who is not a priest from claiming 'I will read first.'" Later, the Rambam extends the sense of honor to the last person who is honored vis-a-vis the reading of the Torah: "By affording even the last person who rolls the Torah scroll closed a reward equivalent to that of all the others, therefore even the person of the greatest stature in the community can receive the concluding *aliyah* (Mishneh Torah Hilchot Tefilah 12:18).

More important than Rashi's comment is Abbaye's in responding to Rav Yosef: in the Gemara:

> All the Torah is מפנה דרכי שלום *mipnei darchei shalom*, is intended to engender peaceful relations, as it is written "her ways are the ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace [Prov. 3:17] (b. Gittin 59b).

The pervasive value of the concept, like the concept of responding to a person's greeting for the sake of honor, derives from the Mishnah[28], the Tannatic recording of an ideal Jewish nomos in post-Temple times. Its place, early-on in the history of the rab-

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28. Mishnah Gittin 5:8

binic reworking of Judaism gives it predominance in the constellation of Jewish religious values.

> Peace is so highly valued that it, like honor, is given great rabbinic support. There can be variation from strict boundaries "in order to establish peace" (b. Yevamot 65b).

How we are to treat the Jewish poor and the sick and dead is *Imitatio Dei*:

> One sustains the gentile poor with the Jewish poor, visits the gentile sick with the Jewish sick, and buries the gentile dead with the Jewish dead, because of ways of peace (b. Gittin 61a).

Finally, the Talmud declares with regard to Numbers 5:23:

> If in order to establish peace between husband and wife the Name of God, which was written in holiness, may be blotted out, how much more so to bring about peace for the world as a whole" (j. Sotah 1:4, 16d).

Recreating a Judaism that is Lived and Sustained by Humans

One sees in these texts over and over again how the rabbinic understanding and appreciation for the uniqueness of the human being is woven into the very fabric of the system of communal prayer that would sustain Judaism. In reimagining a Judaism with prayer as its central ritual act, the actors, the human beings, are central to the rabbinic mind. This centrality allows the rabbis, who gave themselves the authority to reinvent, the ability to focus on human needs from the very beginning of their imagining of this new system of communal prayer. Prayer would replace sacrifice and would allow Judaism, and the Jewish people, to adapt to a radically changed world.

In creating a system where ten Jews would have to come together for prayer, the rabbis found a mechanism through which Jews would have to seek out other Jews no

matter where they found themselves. Understanding that when people come together they often greet each other, the rabbis build-in flexibility for times where when one is interrupted in as important a prayer rubric as the *Sh'ma* and its blessings, one could respond to the greeting of any person because the one who issued the greeting is worthy of honor.

In making the system mobile and creating the requirement for ten in order to pray, the rabbis also create a unit, a *tzibbur*, which itself is honored. As a *tzibbur*, the members are given the authority to be self-regulating and to appoint for themselves one from their midst who would lead them in the prayers. This person, the *sheliach tzibbur*, both leads the congregation but also, through his prayers, can facilitate the halachic (legal) fulfillment of prayers by members of the community who do not know how to pray. This multi-valent function serves both pedagogic and communal functions as it habituates people to the order of prayers at the same time that it includes all of the members of the praying community, irrespective of knowledge.

The honor of the assembled praying community required that the the system function in such a way that people would not turn-away from their halachic requirements to pray. One is not allowed to be a *tircha d'tzibbura*, to "afflict the community" either through the leading of one's prayers or through one's behavior during prayers that others could find distracting.

All of this is to emphasize the value that the rabbis put on creating a system that would be sustained, one that would foster peaceful relations among those who came together to pray.

To be sure, the rabbis placed the majority of their attention of following Jewish law in serving God through prayer. Yet from the beginning of rabbinic Judaism, the rabbis demonstrate and reinforce their powerful understanding that this could only occur through creating a system that understands how humans are in relation to each other and as part of communities.

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