

KEVA AND KAVANNAH:
INTERTWINED FACETS OF THE PRAYER EXPERIENCE

By

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In the Babylonian Talmud tractate Berakhot, the rabbis discuss, argue, and often reach a conclusion about what they believe to be the proper way to pray. Their discussions center around Biblical proofs and rabbinic stories that taught them and continue to teach us valuable lessons about our path to prayer, how to pray the fixed liturgy in the *siddur*, and when we must pray with *kavannah*. Their various opinions push deeply into how, when, what and where we pray, and they search for answers about how we can pray properly so as best to communicate with, honor, praise, and give thanks to our real God for the wonders in our world. The rabbis never used the Talmud to question the idea of prayer or why we might engage in such a personal, spiritual ritual. Their search and perhaps their purpose in writing this section of the Talmud was simply to seek the answers as to how they might accomplish this task in the proper way.

In its simplest form, prayer is the way in which we connect to God. Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz defines prayer as “the salient expression of religious emotion in man and of his relationship with his Creator.”¹ We speak to God through prayer, and we connect with God through the words we speak, whether directly from the fixed liturgy in our prayer book or from the *kavannah* of our heart. Fixed liturgy, or *keva*, is traditionally defined as the fixed part of our prayer and practices, the laws that we are supposed to follow, and the specific directions and guidelines we maintain in order to do them “correctly.” How we define God might affect the *keva* in which we engage or the belief behind our fixed liturgy, but, as Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel writes, “The issue of prayer is not prayer; the issue of prayer is God. One cannot pray unless he has faith in his own ability to accost the infinite, merciful,

¹ Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz, *A Guide to Jewish Prayer* (New York: Israel Institute for Talmudic Publications, 2000), 8.

eternal God.”² Similarly, the rabbis root their prayer in their strong belief in God and their faith and dedication to following the *mitzvot* that were given to them by God. Their guidelines set forth in the Talmud helped guide them to that ultimate fulfillment, and therefore to connected to and with God.

The earliest form of communication with God took the shape of sacrifices. We assume that sacrifices that occurred in the Temple in Jerusalem were modeled on the sacrifices described in the book of Leviticus, and the daily rituals that surrounded that rite were performed exactly as prescribed in the Torah. If this were the case, individuals and families would make sacrifices to God for both good and bad events that transpired in their lives. This form of *keva* ultimately began to change shape when the Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed and people needed a different way to communicate with God. Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi mentions this shift on Bavli Berakhot 26b when explaining the time when the prayers of our forefathers were fixed in time and form, and when this fixed type of prayer through words instead of physical loss and giving one’s own possessions was instituted. It was this new type of prayer about which the rabbis thoroughly discussed and debated throughout Bavli Berakhot and beyond, and the importance of which was never in question by the rabbis.

The rabbis understood the importance of prayer to be the direct connection with God, just as the sacrifices were when the Temple stood in Jerusalem. Just as those sacrifices and offerings had a fixed time, place, and practice, so should prayer occur in its proper fashion in the proper place and time. The rabbis wanted to ensure a structure to prayer, rather than

² Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, ed. Susannah Heschel (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1996), 107.

simply relying on the spontaneous prayer that we find in the examples of Jacob before he meets Esau in the Book of Genesis, or Hannah's prayer to God in the Book of Samuel. And unlike the detailed outlines of the sacrifices in Leviticus, the structure for proper prayer was lacking a well-developed framework in which the rabbis and Jewish communities in general could root their new-found prayer practice. Thus the rabbis wrote the laws in the Mishnah and expounded on these guidelines in the Talmud, pulling and pushing and giving reason and support to these new *halakhot* about prayer.

The rabbis rooted their talmudic discussions and debates in textual sources from the Tanakh, with examples from many books in the Tanakh, beginning as early as Abraham. These sources provided support and depth to the different conversations, and helped to explain that prayer in any form has always been a fixed obligation that every Jew must practice. A story from Berakhot 26b elucidates the concretization of our prayers through the history of our forefathers. This passage portrays specific examples from the storylines of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob that illuminate the idea that the fixed timing of our prayer structure could be modeled after various actions in which they partook in the Torah. By rooting our prayer practice in the earliest stories of our ancestors, the rabbis were able to give depth and meaning to this new structure, and also to balance that newness with the antiquity of the Jewish people.

The rabbis provide these various texts to root our practices in our history. By doing so, the concept of prayer is not only equated to actions our ancestors took in their own stories, but also our own prayer services take on a new sense of depth, importance, and purpose. What was lacking from our forefathers was their definition of prayer, and even

what their communication with God looked like. Had the script of their conversation or their plea been recorded, perhaps we could emulate those words and actions, even take to heart and find our own *kavannah* in the words that they said. And while we might know pieces of their script as it has now been instituted into our prayer service, we do not know how they felt, what was behind their pleas, and how they connected to these words. Perhaps their prayers felt like Hannah's, a cry out to God for something they needed. Or maybe they felt like Abraham, awakening in the morning and rising to attend to the place where he had encountered God before. Or perhaps they acted according to the ways of Isaac, initiating a dialogue with someone or something, or even with himself, in the field where he then met his future wife Rebekah. The rabbis provide these readings of the actions of our ancestors in order to give new depth and ritual to the guidelines they set forth about the prayers we say and when we are to say them. And by doing so, they enhance our own prayers as well and root our modern-day experiences in our ancient literature and history.

The *keva* of our prayers, the words we say and how we say them, are fixed in a set of rulings and *halakhot* from the rabbis in the Mishnah, and expanded on in the Talmud. This *keva* includes the prayers in the various portions of the *siddur*, as well as the structure of the *t'fillot* specifically and the timing of the *t'fillot* in general. The rabbis spend much of Bavli Berakhot discussing the what, how, when, and where of prayer, from the broad conversation about the timing of when to say each Sh'ma throughout the day, to the miniscule details as to the exact time of the sunrise in order that we might say the morning Sh'ma specifically at its proper time. Being vigilant in prayer is something the rabbis considered of high import, perhaps more than anything else the rabbis discuss in Berakhot.

The majority of the first two chapters of Bavli Berakhot discusses fixed prayer, fixed order of prayers, and fixed time of prayer. Regularity of prayer and practice was of high significance, and the guidelines set forth in the Talmud helped individuals as well as future generations to know what a regular prayer life could and should look like. While there were different formats of praying, including communal and individual; spontaneous and fixed; and public and private, the rabbis placed the weight on the actual saying of the different prayers in the *siddur*, the prayers that were shared by one another, rather than the prayers in our hearts, at the proper time and in the proper way.

There are various stories and rulings throughout this section of Talmud that highlight the importance of *keva*. Berakhot 6b elucidates an example of a discussion about fixed prayer, both for location as well as for regularity. In this section, an example is given of a man who attends synagogue habitually, and discusses God's reaction to the reason offered for his absence on a specific occasion. This story is immediately followed with a ruling from Rabbi Helbo in the name of Rabbi Huna that says, "Whosoever has a fixed place for his prayer has the God of Abraham as his helper."³ In the opening Mishnah of Berakhot, we hear a story about Rabban Gamliel's sons who went to a party, and realized upon their return that they had not yet recited Sh'ma. When they asked their father what to do, he gave them the ruling about their obligation to say Sh'ma at the proper time. It is clear from these stories that the rabbis assumed, or at least emphasized, habitual practice, and were focused more on those times when ritual required accommodation or change from the practiced norm. How people went about their lives seemed up to the individual, so long as they followed the

³ Bavli Berakhot 6b

halakhot within the parameters set forth. Ultimately the goal was to teach the proper way to do the *mitzvot*, to ensure that they were done properly, and to keep people away from the transgression, as is clearly expressed at the end of the first Mishnah. The sages created rules that were perhaps a bit extreme, reaching the far ends of the stated boundaries

“כדי להרחיק את האדם מן העבירה,” “in order to distance a person from the transgression.”⁴

Impossible Separation of Keva and Kavannah

Although most of the texts covered in the first five chapters of Bavli Berakhot discuss the *keva* of prayer, it is impossible to say that the rabbis did not put much weight on the *kavannah* of the individual pray-er as well. Most of the discussions include thought about a person’s emotions; ability and stability to be able to pray; how they might enter their space; and what their mindset might be, and how each of these would affect the words that they speak and the intentions behind their regular prayers. As we know today, these emotions clearly affect one’s mind space and how much one can or cannot focus. But the rabbis considered the focus of the individual to be hugely important. Heschel explains perfectly how the rabbis might have deciphered the balance of *keva* and *kavannah*, “There is a specific difficulty of Jewish prayer. There are laws: how to pray, when to pray, what to pray. There are fixed times, fixed ways, fixed texts. On the other hand, prayer is worship of the heart, the outpouring of the soul, a matter of devotion.”⁵ What Heschel expresses so eloquently is the eternal struggle in prayer: how do we express the words written in the prayer book with all our heart, our soul, and our might, while still recognizing the actualities of everyday life and

⁴ Bavli Berakhot 2a

⁵ Heschel, *Moral Grandeur*, 111.

distractions that push our mind in every direction? And even more so, how do we balance the words that our ancient rabbis wrote or formed from our texts with the realities of modern advances and scientific answers? How do we fundamentally root our beliefs and focus our mind for intense prayer to praise, request from, and give thanks to God through the words in the *siddur*?

There is a short teaching found on Berakhot 30a that sheds light on this balance and incorporates various aspects of both sides of the coin:

ת"ר היה רוכב על החמור והגיע זמן תפלה. אם יש לו מי שיאחז את חמורו ירד למטה ויתפלל ואם לאו ישב במקומו ויתפלל. רבי אומר בין כך ובין כך ישב במקומו ויתפלל לפי שאין דעתו מיושבת עליו. אמר רבא ואיתימא רבי יהושע בן לוי הלכה כרבי.

If a man was riding on a donkey when the time for prayer arrived. If he had someone who could hold his donkey, he gets down and prays, and if not, he sits in his place and prays. Rabbi says in either case, he sits in his place and prays so that he will not be worried. Rava, or as some say, R. Joshua b. Levi, said: The halachah follows Rabbi.⁶

In this *baraita*, we read about the importance of place and position, but also about the necessity to have a focused mind while praying. This text portrays the importance of *kavannah*, the focused mind, and that there are times when *kavannah* can or must outweigh the importance of the place or position. The rabbis clearly expect that one can have the ability to pray with a focused mind and should be set up for a successful prayer experience where a person can pray the *keva* with a mind free from distraction or worry.

Most of the rulings and discussions about prayer don't separate the *keva* from the *kavannah*. Of course there are details about the *keva* that must be discussed, but more often than not the rabbis include pieces about feelings, emotions, and the *kavannah* of the

⁶ Bavli Berakhot 30a

individual in their discussions about prayer, thus concluding that prayer is not simply about the words we say, but also about how we direct our hearts and focus our mind. After an entire chapter about the proper way to say the Sh'ma and her blessings, the rabbis open the second chapter by writing about *kavannah*. The Mishnah declares, "If a person is reading in the Torah and the time for the recitation of the Sh'ma arrives, if he had focused his heart (read with *kavannah*), he has fulfilled his obligation."⁷ The Gemara on this Mishnah begins with the declaration from the rabbis, "Learn from this [Mishnah]: *Mitzvot* require *kavannah*!"

⁸ Thus it is taught that, as important the *keva* is, one has not fulfilled the duty of the *mitzvah* unless it is done with *kavannah*. Therefore, the rabbis mandate that we can never fully separate the discussion of *keva* and *kavannah*, and that only when the two are fully entwined can a person have a complete, well-rounded prayer experience where his prayers are said gracefully and he has fulfilled his prayer obligation in its entirety.

How do we take these lessons to affect our prayer experiences today?

The rabbis did not include the discussion about a path to prayer in the Talmud because the rabbis and religious laity for whom they wrote was a praying group of people who observed the laws presented by the rabbis; they were not looking for reasons to pray, but rather how to pray in the proper way. The religious Jews who engaged in the study of Torah and Talmud and followed the *mitzvot* from God didn't need a reason to pray - it was just what they did as Jews and how they communicated with God. Perhaps they believed the words that they said, and they didn't question whether or not God existed. For them, it is

⁷ Bavli Berakhot 13a

⁸ Bavli Berakhot 13a

possible that they believed that the sun rose every day because God continually renewed creation; the body worked in wondrous ways because God created it that way; and that God did sustain life through love, supported the fallen, brought healing to the sick, freed the captive, and kept faith with those who slept in the dust, as is mentioned in our fixed liturgy. Or perhaps these reflect the beliefs of the rabbis who carried the hopes that every other Jew might believe this as well.

With the technological advances and furthering of scientific research, moderns increasingly questioning whether or not God exists in the world. Abraham Joshua Heschel writes, “The act of prayer is more than a process of the mind and a movement of the lips. It is an act that happens between man and God--in the presence of God.”⁹ So how do we take the importance of the *keva* that we learned above and infuse it with the *kavannah* necessary to fulfill our dutiful obligation of this act of prayer, this act that happens “in the presence of God,” when our notion of God is ever-changing and our beliefs about God’s role in the world might be somewhat in question?

A passage in Berakhot 48b in the Babylonian Talmud provides some history and reasoning behind four of the benedictions found in *Birkat HaMazon*. Rav Nahman explains that these four benedictions were drawn out of positive experiences for which people felt there was a need for a fixed prayer and a way to express their feelings of praise and thanksgiving for what they felt God had given to them. This piece of text certainly provides a rabbinic justification of where certain prayers in our liturgy came from, and the sound reasoning behind each of these benedictions in *Birkat HaMazon*. The central question that

⁹ Heschel, *Moral Grandeur*, 109.

this text raises is the following: How do individual prayers for both the positive and challenging events that occur in a person's life align with the prayers in the fixed liturgy of the *siddur*, and if they don't, how does a person continue to pray to God, both in communal prayer experiences, as well as in building their own relationship with God through prayer? According to this text, Moses, Joshua, David, Solomon and the people in Yavneh could create and add their own prayers in response to their experiences in relation to their belief in God and God's role in the good things that occurred in their lives. At the time when these different individuals and groups of people lived, the liturgy was still fluid and its contents were still being formed. But now that we live in a time and worship in a religion where the same prayers from the *matbeah shel t'fillah* can be found in almost any *siddur*, where is the space to add our own liturgy, our own spontaneous prayer of the heart, whether or not they align directly with the words in the *siddur*?

Berakhot 29b explains that Rabbi Eliezer said the following: "One whose prayer is fixed, his prayer is not a prayer of supplication."¹⁰ The Gemara expounds on this thought with the following:

"What is keva? Rabbi Ya'akov b. Idi said in the name of Rabbi Oshaya: Anyone whose prayer is like a heavy burden on him. The rabbis say: Anyone who does not say his prayers in the language of supplication. Rabbah and Rav Yosef both said: All who are unable to introduce something new in [his prayer]."¹¹

Steinsaltz comments on the final part of this Gemara, explaining that one who does not add something new into his prayer "for his needs" and only includes the fixed *keva* has not said

¹⁰ Bavli Berakhot 29b

¹¹ Bavli Berakhot 29b

any prayer of supplication.¹² The various pieces of this text, including the Mishnah, the Gemara, and the commentary, bring to light the conclusion that not only is the *mitzvah* of prayer supposed to be filled with *kavannah*, but even more so we are told that our prayer must include something of our own needs and not simply the words in the *siddur*. This implies that our prayers will not in fact be prayers to God at all but rather empty words that lack meaning and depth should they be missing the personalized, individual prayer.

Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi writes the following on the topic of *kavannah*:

“Jewish prayer begins with *kavannah*. To daven with *kavannah* means to pray with focus, intention, meaning. It means praying from the heart, rather than prayer centered solely on the mind...*Kavannah* lies at the heart of Jewish devotional life. That one word encompasses an entire body of inner work necessary to live consciously in the presence of God.”¹³

The various opinions included above teach that we as pray-ers are mandated to pray with *kavannah*, that our prayers may never be mindless or rote. To pray is to work through feelings and emotions, and to strive towards true devotion to, praise of, and connection with the one, real God with whom we are partners on this earth. Not only do the rabbis provide the structure for the already created prayers in the *siddur*, but they tell us that we may add our own prayers in response to events in the world, and also that we must include our personal prayer as well, a petition, praise, or act of thanks to God that reflects the events in our lives and makes relevant our prayer experience in general. According to Rabbah and Rav Yosef, if we are unable to add that additional prayer, we have not in fact prayed properly at all.

¹² Koren 192, Steinsaltz 29b

¹³ Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi and Joel Segel, *Davening: A Guide to Meaningful Jewish Prayer* (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2012), 5-6.

What does this mean for Reform Jewish prayer?

Perhaps the most compelling part of Reform Judaism is the push we make about “choice through knowledge.” By providing the option to observe the rituals and laws we choose and find meaningful, Reform Judaism shows itself to be an open and accepting movement where anyone can affiliate as Jewish with few if any standards for practice and ritual adaptation. This notion of choice through knowledge might also be the most problematic aspect of Reform Judaism. In making these choices and having the freedom to choose, many Reform Jews do not make the choice to learn and gain the knowledge in order to make their choices. Instead, they know that they will be accepted within their congregation when they choose to attend, or they simply will join a congregation in order for their children to attend religious school, just as they themselves did as children. In this, a lack of literacy is formed, resulting in the inability to make knowledgeable choices. And it is because of this illiteracy that many Reform Jews lose the possibility of a prayer experience where the *keva* is filled with depth, understanding, and true *kavannah*. Most Reform Jews do not attend *t’fillot* on a weekly basis, and even those who do may lack understanding of the Hebrew prayers. The rabbi and cantor conduct the service in both Hebrew and English, singing quickly through the Hebrew because most people do not understand what they are singing, and think nothing of it other than that of a pretty song.

There are many questions that we as pray-ers constantly ask about prayer: How does one pray? What does it mean to pray? How can I connect to something if I don’t know what I am saying? What if I don’t actually believe the words that are written in the prayer book? Many people have asked these questions and have received no answer, or perhaps they afraid

to ask the questions in the first place or don't even know which questions to ask. They are responsible for taking the journey of prayer on their own with little to no guidance, aside from that which the *siddur* might offer. Worse yet, they find little to no specific way to connect to the text without or even with the English translation. Still others connect neither through Hebrew nor English text, but simply through the music to which the prayer was set. For many Jews, what the prayers come to mean is at the discretion of each individual to decide. But as such, Reform Jews can end up in a double bind: they are free to develop their own connection to the liturgy, the prayer experience, the Jewish religion, and ultimately to God, but they frequently lack the tools and context to do so in any serious ways.

Rabbi Lawrence Hoffman writes in the Introduction to first volume of his *My People's Prayer Book* series, "Of all the books that line the shelves of a Jewish library, it is the *Siddur*, not the Talmud and not even the Bible, that Jews know best."¹⁴ It is true that Reform Jews might know the words of the prayers in the *siddur* better than they do the Torah or the Talmud, but is it enough to know the words without knowing the meaning behind them, or saying them mindlessly? According to the teaching of the rabbis, we are mandated to teach the *keva*, but also to help our students, young and old, to say their prayers with *kavannah*. And not only that, but we are also mandated to help our students and fellow Jews to understand what prayer is and how important it is to personalize prayer and add something of ourselves to the experience that goes above and beyond simply praying out of the prayer book.

¹⁴ Rabbi Lawrence A. Hoffman, ed., *My People's Prayer Book: Traditional Prayers and Modern Commentaries: The Sh'ma and its Blessings* (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2011), 1.

We must create space for Reform Jewish adults and children to question God, to experience God through the prayers in the liturgy, and, if they choose, to build a connection to God through understanding God's role in the world according to how it is depicted in the liturgy. Along this journey, students will work to refine their *kavannah* through the *keva* they have learned. Ultimately, it is that understanding that will help each individual to connect to the *keva* and find a spiritual connection in which they can root their *kavannah* and build their prayer skills.

Conclusion

According to the rabbis, what is the proper way to pray? There is no obvious answer that the Talmud gives, but the various opinions and multitude of discussions result in texts that seem to put *keva* and *kavannah* as intertwined facets of the prayer experience. The discussion of the rabbis is important, and the different opinions presented give each reader and pray-er a different understanding about the balance between rote prayer and intentional prayer. Perhaps the rabbis were accepting of the possibility of different ways to prayer, but in any event, it is clear that they ultimately wanted each Jewish person to follow the *mitzvot*, and this commandment of prayer was hugely important to them.

But the rabbis also recognized that prayer was not only a necessary part of Jewish practice, but that it was the way through which the Jewish people communicated to a real God, a God whom each individual was obligated to praise, give thanks for the wonders in our world, and partner to make our world a better place, and that to do this prayer in the proper way and in the proper place was of high import to the rabbis. Why was it important? The

rabbis define that in the first Mishnah: “כדי להרחיק את האדם מן העבירה,” “in order to distance a person from the transgression.”¹⁵

Langston Hughes once wrote, “In an envelope marked: *Personal*, God addressed me a letter. In an envelope marked: *Personal*, I have given my answer.”¹⁶ This speaks beautifully to the rabbis understanding of prayer: Prayer is a deep manifestation of one’s connection to and belief in our one, real God that must include the structured *keva* but also must be rooted in a personal *kavannah* that is defined differently by each individual’s needs and life experiences. Though this form of modern-day prayer is different from that of the sacrifices in the Temple, perhaps this prayer can be thought of as a type of sacrifice as well, where each individual sacrifices a part of themselves as he or she communicates with God. The picture of the proper way to do that is painted in different colors according to a person’s journey, and is an individual tile in the mosaic of world Jewry where each person is connected by the *keva* in our *siddur* and the history that we share as *Am Yisrael*.

¹⁵ Bavli Berakhot 2a

¹⁶ Langston Hughes and Arna Bontemps, eds., *The Poetry of the Negro 1746-1949* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1951), 100.

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Texts - Mentioned in Paper
All translations by Lara Regev

Berakhot 2a

מאימתי קורין את שמע בערבית? משעה שהכהנים נכנסים לאכול בתרומתן, עד סוף האשמורה הראשונה, דברי רבי אליעזר. וחכמים אומרים, עד חצות. רבן גמליאל אומר, עד שיעלה עמוד השחר. מעשה שבאו בניו מבית המשתה, אמרו לו, לא קרינו את שמע. אמר להם, אם לא עלה עמוד השחר, חיבין אתם לקרות. ולא זו בלבד, אלא כל מה שאמרו חכמים עד חצות, מצותן עד שיעלה עמוד השחר. הקטר חלבים ואברים, מצותן עד שיעלה עמוד השחר. וכל הנאכלין ליום אחד, מצותן עד שיעלה עמוד השחר. אם כן, למה אמרו חכמים עד חצות, כדי להרחיק את האדם מן העבירה.

From what time do we recite the Sh'ma in the evening? From the time that the priests enter to partake of their *t'rumah*, until the end of the first watch - according to Rabbi Eliezer. The Rabbis say: Until midnight. Rabban Gamliel says: Until the sun rises.

A story: His sons came from a house of festivities. They said to him, "We didn't say Sh'ma." He said to them, "If the sun has not risen, you are obligated to recite. And not only this [obligation], rather for all those for which the Rabbis say, 'until midnight,' you are commanded until the sun rises." Burning the fats and limbs - you are commanded to do until the sun rises. And all which may be eaten for one day - you are commanded to do until the sun rises. If so, why do the Rabbis say, "until midnight?" In order to distance a person from transgression.

Berakhot 6b

אמר רבין בר רב אדא אמר רבי יצחק: כל הרגיל לבא לבית הכנסת ולא בא יום אחד הקב"ה משאיל בו שנאמר (ישעיהו נ, י) מי בכם ירא ה' שומע בקול עבדו אשר הלך חשכים ואין נוגה לו אם לדבר מצוה הלך נוגה לו ואם לדבר הרשות הלך אין נוגה לו יבטח בשם ה' מאי טעמא משום דהוה ליה לבטוח בשם ה' ולא בטח:

Rabin son of R. Adda in the name of R. Isaac said: If a man is accustomed to attend Synagogue and one day does not go, the Holy One, blessed be He, asks about him, as it is said (Isaiah 3:10), "Who is among you that fears God, that hears the voice of God's servant, that walks in darkness and has no light?" If he absented himself on account of a religious purpose, he shall have light. But if he absented himself on account of a worldly purpose, he shall have no light. Let him trust in the name of God. What is the reason? Because he should have trusted in the name of God and he did not trust.

Berakhot 6b

א"ר חלבו אמר רב הונא: כל הקובע מקום לתפלתו אלהי אברהם בעזרו וכשמת אומרים לו אי עניו אי חסיד מתלמידיו של אברהם אבינו ואברהם אבינו מנא לן דקבע מקום דכתיב (בראשית יט, כז) וישכם אברהם בבקר אל המקום אשר עמד שם ואין עמידה אלא תפלה שנאמר (תהלים קו, ל) ויעמוד פינחס ויפלל

R. Helbo in the name of R. Huna says: Whosoever has a fixed place for his prayer has the God of Abraham as his helper. And when he dies, people will say of him: Where is the pious man, where is the humble man, one of the disciples of our father Abraham! And how do we know that our father Abraham had a fixed place [for his prayer]? For it is written (Genesis 19:27), "And Abraham rose in the morning and went to the place where he had stood," and standing equals prayer, as it is written (Psalms 106:30), "And Pinchas stood and prayed."

Berakhot 13a

מתני' היה קורא בתורה והגיע זמן המקרא אם כוון לבו יצא בפרקים שואל מפני הכבוד ומשיב שואל מפני היראה ומשיב דברי ר' מאיר ר' יהודה אומר באמצע שואל מפני היראה ומשיב מפני הכבוד ובפרקים שואל מפני הכבוד ומשיב שלום לכל אדם אלו הן בין הפרקים בין ברכה ראשונה לשניה בין שניה לשמע בין שמע לוהיה אם שמוע בין והיה אם שמוע לויאמר בין ויאמר לאמת ויציב ר' יהודה אומר בין ויאמר לאמת ויציב לא יפסיק אמר ר' יהושע בן קרחה למה קדמה פרשת שמע לוהיה אם שמוע כדי שיקבל עליו עול מלכות שמים תחלה ואחר כך מקבל עליו עול מצות והיה אם שמוע לויאמר שוהיה אם שמוע נוהג בין ביום ובין בלילה ויאמר אינו נוהג אלא ביום בלבד:

גמ' ש"מ מצות צריכות כוונה

A person who was reading in the Torah, and the time for the recitation of the Sh'ma arrived, if he focused his heart, he has fulfilled his obligation. At the breaks [between the paragraphs], he may greet because of respect, and one may respond. In the middle, he may greet because of fear, and one may respond. These are the words of Rabbi Meir.

Rabbi Yehudah says: In the middle, he may greet because of fear, and one may respond because of respect. At the breaks [between the paragraphs], he may greet because of respect, and one may respond because of peace for all men.

These are the breaks between the paragraphs: between the first blessing and the second, between the second and "Sh'ma," between "Sh'ma" and "v'Hayah im shamoah," between "v'Hayah im shamoah" and "Vayomer," between "Vayomer" and "Emet v'Yatziv."

Rabbi Yehudah says: between "Vayomer" and "Emet v'Yatziv" one does not stop.

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Korcha said: Something is missing here

Berakhot 13a-b

ת"ר והיו שלא יקרא למפרע הדברים על לבבך יכול תהא כל הפרשה צריכה כוונה תלמוד לומר האלה עד כאן צריכה כוונה מכאן ואילך אין צריכה כוונה דברי ר' אליעזר א"ל רבי עקיבא הרי הוא אומר (דברים ו, ו) אשר אנכי מצוך היום על לבבך מכאן אתה למד שכל הפרשה כולה צריכה כוונה אמר רבה בר בר חנה אמר ר' יוחנן הלכה כר"ע איכא דמתני לה אהא דתניא הקורא את שמע צריך שיכוין את לבו ר' אחא משום ר' יהודה אומר כיון שכוון לבו בפרק ראשון שוב אינו צריך אמר רבה בר בר חנה אמר ר' יוחנן הלכה כר' אחא שאמר משום ר' יהודה.

The Rabbis taught: And they will be - one may not recite [Sh'ma] out of order. These words, "upon your heart". A person could [have thought that] the entire paragraph requires *kavannah*. The verse teaches, "these," - to this point *kavannah* is required, but from this point forward, *kavannah* is not required, says Rabbi Eliezer.

Rabbi Akiva said to him: But the verse says (Deuteronomy 6:6), "Which I command you this day shall be upon your heart." From this you learn that the entire portion requires *kavannah*. Rabba bar Bar Chana said in the name of Rabbi Yochanan: the *halakha* follows Rabbi Akiva. Some teach this with regards to that which was taught: One who recites the Sh'ma requires *kavannah*.

Rabbi Acha in the name of Rabbi Yehudah says: Once he focused his heart for the first paragraph, he no longer needs to.

Rabba bar Bar Chana said in the name of Rabbi Yochanan: the *halakha* follows Rabbi Acha in the name of Rabbi Yehudah.

Berakhot 26b

איתמר רבי יוסי ברבי חנינא אמר: תפלות אבות תקנום; רבי יהושע בן לוי אמר: תפלות כנגד תמידין תקנום. תניא כוותיה דר' יוסי ברבי חנינא, ותניא כוותיה דרבי יהושע בן לוי. תניא כוותיה דרבי יוסי בר' חנינא: אברהם תקן תפלת שחרית שנא' (בראשית יט, כז) "וישכם אברהם בבקר אל המקום אשר עמד שם", ואין עמידה אלא תפלה שנאמר (תהלים קו, ל) "ויעמד פינחס ויפלל"; יצחק תקן תפלת מנחה שנאמר (בראשית כד, סג) "ויצא יצחק לשוח בשדה לפנות ערב", ואין שיחה אלא תפלה שנאמר (תהלים קב, א) "תפלה לעני כי יעטף ולפני ה' ישפוך שיחו"; יעקב תקן תפלת ערבית שנאמר (בראשית כח, יא) "ויפגע במקום וילן שם", ואין פגיעה אלא תפלה שנאמר (ירמיהו ז, טז) "ואתה אל תתפלל בעד העם הזה ואל תשא בעדם רנה ותפלה ואל תפגע בי".

It was stated that Rabbi Yosi in the name of Rabbi Chanina said: the *t'fillot* of our forefathers were fixed. Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said: the *t'fillot* were fixed to replace to the sacrifices. It was taught in accordance with Rabbi Yosi in the name of Rabbi Chanina, and it was taught in accordance with Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi. It was taught in accordance with Rabbi Yosi in the name of Rabbi Chanina: Abraham fixed the morning prayer, as it is written (Genesis 19:27), "And Abraham rose in the morning and went to the place where he had stood," and standing equals prayer, as it is written (Psalms 106:30), "And Pinchas stood and prayed."

Isaac fixed the afternoon prayer, as it is written (Genesis 24:63), “And Isaac went out to converse in the field toward evening,” and conversation equals prayer, as it is written (Psalms 102:1), “A prayer of the poor when he is faint, and before God he pours his plea.” Jacob fixed the evening prayer, as it is written (Genesis 28:11), “And he arrived at the place and he slept there,” and arrival equals prayer, as it is written (Jeremiah 7:16), “And you, do not pray for this people, and don’t raise a cry of prayer on their behalf. Do not plead with me.”

Berakhot 29b

ר' אליעזר אומר העושה תפלתו קבע וכו': מאי קבע א"ר יעקב בר אידי אמר רבי אושעיא כל שתפלתו דומה עליו כמשוי ורבנן אמרי כל מי שאינו אומרה בלשון תחנונים רבה ורב יוסף דאמרי תרוייהו כל שאינו יכול לחדש בה דבר.

Rabbi Eliezer says: One whose prayer is fixed etc. What is fixed? Rabbi Ya'akov b. Idi said in the name of Rabbi Oshaya: Anyone whose prayer is like a heavy burden on him. The rabbis say: Anyone who does not say his prayers in the language of supplication. Rabbah and Rav Yosef both said: All who are unable to introduce something new in [his prayer].”

Berakhot 30a

ת"ר היה רוכב על החמור והגיע זמן תפלה. אם יש לו מי שיאחז את חמורו ירד למטה ויתפלל ואם לאו ישב במקומו ויתפלל. רבי אומר בין כך ובין כך ישב במקומו ויתפלל לפי שאין דעתו מיושבת עליו. אמר רבא ואיתימא רבי יהושע בן לוי הלכה כרבי.

The rabbis taught: A man was riding on a donkey when the time for prayer arrived. If he had someone who could hold his donkey, he got down and prayed, and if not, he sat in his place and prayed. Rabbi says in this case or in that case he sat in his place and prayed so that he will not be worried. Rab, or as some say, R. Joshua b. Levi, said: The halachah follows Rabbi.

Additional Texts
Resources on Keva and Kavannah
All translations by Lara Regev

Berakhot 30a

ת"ר סומא ומי שאינו יכול לכוין את הרוחות יכוין לבו כנגד אביו שבשמים שנא' (מלכים א ח, לה) והתפללו אל ה' היה עומד בח"ל יכוין את לבו כנגד ארץ ישראל שנא' (מלכים א ח, מח) והתפללו אליך דרך ארצם היה עומד בארץ ישראל יכוין את לבו כנגד ירושלים שנאמר (מלכים א ח, מד) והתפללו אל ה' דרך העיר אשר בחרת היה עומד בירושלים יכוין את לבו כנגד בית המקדש שנאמר (דברי הימים ב ו, לב) והתפללו אל הבית הזה היה עומד בבית המקדש יכוין את לבו כנגד בית קדשי הקדשים שנאמר (מלכים א ח, לה) והתפללו אל המקום הזה היה עומד בבית קדשי הקדשים יכוין את לבו כנגד בית הכפורת היה עומד אחורי בית הכפורת יראה עצמו כאילו לפני הכפורת נמצא עומד במזרח מחזיר פניו למערב במערב מחזיר פניו למזרח בדרום מחזיר פניו לצפון בצפון מחזיר פניו לדרום נמצאו כל ישראל מכוונים את לבם למקום אחד

Our Rabbis taught: A blind person or one who cannot [tell the four directions] should direct his heart towards his Father in Heaven, as it says (I Kings 8:35), "And they pray to God." If a person stands outside of the Land of Israel, he should direct his heart towards the Land of Israel, as it says (I Kings 8:48), "And they pray to You toward their land." If a person stands in the Land of Israel, he should direct his heart towards Jerusalem, as it says (I Kings 8:44), "And they pray to God toward the city which You chose." If a person is standing in Jerusalem, he should direct his heart towards the *Beit haMikdash*, as it says (II Chronicles 6:32), "And they pray toward this house." If a person is standing in the *Beit haMikdash*, he should direct his heart toward the Holy of Holies, as it says (I Kings 8:35), "And they pray toward this place." If a person is standing in the Holy of Holies, he should direct his heart toward *Beit ha-Kaporet* (behind the Holy of Holies). If a person is standing behind *Beit ha-Kaporet*, he should imagine himself to be in front of *Beit ha-Kaporet*. If he finds himself standing in the east he should turn his face to the west; if in the west he should turn his face to the east; if in the south he should turn his face to the north; if in the north he should turn his face to the south. All Israel will find themselves turning their hearts towards one place.

Berakhot 30b

מתני' אין עומדין להתפלל אלא מתוך כובד ראש חסידים הראשונים היו שוהין שעה אחת ומתפללין כדי שיכוונו לבם לאביהם שבשמים אפי' המלך שואל בשלמו לא ישיבנו ואפי' נחש כרוך על עקבו לא יפסיק.

MISHNAH: They do not stand and pray (the *Amidah*) except with a focused mind. The pious ones would wait for one hour and pray so that they could direct their hearts towards

their Father in Heaven. Even if a king greets him in peace he should not return, and even if a snake is wrapped on his heel he should not stop.

Berakhot 31a

ת"ר אין עומדין להתפלל לא מתוך דין ולא מתוך דבר הלכה אלא מתוך הלכה פסוקה.

Our Rabbis taught: They do not stand up to pray (the *Amidah*) either after judgment or after a [discussion on a point of] *halakhah*; but he may do so after a conclusive *halakhic* decision.

Berakhot 31a

ת"ר אין עומדין להתפלל לא מתוך עצבות ולא מתוך עצלות ולא מתוך שחוק ולא מתוך שיחה ולא מתוך קלות ראש ולא מתוך דברים בטלים אלא מתוך שמחה של מצוה

Our Rabbis taught: They do not stand up to pray (the *Amidah*) while immersed in sorrow, or laziness, or laughter, or conversation, or frivolity, or meaningless matters, but only while immersed in the happiness of performing a *mitzvah*.

Berakhot 32b

וא"ר אלעזר גדולה תפלה יותר מן הקרבנות שנא' (ישעיהו א, יא) למה לי רוב זבחיכם וכתיב ובפרשכם כפיכם.

Rabbi Elazar said: Prayer is greater than the sacrifices, as it is said (Isaiah 1:11), "To what is the purpose of your many sacrifices to me," and is also written, "And when you spread forth your hands."