Kavannah: From Tradition to Today

Phillip J. Schwartz

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Ordination

Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion

June 2013

Referees: Rabbi Richard Sarason and Rabbi Samuel Joseph

Table of Contents

Dedicated to my wife, Michelle, who has always believed in me, supported me, and guided me throughout this journey

Acknowledgements

This thesis represents far more than the completion of my rabbinical studies at HUC. It is a symbol of my personal growth throughout my life, especially over the past five years. There are many people who have contributed to this thesis, and without whom my success would not be possible.

I would like to thank Rabbis Richard Sarason and Samuel Joseph, my thesis advisors, who have spent numerous hours helping to create a vision for this thesis and have guided me toward its fruition.

I also would like to thank Rabbis Ken Kanter and Julie Schwartz, who have not only been part of my HUC support team, but taught me the value of self-care, the concept of self-differentiation, and have helped me envision my own rabbinate.

I would be remiss not to mention my parents, Robert and Sheri Schwartz, and my brother, Austin Schwartz, who have greatly influenced my own spirituality and have helped develop my own insight and awareness. I also want to recognize my in-laws, Neal and Debra Schwartz, who have wholeheartedly welcomed me into their family and provided many resources necessary to ensure that this thesis would be completed.

I also would like to thank all of those whom I interviewed for *Moreh L'Kavannah Ba-T'filah – A Worship Guide*. Each of you have inspired me to become an effective worship leader, guided me in my own concept of *kavannah*, and are part of what I hope to be the beginnings of a work that will continue to be refined and expanded. To Merri Arian, Rabbi Jonathan Blake, Cantor Rosalie Boxt, Cantor Susan Caro, Cantor Erik Contzius, Cantor Ellen Dreskin, Rabbi Daniel Freelander, Rabbi Shefa Gold, Rabbi Edwin Goldberg, Rabbi Don Goor, Cantor Alaine Katzew, Rabbi Zoe Klein, Rabbi Elyse Frishman, Dr. Lawrence Hoffman, Rabbi Lawrence Kushner, Rabbi Richard Levy, Rabbi Janet Marder, Danny Maseng, Rabbi Shira Milgrom, Josh Nelson, Dan Nichols, Rabbi Joel Sisenwine, Rabbi Jonathan Slater, Rabbi David Stern, Rabbi Nadia Siritsky, Cantor Jodi Sufrin, Craig Taubman, Rabbi Sue Ann Wasserman, Rabbi Elane Zecher, and Rabbi Benjamin Zeidman, I thank you all.

Finally, and most importantly, I am extremely grateful to my wife Michelle, who is the most unconditional, compassionate, and patient person I know, as well as my dog, Teddy, who has brought so much joy to my life over the past year.

Digest

Perhaps one of the greatest expressions of Judaism is through the act of prayer. Jewish tradition typically discusses the purpose and function of prayer in terms of *keva* and *kavannah*. *Keva* refers to the fixed aspects of prayer, specifically the order of the service. *Kavannah*, on the other hand, represents the inner quality or intent that accompanies the act of prayer. Our sages teach us about the importance of finding the balance between these two opposing requirements for prayer. All *keva* and no *kavannah* can lead to ritual by habit; and all *kavannah* and no *keva* leads to spirituality without any structure.

The idea that *keva* is the vehicle for *kavannah* has remained a consistent part of Jewish tradition, yet *kavannah* in prayer has been an ever-evolving idea that continues to challenge us today. *Kavannah* has meant the intellectual understanding of the prayers themselves as well as the emotion put into the act of praying. Today, the notions of *keva* and *kavannah* in prayer have manifested themselves in various practices that enhance the prayer experience as a whole. From the creation of new liturgies that reflect Judaism of the day to soulful melodies that elevate a prayer's meaning, to the aesthetics of the sanctuary and the use of space, congregations have engaged themselves in a visioning process that enables both the congregants and worship leaders to be more intentional when they pray.

This thesis explores both the traditional and contemporary notions of *kavannah* and examines how they affect worship for the leaders and worshippers. Part One identifies how *kavannah* is understood by the ancient Rabbis, medieval and modern philosophers, and the mystics. Part Two examines the trends in Judaism emerging from the period of the Enlightenment in Western Europe to present-day America that have impacted upon the purpose of prayer and worship. Part Three contains a worship guide entitled, *Moreh L'Kavannah Ba-T'filah – A Worship Guide*, that synthesizes the research of the first two parts of this thesis and also compiles insights from interviews of rabbis, cantors, and Jewish musicians who have been thoughtful and intentional in their worship visioning, planning, and implementation. The goal of the worship guide is to aid worship leaders in creating meaningful prayer experiences in their worship settings.

Part One: *Kavannah in Jewish Tradition*

The destruction of the Second Temple by the Romans in 70 C.E. marked a major turning-point for Jewish ritual and practice. No longer could the Temple be a dwelling place for God and a center for Jewish life. The concept of sacrifice as an offering to God and the primary vehicle for communal worship required a dramatic reinterpretation to ensure continuity in Judaism. The destruction forced the ancient Rabbis to find new ways to stand in God's presence and demonstrate a commitment to God's worship. Communal prayer was now considered a service of the heart: prayer did not simply replace the sacrificial offerings in the Temple, but became a religious obligation equivalent to it.[1]

A basic framework for Jewish liturgy had already been developed prior to the destruction of the Temple. In this respect, the Rabbis brought some uniformity and standardization into prayer by developing specific instructions guiding the worshipper in how, what, and when to pray. They were also aware that a fixed and rule-bound liturgy might cause a worshipper to pray mechanically. The Rabbis did not want to create a fixed wording for the prayers; they actually discouraged writing down any prayer because they encouraged flexibility and variety in worship. The Rabbis were completely opposed to making their prayers *keva*, a fixed prayer routine.[2] They did not want prayer to be a burden or viewed strictly as an obligation.[3] In order to achieve this ideal, the worshipper must be intense and heartfelt in his prayers, pleading for divine mercy and compassion.[4] Since prayer was the 'sacrifice', the Rabbis demanded that prayer should be complemented by a specific mindset as well a consideration of a prayer's form and content to

---

[1] Ruth Langer, *To Worship God Properly: Tensions Between Liturgical Customs and Halakhah in Judaism.* (Cincinnati, OH: Hebrew Union College Press, 1998), 2.
[2] Jakob J. Petuchowski, "The Liturgy of the Synagogue: History, Structure, and Contents," in *Approaches to Ancient Judaism IV*, ed. William Scott Green (Chico, 1983), 3-4.
[3] Berakhot 29b
[4] Mishnah Avot, 2:18

guarantee its efficacy.[5] This notion serves as the basis for the rabbinic understanding of *kavannah*, "intentionality," "devotion," or "focus."

With the Second Temple destroyed, the Rabbis were faced with the question of what was acceptable prayer to God. This led to many disputes over what was understood to be effective prayer.[6] One of the major concerns of the Rabbis was the degree of concentration involved in praying and those situations that would impede their concentration. The need to have intentionality in prayer is most prominent in discussions about the *Shema* and *Amidah*, both of which had become an integral part of worship following the events of 70 C.E. Post-talmudic liturgies such as *Seder Rav Amram* responded to the need for guidelines for prayer, presenting an order to and rules for praying.[7] Still later authorities organized the talmudic discussions so that the Jews of their time could properly observe the *halakhah*, law. Works such as the *Mishneh Torah* and *Shulchan Aruch* both codified the opinions of the Rabbis and simplified the process of study, making *halakhah* accessible to everyone.[8] As Jakob Petuchowski pointed out, what were considered by the talmudic rabbis as models to elicit *kavannah* in prayer gradually became mandatory parts of Jewish liturgy.[9] It is at this point that we can explore how the notion of *kavannah* evolved in *halakhah* and what themes and ideas remained constant.

Different rabbinic authorities suggested various levels of *kavannah* for different prayers. The ancient Rabbis distinguish between two basic categories of *kavannah*: the intent of fulfilling

---

[5] Berakhot 28b
[6] Langer, *To Worship God Properly*, 6.
[7] Lawrence A. Hoffman, "The Roots of the Siddur," in *Keeping Posted* 22:6 (March 1977), Reprinted in Alan D. Bennet, ed., *Journey Through Judaism: The Best of Keeping Posted* (New York: UAHC Press), 1991, 123-126.
[8] Barry Holtz, *Back to the Sources: Reading Classic Jewish Texts* (New York: Simon and Schuster Press, 1986), 158-159.
[9] Jakob J. Petuchowski, "Some Laws of Liturgical Development," in Petuchowski, *Studies in Modern Theology and Prayer* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1998), 154.

the *mitzvah* of prayer, and the intent of understanding the words being said.[10] At the core of this distinction lie the *Shema* and *Amidah*. According to the Talmud, focusing one's heart fulfills the obligation of reciting the *Shema*. The Rabbis debated whether the intention described refers to that of fulfilling the *mitzvah* or simply the intent to read the biblical passages of the *Shema*. The Gemara is unclear as to whether *mitzvot* require *kavannah* and includes arguments about how much of the *Shema* one must focus on.[11] Regardless, some type of intention is necessary. *Berachot* 13b presents several opinions concerning which sections of the *Shema* require intention. All of these opinions are based on an interpretation of the obligation to recite the *Shema* as it appears in the Torah. Rabbi Meir understands that intention is only necessary for the first verse, and this opinion is also accepted by the *Shulchan Aruch*.[12] Rambam emphasizes that the *kavannah* required for the *Shema* is different from that for other *mitzvot*. The *mitzvah* of reciting the *Shema* is not just concentrating on the words being said, but also turning towards God and accepting God as the Ruler of all rulers. In *Hilchot Keriat Shema* (2:1) he writes:

> He who read Shema and did not concentrate during the first verse did not fulfill his obligation. As for the other verses, if he did not concentrate, he has fulfilled his obligation, even if he was reading the Torah routinely or checking sections of the text.

The implication of the Rambam is clear: concentration on the first verse of the *Shema* demands an additional level of *kavannah* beyond that of the other verses. In addition to aiming to carry out God's commandment, the first verse of the *Shema* must be read with a sense of fear and awe to fully emphasize the prayer's declaration that there is only one God. If a worshipper prays with the correct intent for the first verse of the *Shema*, any automatic reading and a lack of awareness of what he was saying thereafter would not prevent him from fulfilling the obligation.

---

[10] Joseph Tabory, "Prayer and *Halakhah*," in *Prayer in Judaism: Continuity and Change*, ed. Gabriel H. Cohn and Harold Fisch (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, Inc., 1996), 62-63.
[11] Berakhot 13a-13b.
[12] Orach Chayim, 60:4-60:5

The requirement of *kavannah* in the *Amidah* introduces an added element to the rabbinic understanding of intention. When rising for the *Shemoneh Esrei*, the Rabbis asserted that one must pray in a reverent manner. Here, directing one's heart includes an emotive aspect that is non-existent with regard to the *Shema*, since it is only a scriptural recitation. *Berakhot* 30b teaches that one should pray only if his attention can solely be on the *Tefillah*, but if he cannot, he should not pray at all. Menachem Meiri cites an anonymous *baraita* explaining that one who does not concentrate during the entire *Amidah* has not fulfilled his obligation, and therefore must repeat it in its entirety. Most rabbinic authorities disagree, in light of the following Gemara:

> ...When one says the *Tefillah* he must say all the blessings attentively, and if he cannot say all with *kavannah* he should say one attentively. R. Chiya said in the name of R. Safra who had it from a member of the School of Rabbi: This one should be the blessing of *Avot* (the first *berakhah*)...[13]

As in the case of the *Shema*, the Rabbis did not agree over what parts of the *Amidah* require *kavannah*. The *Shulchan Aruch* prefers that one should concentrate on the entire *Amidah*, but doing so just for the *Avot* is also acceptable. Even if a person focuses on the rest of the *Amidah*, he should repeat the prayers if he did not have the right *kavannah* for the *Avot*.[14] However, Rambam tends to support Meiri:

> What role does *kavannat ha-lev* (intention of the heart) play? Any *Tefillah* which lacks *kavannat ha-lev* is not a *Tefillah*, and one who prays without intention should repeat his prayer with *kavannah*... And what is *kavannat ha-lev*? One should remove his thoughts from his heart and view himself as if he is standing before the Divine Presence...[15]

Recognizing that having *kavannah* is the ideal, the Rambam does eventually agree with the Gemara that one who is attentive to the meaning of the *Avot* does need to repeat the *Amidah*.[16]

---

[13] Berakhot 34b
[14] Orach Chayim 101:1
[15] Hilchot Tefillah, 4:15-4:16
[16] Hilchot Tefillah, 10:1

This tension between *kavannah* as intentionality and *kavannah* as awareness is further exacerbated by the numerous examples of when one's concentration in prayer is limited. A classic example is found in a *mishnah* that describes how to recite the *Shema* and *Amidah* while working. Workers can recite the *Shema* without descending from a tree, but must recite the *Amidah* on the ground. According to the Sages, since only the first line of the *Shema* requires intense *kavannah*, a person can easily recite it atop a tree. The *Amidah* requires greater concentration, so it must be said from the safety of the ground.[17] The Rabbis also debated whether a person should stop during a journey to recite the *Amidah*. One who is traveling might be too distracted to pray if he must get off his donkey.[18] The *Shulchan Aruch* adds that one may engage in prayer while on the donkey while it is moving if that is where he will achieve the greatest *kavvanah*.[19] In other words, one must do whatever is necessary to be attentive and aware when praying.

The Rabbis were so concerned with avoiding distractions during prayer that at times they allowed the *mitzvah* of prayer to be compromised for the sake of another *mitzvah*. A groom is exempt from saying the *Shema* on the first night following his wedding until the subsequent Shabbat. Because the anxiety of the initial sexual encounter between man and wife would prevent the groom from concentrating, his liturgical obligation is postponed.[20] A mourner who loses an immediate relative also is exempted from reciting the *Shema* and *Amidah* because he is preoccupied with performing the *mitzvah* of burial.[21] In instances such as these, the Rabbis stressed that a person should pray only if their ability to concentrate allows them to do so.

---

[17] Berakhot 16a
[18] Berakhot 30a
[19] Orach Chayim, 94:4-94:7
[20] Berakhot 16a
[21] Berakhot 17b

Regardless of the varying levels of concentration needed to pray, the Rabbis were insistent that some degree of intentionality was necessary. To assist the worshipper in attaining any level of *kavannah*, numerous considerations about preparation; language; and the times, place, and choreography for prayer were made to allow for maximum levels of concentration. Prayer was the direct means to dialogue with God in the divine presence. As a result, the Rabbis described what a person should wear during prayer, where a person should pray, and what activities were deemed inappropriate before praying. In essence, the Rabbis established that an appropriate degree of purity was needed in order to pray.[22] These requirements were deemed so important that an individual must distance himself from any bad odor, excrement, or waste by at least four cubits in order to recite the *Shema* and *Amidah*. If one were to enter an impure space when reciting these prayers, he must stop the recitation and in some cases remove himself completely from the area even if he was in the middle of praying.[23] Furthermore, those who ate or drank immediately prior to praying were considered arrogant and overconfident.[24]

Secondly, the Rabbis considered whether the use of the vernacular or any language other than Hebrew could affect one's intentionality when praying. Regarding praying in Hebrew without understanding, the Sages discuss two separate scenarios. They question whether the person listening to another needs to understand what is being said, regardless of whether the words are in Hebrew or not. If an individual does recites the words in Hebrew, most authorities assume that he can fulfill his obligation without understanding the text (although understanding the first verse of *Shema*, as well as the first *berakhah* of the *Amidah*, is essential).[25] However, some authorities believe that when reciting a *berakhah* or prayer in Hebrew, one does need to

---

[22] Langer, *To Worship God* Properly, 13.
[23] Berakhot 22b-24b, 25b
[24] Berakhot 10b
[25] Berakhot 45b

understand its meaning. Seemingly, the difference between *mitzvot* which must be fulfilled in Hebrew and those which are fulfilled in the vernacular lies in the necessity for comprehension. Most assert that one may use another language that he understands for prayer. Even more so, if a worshipper prays in a language other than Hebrew, he must be just as scrupulous in his pronunciation as he would be in the prayer's original language.[26]

The Rabbis also placed importance on being extremely precise when saying a prayer's words to ensure its efficacy. The Gemara teaches that one who recites the *Shema* must be careful to properly pronounce its letters.[27] The *Shulchan Arukh* describes how one should strive to perfectly read the words of *Shema*. For example, one should pronounce every letter and pronounce each word separately. One should read *Shema* loudly enough so that he can hear it being said. However, if he did not hear the words, as long as they were enunciated orally, his recitation is valid. If one makes a mistake when reciting the *Shema*, one should return to the beginning of that verse. If he was unsure where the mistake was made, he should return to the beginning of the paragraph and then continue.[28] The Gemara elsewhere explains two *halakhot* regarding the recitation of the *Amidah*: one should enunciate the words with one's lips, and one should not raise one's voice. The presumption here is that while the prayer must be articulated and recited out loud, raising one's voice in public prayer may distract others.[29] The Rambam, followed by the *Shulchan Arukh*, adds that one who finds it difficult to concentrate may raise his voice during the *Amidah*, but only when praying privately.[30]

Even though the Rabbis did not necessarily compose the prayers word for word, they did establish a prayer structure broadly linked to the patterns of Temple worship in Jerusalem. In

---

[26] Sotah 32a-32b
[27] Berakhot 15b
[28] Orach Chayim, 61:1-61:2
[29] Berakhot 24b
[30] Hilchot Tefillah 5:9, Orach Chayim 101:2

many respects, the Rabbis provided a model for prayer that not only included the words to say, but also the times and the movements associated with praying.[31] They believed that the *Shema* should be recited in the morning and evening because of Deuteronomy 6:7 which states, "when you lie down and when you rise up." Since one of the themes of the *Shema* relates to accepting God's rule, the Rabbis also stressed that this would be a fitting way to both begin and end the day. When a worshipper recites the *Shema*, he reminds himself of God's unity and is comforted by the idea that God will protect and guard him both day and night.[32] In order to enhance concentration, he may not do anything or even motion to others when reciting the first section of Shema.[33] In addition, later authorities rule that one should cover his eyes with his right hand while saying the verse of *Shema* to reduce distractions and enhance concentration.[34] The Gemara expresses the preference for reciting the *Amidah* at sunrise when one can be reminded of the glory of creation. Unlike the *Shema*, regarding which an individual may choose whether to sit or stand when reciting it; the Talmud instructs one to say the *Amidah* standing and while one's feet are together.[35] The Rabbis also specify how one should direct his eyes while praying and face Jerusalem, directing one's prayer to God's earthly abode.[36]

Rabbinic prayer was framed as a liturgical system that would elicit a divine response. The Rabbis established guidelines describing the proper performance and atmosphere for prayer that reflected Temple ritual. In addition, a standard for the language and structure for prayer was formulated to fully support an environment that gave the worshipper the ability to concentrate when praying. The early notions of *kavannah*, then, consisted of two elements: concentration

---

[31] Seth Kaddish, *Kavvana: Directing the Heart in Jewish Prayer*. (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, Inc., 1997) 82-85.
[32] *Berakhot* 11a
[33] *Orach Chayim* 63:7-9
[34] *Orach Chayim* 61:5
[35] *Berakhot* 10b
[36] *Yevamot* 105b, *Orach Chayim* 95:2, *Berakhot* 30a

and understanding. True prayer was sincere; what one says to God must be whole-hearted and authentic. The worshipper does not merely say the words of a prayer and concentrate on other matters, but immerses himself in the complete meaning of the words he says. *Kavannah* represents the embodiment of a person's commitment and relationship to God; it is an emotional experience. The intentionality of prayer is directly connected with one's belief that his prayers are worthy and accepted by God when he means what he is saying.[37]

However, having *kavannah* in all prayer is only the ideal. Despite the talmudic prohibition against prayer without *kavannah*, later authorities encouraged Jews to pray even when they cannot have *kavannah*. As previously mentioned, there was precedent for this ruling in the anonymous *baraita* that required *kavannah* only for one blessing if a person could not concentrate through all of his prayer. The *Shulchan Aruch* especially was cognizant that a "modern" Jew usually does not always have the mental or emotional capacity to concentrate when praying. Nevertheless, a Jew still is required to pray.[38]

This tension between fulfilling the formal obligation to pray and doing so with *kavannah* became even stronger as the rabbinic model of prayer spread and slowly became standardized. By the Middle Ages, *halakhah* was forced to respond to the different prayer customs that had emerged. For example, liturgical poetry appearing in the statutory blessings of the *Shema* and *Amidah* were often substitutes for the standard prayer text. Prayer became much more of an individual experience; innovative liturgy provided additional meaning to prayer and was a distinctive way to demonstrate intentionality in worship. Furthermore, many Jewish intellectuals were heavily influenced by Greek philosophy, which suggested that God is not affected by praise

[37] Kaddish, *Kavvana*, 229.
[38] Ibid., 40-41.

and petitions.[39] For such thinkers (like Bahya ibn Pakuda and Maimonides), the function of prayer was to reflect upon the lessons contained in the prayers themselves. Therefore, the concept of *kavannah* took on an intellectual meaning as well as an emotional one.[40]

While the Rabbis asked what conditions were necessary for God to hear one's prayer, the philosophers questioned whether God had any use for them. In Bahya ibn Pakuda's *Duties of the Heart*, prayer without *kavannah* is compared to a body without a soul. Bahya did not compose any formal works on prayer itself, but the topic frequently appeared in his book. The foundation of Bahya's philosophy is the notion that there are two types of duties man has in relation to God: the "inner" duties, the specific, internal thoughts and feelings one has about God, such as the belief in God's unity, the absolute acceptance of God's authority, and loving and fearing God; and the "outer" duties, the physical activities God commanded in the Torah, such as building a *sukkah* and wearing *tzitzit*.[41] Therefore, man serves God both "through his physical actions (when he performs visible *mitzvot*), but also with his thoughts, feelings, and sincere intentions."[42]

Bahya observes that humanity was created with both a body and soul, with "inner" and "outer" elements requiring man to "serve God fully with both of our aspects by doing *mitzvoth* that are 'hidden' and *mitzvot* that are "revealed."[43] Obligations such as the act of prayer not only consist of the physical activity of praying (movement and speech), but also involve an "inner," conscious aspect involving our commitment to fulfill God's will. This is why Bahya characterized duties such as prayer as a duty of the heart and limbs.[44] Prayer is an outward physical act that must be performed with a specific inner attitude:

---

[39] Langer, *To Worship God* Properly, 36.
[40] Ibid., 229.
[41] Kaddish, *Kavvana*, 108.
[42] Ibid., 427.
[43] Ibid., 109.
[44] Ibid., 109.

> When a man undertakes a duty that involves both the heart and the members, like prayer, or the glorification of God, then he must free himself of all the deeds pertaining to both this world and the next. He must also discard all thoughts which may preoccupy and draw him away from the matter of his prayer.....then he must recall to memory the object and purpose of his prayer, its wording and its meaning, in order to make it acceptable to his Lord. For you must know that words are a matter of the tongue, but meaning is the matter of the heart. [45]

It is evident that Bahya considered routine, perfunctory prayer to be a serious issue for Jews during his time. Despite the need to concentrate when praying, it was usually not the focus for the average Jew. Bahya recognized that proper *kavannah* was difficult to attain and identifies this as the reason for the development of fixed prayer:

> Since this is difficult for the soul to do without a certain order and rule, our ancient sages have compiled the material which most classes of people need...This is the kind of prayer which is organized and regulated so that the soul may confront its Creator with it...through the order of prayer, the soul may show its own humility and submission to God.[46]

Despite this rationale for a fixed liturgy, Bahya stresses that the words themselves have no value of their own. It is the ideas expressed in prayers that are important, not the words. Bahya identifies with those Rabbis who encouraged Jews to do more than the minimum requirements for prayer.[47] Even though prescribed prayers may be necessary to guide the worshipper, the true purpose of prayer is for man to express his dependence on God. It is man who needs to pray; the deeper meaning of prayer is to help man overcome the material world and strengthen his spirituality:

> The words need the meaning, but the meaning is in no need of words when it is possible to convey it with the heart. For the meaning is the root of our purpose and the basis of our intention...fix well in your heart the matter of prayer. Make your words equal to it and direct both heart and prayer solely to God. Free from your body all of its movements and prevent your senses and thoughts from being preoccupied with any of the matters of

---

[45] Bahya ibn Pakuda, *The Book of Direction to the Duties of the Heart*, ed. Menahem Mansoor (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, Ltd., 1973), 364-365.
[46] Ibid., 366.
[47] Kaddish, *Kavvana*, 112.

> this world when you are engaged in prayer... When you pray according to His commands you have fulfilled the obligations of that deposit and He will accept it from you.[48]

Kavannah for Bahya is "to emotionally feel the meaning of the words one says."[49] Bahya wants to align the words of the prayers and the meaning attached to them so that both one's speech and one's heart are the same. This level of inwardness reminds man how dependent he is on God, not to ask or tell God what He should do for us. In essence, one does not expect God to respond to his prayers. He only anticipates that sincere *kavannah* will help him be at his very best and hopes that God will grant him the ability to be His servant.

Bahya's understanding of prayer and *kavannah* was the foundation for other religious philosophers who also viewed the main function of prayer as changing man, not God. Yet, one philosopher, Maimonides, presents two distinct understandings that describe the purpose of prayer. His *Mishneh Torah* provides a systematic and clear summary of rabbinic law and defines prayer in a manner similar to that of the Rabbis: prayer requires *kavannah* in order to stimulate a response from God. Many of his opinions about prayer as described in the *Mishneh Torah* are provided earlier in this chapter. In his philosophical work *Guide for the Perplexed*, on the other hand, Maimonides explores the traditional meanings of the *mitzvot* (including prayer) and provides more philosophically sound reasons for performing them. At first glance, one might find that his two works are in opposition to each other. However, the audience for each of his works also differs. The *Mishneh Torah* was written to give people a legal guide that was presented in a unified and rational way. The precise methods for successfully fulfilling the *mitzvot* are studied and explained so that the individual knows how to do them correctly. The *Guide for Perplexed* is intended for those who are philosophically inclined and seek to further understand the intentions of the *mitzvot* in rational terms. In other words, Rambam gives insight

[48] Bahya, *Duties of the Heart*, 367.
[49] Kadish, *Kavvana*, 114.

into the dilemmas and concerns of Jews of his time and provides two ways that one can be certain he is fulfilling his religious duty. The *Guide for Perplexed*, as we will see, reveals a deeper conception of why we pray.[50]

The basis for Rambam's definitions of prayer and *kavannah* is his belief that intellectual reasoning was the only way to truly understand the Torah and its precepts. God can never be fully understood in human terms, so all we can really describe about God involves what God is not. Rambam explained that people must be taught about Torah and God in "the language of man" in order for humanity to accept their claims. Man does have the capability, though, to recognize and interpret the Torah correctly. When this is accomplished, the simple functions of religious practice, including prayer, are no longer sufficient.[51]

Rambam asserted that *mitzvot* have both a primary and secondary purpose. The actual forms of worship, including their structure and the words themselves, are secondary to the true function of prayer:

> Sacrifices – pertain to a second intention, whereas invocation, prayer, and similar practices and modes of worship are necessary for its achievement, a great difference has been made between the two kinds. For one kind of worship – I mean the offering of sacrifices - although the sacrifices are offered to the name of God, has not been made obligatory for us to the same extent as it had been before. We were not commanded to sacrifice in every place, and in every time, or to build a temple in every place, or to permit anyone who desires to become priest and to sacrifice... All these restrictions served to limit this kind of worship, and keep it within those bounds within which God did not think it necessary to abolish sacrificial service altogether. But prayer and supplication can be offered everywhere and by every person. [52]

Prayer essentially reinforces our belief in God; the forms of worship that existed were not changed so that man could always be reminded of "God's existence, His knowledge of our

---

[50] Colette Sirat, *A History of Jewish Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 166-168.
[51] Kaddish, *Kavvana*, 138-139.
[52] Maimonides, "The Guide for the Perplexed," in *A Maimonides Reader*, ed. Isadore Twersky (Springfield, NJ: Behrman House, 1972), 332-333.

circumstances, and that He justly decides our fortunes in accordance with our actions."[53] Prayer embodies the correct beliefs of Judaism and exists as a tool to educate the worshipper about God. Prayer is essential in informing Jews how to fully invest in the contemplation of God:

> We have already made it clear to you that intellect which overflowed from Him, may He be exalted, toward us is the bond between us and Him....Know that all the practices of worship, such as reading the Torah, prayer, and the performance of other commandments, have only the end of training you to occupy yourself with His commandments, may He be exalted, and know that which is other than He.[54]

For Rambam, prayer helps an individual train himself to concentrate on God and nothing else. Rambam describes *kavannah* as when the individual goes beyond the plain meaning of what they do and reaches out to discover the unperceivable. The need for prayer in the customary sense is something that an intellectual has already removed himself from. Prayer becomes a step towards the higher goal of realizing and knowing God.

While Rambam asserts that the intellect is required to completely understand Judaism, Rabbi Judah Halevi stressed that "life-experience and history are better guides to right living than abstract contemplation, and that to God, exemplary action has much greater significance than good intentions or correct ideas."[55] Halevi's *Kuzari* centers on a dialogue between a Jewish scholar and a Khazar king, who inquires about the Jew's religious ways of life, which include prayer. While his *Kuzari* is pure historical fiction, Halevi sought to justify the religious practices of Judaism by proving that it was the highest absolute religious truth and that tradition is valuable for the Jews of his time.[56]

Halevi's primary discussions about prayer in the *Kuzari* are intertwined with his descriptions of the life of a *hasid*, a pious individual devoted to serving God. He criticized

---

[53] Kaddish, *Kavvana*, 138-141.
[54] Maimonides, "The Guide for the Perplexed," in *A Maimonides Reader*, 344-345.
[55] Kaddish, *Kavvana*, 127.
[56] Judah Halevi, "Kuzari", in *3 Jewish Philosophers*, ed. Hans Levy, Alexander Altmann and Isaac Heinemann (New Milford, CT: The Toby Press, 2006), 334.

ascetics who believed that they were thereby *hasidim*. They were convinced that, by removing themselves from society, they would be closer to God. Since these ascetics were completely immersed in prayer, the risk of habitually reciting their innovative prayers would be greater. Their *kavannah* would eventually become *keva* and the meaning of prayer would be lost.[57] Halevi argued that a true *hasid* is one who "subdues his passions and restrains them from excesses" so that he can reach "the higher or Divine degree." [58] By taking complete control of himself, the *hasid* can achieve a state beyond intellect and touch the level of the Divine.

Like his predecessors, Halevi acknowledges that any preparation required to connect with God is difficult. Prayer makes this goal attainable; it is an active experience, rather than a contemplative one, that cultivates man's ability to reach God:

> All this stands in the same relation to the soul as food to the body; he prays for the sake of his soul, as he takes nourishment for the sake of his body; and the blessing of one prayer lasts until it is time for the next, just as the strength derived from lunch lasts till supper. [59]

Prayer, then, is fundamentally an act of spiritual renewal. The function of prayer is for man to "turn to his Creator in gratitude for all the gifts which he has enjoyed." [60] Prayer requires pure *kavannah* in order to fully give oneself to God and declare one's obedience to Him. One's imagination aids his concentration in prayer. Halevi believed that in order to reach the level of the Divine, one must first imitate it. A worshipper's mindset is guided by "imagining the greatest moments of prophetic glory that have been preserved in the memory of the Jewish people." [61] When the *hasid* recites specific blessings, he can add further meaning to them by

---

[57] Kaddish, *Kavvana*, 138-131.
[58] Judah Halevi, "Kuzari", in *3 Jewish Philosophers*, 415-416.
[59] Ibid., 418.
[60] Eliezer Schweid, "Prayer in the Thought of Yehudah Halevi," in *Prayer in Judaism: Continuity and Change*, ed. Gabriel H. Cohn and Harold Fisch (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, Inc., 1996), 115.
[61] Kaddish, *Kavvana*, 138-132.

visualizing not only their meaning, but "its purpose and what is connected with it."[62] Therefore, *kavannah* occurs when a worshipper uses his own imagination with the aid of memory as the means to reach God:

> After this preparation, the willpower stimulates all his organs to work with alertness, pleasure, and joy...all limbs are frightened and anxious to obey their master, paying no heed to pain or fatigue. The tongue agrees with the mind and does not talk idly nor speak in prayer in an automatic way like the starling and the parrot, but every word is uttered thoughtfully and attentively.[63]

It is clear that when one prays, the worshipper needs to put his entire self into the act of prayer: his words match his thoughts, he avoids distraction, and he immerses himself in the reenactment of God's revelation. For Halevi, *kavannah* is an emotional, intellectual, and physical experience by which every part of a human being is committed to achieving a personal interaction with God.

For the philosophers, the purpose of prayer in many respects is pedagogical: a person thinks and learns about the lessons found in the prayers. *Kavannah* involves both the intellectual understanding of what can be gleaned from the prayers and the emotional effort one puts into learning about them. When people pray, they are doing it completely for themselves; the objective of praying is not to influence or evoke a response from God, but to be reminded of the multifaceted messages contained in prayer. For the philosopher, the overall power of prayer for the worshipper is vital, not necessarily the exact words he says or the rules he follows. By the twelfth century, the rational definition of prayer was criticized for eliminating any possibly for meaning found in the structure, text, and system of prayer. It is here where the mystics began to make their mark on defining *kavannah* by stressing that every detail related to prayer, including the specific letters and words, had hidden meaning that needed to be revealed.[64] Indeed, the

---

[62] Judah Halevi, "Kuzari", in *3 Jewish Philosophers*, 426.
[63] Ibid., 418.
[64] Kaddish, *Kavvana*, 138-148-149.

major theme of all the mystical movements in regard to prayer was to bring new meaning to the ancient prayer texts. [65]

Early Jewish mysticism was characterized by a variety of different schools of thought that developed around the same time, specifically the late twelfth to the early thirteenth century. For the mystics of Spain and Provence, the performance of *mitzvot* requires specific actions linking this world and the *sefirot*, those manifestations of the Divine symbolizing God's revealed self. The *kavannah* associated with each *mitzvah* involved the intense concentration of thought upon its mystical significance. All groups of Jewish mystics emphasized that prayer is supplemented by a system of individual *kavannot* that described each prayer's mystical content. The mystics believed that the prayers contain a meaning extending beyond the words of the prayers themselves. These *kavannot* transform the words of prayer into the *sefirot*, which represent milestones as the worshipper ascends to the Divine realm.[66]

A different mystical theory, which emerged in Germany, provided some of the first comprehensive works on Jewish liturgy and developed a nearly impossible system of worship that could only be achieved by elite individuals. The *Hasidei Ashkenaz*, adherents to the thoughts of Rabbi Judah the Pious and his disciple, Rabbi Eleazar of Worms, present an esoteric and pietistic conception of Jewish practice.[67] German-Jewish piety, as Ivan Marcus notes, "is an affirmation of the central significance in Judaism of intention, motivation, inwardness, as well as action." [68] For the *Hasidei Ashkenaz*, every religious practice consisted of both a physical, active element as well as a private, personal component. To fulfill any commandment, one must

---

[65] Joseph Dan, *Jewish Mysticism: Volume II, The Middle Ages*. (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, Inc., 1998), 242-245.
[66] Gershom Scholem, *Kabbalah: A Definitive History of the Evoltuion, Ideas, Leading Figures and Extraordinary Influence of Jewish Mysticism*. (New York: Penguin Books, 1978), 176-177.
[67] Dan, *Jewish Mysticism: Volume II*, 225.
[68] Ivan Marcus, *Piety and Society: The Jewish Pietists of Medieval Germany* (Boston, MA: E. J. Brill, 1981), 33.

use his body and his heart[69]. To be pious meant to strive for perfection: prayer, for example, required correct wording and demanded a level of exactness necessary to highlight the number of letters, consonants, and vowels in the word. Worship represented the greatest expression of a God-fearing individual who truly understood the mystery of the Godhead and its three characteristics: "the hidden, infinite God, who created the universe...the concealed *Shekhinah*, who is the internal glory and sanctity of God; and the manifest *Shekhinah*, who is the external glory of God, and His greatness."[70]

Proper prayer meant having *kavannah* through all of worship; attributing melodies to prayer, reciting the prayers extremely slowly, covering one's head with a *tallit* and closing one's eyes to avoid distraction all helped one remain focused at all times.[71] Instead of concentrating on their literal meaning, the worshipper would engage in visualizing specific *kavannot*. To sustain this type of *kavannah* and create a free-flowing prayer experience, worshippers were encouraged to repeat the prayers, each recitation allowing one to gradually reach God. Rabbi Judah asserted that the prayer texts are part of a consistent and sacred structure. Therefore, "the most minute change...can destroy this carefully constructed intrinsic, esoteric harmony and render the prayers not only useless but religiously and spiritually harmful."[72] While the *Hasidei Ashkenaz* could be criticized for deviating from tradition in this manner, Rabbi Judah argued that *halakhah* is what an authentic, pious Jew needs to rely on to even remotely connect with the Divine. The stringent guidelines for worship and living were all based on tradition, utilizing the ancient text of the prayer book as a pathway to God.[73]

---

[69] Ibid., 33.
[70] Isaiah Tishby, "Prayer and Devotion," in *The Wisdom of the Zohar: An Anthology of Texts: Volume III.* ed. Isaiah Tishby, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 945.
[71] Ivan Marcus, "The Devotional Ideals of Ashkenazic Pietism," in *Jewish Spirituality: From the Bible Through the Middle Ages*, ed. Arthur Green (New York: Crossroad, 1986), 362.
[72] Dan, *Jewish Mysticism: Volume II,* 266.
[73] Ibid., 267-268.

The pious Jews of medieval Germany were only one group of mystics during the later twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. The *Zohar*, the central work of Spanish-Jewish mysticism in the Middle Ages, is the product of a distinctive literary and esoteric tradition that made its appearance during the closing decades of the thirteenth century. It is safe to assume that early compilations of this now classic work began to be formed around the same period as the *Hasidei Ashkenaz*.[74] Despite the relatively concise form in which it is published, it is difficult to think of the *Zohar* as a single book. It gives the appearance of an extensive literary anthology that reworks and integrates prior kabbalistic thought into the author's own understanding of the mystical world.[75]

Gershom Scholem, one of the foremost scholars of *Kabbalah*, notes that the *Zohar* is best characterized by its theosophic notion of God as *Ein Sof*, the hidden, infinite God that is indescribable. Expanding upon the themes and ideas of previous mystical traditions, the *Zohar* understands that there exist two realms: the world of the *Ein Sof*, and the world of the *sefirot*. It is through the *sefirot* that God can reveal Himself to humanity. The goal of the mystic, then, is to immerse himself in the knowledge of the *sefirot* in order to connect with God.

The *Zohar* continues and expands the idea that all of the *mitzvot* mirror the divine realm. Prayer is the best method of worshiping God because it is "the innermost form of worship...because everything depends on this innermost form of worship; it is the foundation of everything."[76] Through contemplation of prayer, one can cleave his soul to God.[77] Similar to other traditions, a prayer recited without the correct *kavannot* in mind has no impact on the

---

[74] Arthur Green, "The Zohar: Jewish Mysticism in Medieval Spain," in *Essential Papers on Kabbalah*. ed. Lawrence Fine (New York: New York University Press,1995), 27.
[75] Ibid., 37.
[76] *Zohar* II, 201a, quoted in Isaiah Tishby, "Prayer and Devotion," 951.
[77] Shalom Rosenberg, "Prayer and Jewish Thought: Approaches and Problems (A Survey)," in *Prayer in Judaism: Continuity and Change*, ed. Gabriel H. Cohn and Harold Fisch, (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, Inc., 1996), 76-77.

sefirot. Intentionality is paramount for the performance of *mitzvot* and prayer. Unique to prayer is the notion that it actually aids the *sefirot* when the appropriate *kavannot* are evoked. In essence, correct prayer and *kavannot* repair the *sefirot* and unify the *Shekhinah*, the feminine aspect of God relating to the people Israel in the physical realm, with the *Tiferet*, God's masculine aspect.[78] This act of repair between these two realities is called *tikkun*, literally meaning "fixing." The physical actions of man affect the divine realm, and prayer brings harmony between this world and that of God. The *Zohar* explains that all of humanity is in exile from God and that prayer with *kavannah* helps humanity, and in turn the *Shekinah*, return to God:

> Happy is the man who does not delay the consort in her ascent to the King, but the man who is fluent in his prayer and does not hesitate brings the consort quickly to the King. Alas for those who are dull of heart and eyes, and who do not exert themselves to understand the honor due to their Creator, to make His will disposed to His *Shekinah* with their pleas and their entreaties, and to bring Him down toward her, and, even more, to arouse love in Him for her...Happy is the man who raises her to Him in the proper manner.[79]

Proper *kavannah* not only refers to the esoteric understanding of the meaning of the prayer in the *Zohar*, but also contains an emotive aspect. While previous traditions in Judaism separated the ideas of fearing and loving God in prayer, the obligation to both pray out of fear of and love for God developed in Spanish *Kabbalah*.[80] *Devekut*, which later became the center of eastern European Hasidic piety, is understood here as communing with God based in fear – awe for the Divine – and love, the complete submission to God:

> Rabbi Eleazar said: Fear must not be forgotten in any of the commandments, and it must certainly be made to cleave to this one. How is such cleaving possible? Love, in one aspect, is concerned with good...It is then that one must arouse fear and be afraid that it

[78] Kaddish, *Kavvana*, 156-157.
[79] *Tikkunei ha-Zohar, Tikkun* 21, 44b-45b, quoted in Isaiah Tishby, *The Wisdom of the Zohar*, 1053.
[80] Isaiah Tishby, "Prayer and Devotion," 985-987.

> will cause sin. That is why it is written "Happy is the man who always fears" (Proverbs 28:15), for this comprises both fear and love.[81]

Therefore, in order to be restored as well as to restore the divine realm, *kavannah* meant praying with a "willing heart," both being reverent toward and fully dependent on God. Praying with *kavannah* was an active experience of longing to cling to the Divine, triggered by enunciating each individual *kavannah* and expressing one's thoughts audibly to arouse God. This type of concentration on, and acknowledgement of the power of, prayer ensures the ascent to God.[82]

The *Zohar* provided a complete and systematic method of praying and focusing on a prayer's deeper meaning. Prayer in the *Zohar* involved specific *kavannot* related to unifying this world and that of the Divine, but rarely addressed the meaning of specific words or individual letters of the prayer. Isaac Luria, perhaps the greatest leader of the mystical movement in Safed, in the land of Israel following the Jewish expulsions from Spain in 1492, introduced an entirely new structure of Jewish mysticism. Grounded in ideas introduced in the *Zohar*, Lurianic prayer was not intended for the masses; it was for an elitist group of individuals who had the special capacity to impact the *sefirot*.[83]

In addition to adapting classical kabbalistic ideas, Luria introduced the element of *tzimtzum*, God's self-contraction, as the primal action occurring prior to any emanation of God. [84] Unlike the initial actions of the Godhead in the *Zohar*, which were those of revelation and emanation, *tzimtzum* is described as an act of concealment and limitation: "the divine withdrawal from a certain segment of space in order to allow the emergence of other beings."[85] Some part of the Godhead had to withdraw and leave room in order for the creative processes to come into

---

[81] *Zohar* III, 56a-56b, quoted in Isaiah Tishby, "Prayer and Devotion," 1068-1069.
[82] Isaiah Tishby, "Prayer and Devotion,", 952-953.
[83] Kaddish, *Kavvana*, 160.
[84] Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, (New York: Schocken Books, 1961), 82.
[85] Joseph Dan. *The Heart and the Fountain: An Anthology of Jewish Mystical* Experiences, (Oxford University Press, New York: 2002), 34.

play.[86] Prior to the Godhead's self-contraction, the cosmos was entirely filled with the presence of God, who is conceived as limitless divine light. This divine light was made of diverse elements, containing "a mixture of good and evil, light and darkness, and the powers of strict Judgment...bound up with the powers of Compassion."[87] The sefirot were intended to fill this empty space (reshimu), but this process failed because some elements "refused to assume the constructive function designed for them."[88] This event in the Lurianic myth is described as the "breaking of the vessels," or shevirat hakeilim. These vessels fell down into the physical world and have been trapped ever since.

Luria emphasized that the fallen sparks of the divine should be returned to their original place in the divine realm. All actions performed by man, then, are directed towards the concept of *tikkun*. In the *Zohar*, the process of *tikkun* helps the *sefirot* return to God. Luria took this a step further: man was responsible for mending these broken vessels and liberating the sparks of the Divine.[89] It is here where Luria turns to the importance of prayer: the cosmos can be healed through thoughtful concentration to lift the sparks and purify these lights so that they can once again cling to God.[90] According to Lawrence Fine, Luria spent a great deal of time describing the mindset required of prayer and the performance of all *mitzvot*. He stresses that Luria encouraged the worshipper to avoid sadness. For Luria, the worshipper should "be exceedingly joyous to the greatest extent possible, just as a servant serves his master joyfully."[91] Both the value and degree of an individual communion with God is dependent on this mindset.

---

[86] Gershom Scholem, *Kabbalah: A Definitive History of the Evoltuion, Ideas, Leading Figures and Extraordinary Influence of Jewish Mysticism.* (New York: Penguin Books, 1978), 129.
[87] Lawrence Fine, *Physician of the Soul, Healer of the Cosmos* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 127.
[88] Dan, *The Heart and the Fountain,*. 34.
[89] Joseph Dan, *Gershom Scholem and the Mystical Dimensions of Jewish History*, (New York: New York University, 1987), 270.
[90] Fine, *Physician of the Soul,* 235.
[91] Ibid., 227.

Luria asserted that the balance of the cosmos can be restored through prayer. The worshipper and the Divine "stand in intimate, symbiotic relationship to each other, dependent on each other for sustenance."[92] As such, the liturgical structure as well as the amount of liturgy that was inherited allowed Luria to provide numerous meanings for prayer focusing on the intricacies of the prayers themselves. By this time prayer had already been standardized, so Luria's *kavannot* gave the worshipper "renewed opportunity to perform rites of mystical action over and over again."[93] Each act of devotion to God was considered unique and precious; each recitation of the prayers differed from the previous one.

This type of *kavannah* demanded a special level of commitment; there was no doubt that this kind of praying was an arduous task that only the most pious individual could achieve.[94] Nevertheless, the exclusivity of Lurianic prayer is exactly what motivated the Baal Shem Tov and his disciples to create a more accessible and attainable concept of *kavannah* for those who wanted to serve God more genuinely.[95] Beginning in the late eighteenth century, this eastern European movement emphasized that all of life is dedicated to the service of God, and following the *mitzvot* makes this task achievable. One of the things that made Hasidism distinct from other Jewish mystical trends and even other Jewish groups is that the *mitzvah* of prayer was elevated to be even more important than the study of Torah.[96] Prayer is essential for Hasidic religiosity and the means by which any *hasid*, if he demonstrates the correct devotion, can achieve a state of *bittul*, an annihilation of the self. As Louis Jacobs points out, "This attitude is especially to be cultivated at the time of prayer, so that in Hasidism prayer is essentially an exercise in world-

[92] Ibid., 257.
[93] Ibid., 258.
[94] Ibid., 258.
[95] Kaddish, *Kavvana*, 165.
[96] Louis Jacobs, *Hasidic Prayer*, (Portland, OR: Oxford, 1972), 17.

forsaking and abandonment of self."[97] The goal is for the individual to realize that God is present everywhere and, by overcoming one's physical reality, one can encounter the Divine directly.[98]

At the heart of all of Hasidic thought is *devekut*, the attachment of oneself to God in prayer. This type of communion with God distinguishes itself from the *devekut* of the *Zohar* in that *devekut* in Hasidism was a state that a *hasid* would maintain in all aspects of life, rather than a temporary one.[99] Even more so, Hasidism adapted the Lurianic concept of *tzimzum*, explaining that God's self-contraction "was not caused by an internal struggle within the Godhead but by God's love for what was created, and thus it was not a self-exilic act of the Godhead but an expression of divine charity and love for mankind."[100] Since the only true reality is God, the physical realm of man and the *Shekinah* and the *sefirotic* realm all blind humanity to this reality. If one properly directs himself through *devekut*, his longing to be reunited and unified with God can be achieved. *Devukut* and *kavannah* in Hasidism appear to go hand-in-hand; concentration allows one to lose himself in the act of prayer, "forget that he himself exists as a separate entity" and commune with God."[101]

Because one's devotion to God is so intense, his level of *kavannah* is just as strong. The Hasidic masters prescribed that when one is about to pray, he should pray as if he is about to die. Only God's love can give the person the ability to finish reciting his prayers and stay alive.[102] *Kavannah* is reflected in the joy one has when performing the commandments, the spontaneous movements and melodies that emerge when he is fully immersed in prayer, and his willingness to

---

[97] Ibid., 21.
[98] Arthur Green and Barry Holtz, *Your Word is Fire: The Hasidic Masters on Contemplative Prayer* (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 1993), 7.
[99] Ibid., 21.
[100] Joseph Dan, *The Teachings of Hasidism*, (Springfield, NJ: Behrman House, 1983), 18.
[101] Kaddish, *Kavvana*, 164.
[102] *Zava'at Ha-Rivash*, as quoted in Joseph Dan, *The Teachings of Hasidism*, 108.

separate himself from this world so that he can be part of God's. Instead of individual *kavannot* referring to specific elements of the Divine, *kavannah* in Hasidism was a unified direction or aim in prayer. Every letter and word has significant meaning, but they are beyond symbols, they are expressions of God. The intention is to unify all the letters into words so that their power can be revealed:

> Every letter in prayer is a complete world in itself, and if you do not recite the prayer with all your strength, so that this aspect of it is realized, the prayer will be incomplete, as if one of its limbs were missing....the power of your prayer will enable you to achieve the merit of uniting your thought with the divine world.[103]

While Hasidism clearly understood that letters and words of prayer did have hidden meanings, their conception of unifying these letters implies that they also recognized that focusing on the complex details of the *kavannot* seemed to limit one's capacity for *devekut*. As Jacobs questions, "How could a worshipper become attached to God and have only God in mind if, at the same time, he was expected to engage in the very severe effort of retracing the details of the Sefirotic map?" [104] For the *hasid*, then, if *kavannah* involved avoiding distractions from praying, and the purpose of prayer was to attain *devekut*, focusing on anything but God, including the symbols found in prayer, would prevent them from achieving their goal.

One major Hasidic group, Habad, particularly stresses the importance of *kavannah* in prayer and communing with God. Characteristic of Habad is that the ascent to a state of *bittul* is a gradual one; while any prayer can be recited with great devotion, contemplation in prayer occurs in stages. While early Hasidic thinkers viewed *bittul* as a tool to ascend to God, Habad understood *bittul* to be part of the journey. *Hitbonenut*, or concentration, for Habad has two phases: (1) *binah*, deep concentration on the idea that God created *ex nihilo* and by Him also is creation preserved, and (2) *tevunah*, when one's consciousness of this idea is so integrated within

---

[103] *Zava'at Ha-Rivash*, as quoted in Dan, *The Teachings of Hasidism*, 107.
[104] Jacobs, *Hasidic Prayer*, 75.

him that he can call upon this awareness to become one with God.[105] This reflection on creation and becoming aware of God's reality is a process that emulates the cosmos; it makes it possible for God to be revealed in all realities.[106]

An element of being aware that God's presence is in all things is recognizing that even distractions are God's creations. The Baal Shem Tov and his disciples all taught that one should not attempt to battle these distractions, in particular, evil thoughts, but allow these thoughts to become a part of the ascent to God. For these thoughts to be eliminated, one must transform this evil desire into a longing for God:

> It is not necessary to fight the evil thought actively or to move your head from side to side in an effort to drive it away; none of this helps, and fixing your attention on the evil thought may even strengthen it. The only thing that works is to ignore the evil thought and concentrate fully on whatever you are doing....If you heed this advice, the evil thoughts will go away of their own accord. [107]

At first glance, one might assume that the Hasidic system for concentration and prayer is a response to the individual's constant yearning to become unified with the Divine. However, it is the exact opposite: God needs man to pray because God is a Giver.[108] Everything in the physical world is a reflection of God. Man prays solely for a God who is the authentic reality:

> You can see that, since a man's chief aim when he pours out his speech in prayer and supplication is only for the sake of the exile of the Shekhinah, it follows that he has only one request...It is to this that his aim and his efforts are directed, to elevate them to their own source, and he senses nothing of his own needs....His requests are numerous in proportion to the different kinds of sorrow he experiences all the time. [109]

Prayer, then, should not be for human needs, but must be strictly for the *Shekhinah*. All of the worshipper's petitions are different expressions of the same prayer of requesting God to bring the

---

[105] Ibid., 84-87.
[106] Ibid., 90-91.
[107] *Likutey Moharan I*, chap. 233, as quoted in Dan, *The Teachings of Hasidism*, 114.
[108] Jacobs, *Hasidic Prayer*, 30.
[109] Rav Zeev Wolf of Zhitomer, quoted in Jacobs, *Hasidic Prayer*, 31.

Shekhinah to Him. The prayers of a worshipper literally bring harmony to the universes of the *sefirot*. In other words, the needs of humanity are the needs of the *Shekhinah*.[110]

While Hasidism developed a structure that made prayer and communion with God more accessible, their system resulted in the tension that they wanted to avoid. Rejecting all claims that a worshipper prays for his own needs eliminates the possibility for the *hasid* to experience new things when he prays. If no matter what one prays involves the same focus of being unified with God, he easily can fall into the routine of reciting a fixed text with a fixed desire. Hasidic prayer does elevate the importance of demonstrating appropriate emotion in prayer through words, gestures, and music, but later Hasidic thought also emphasizes that simple sincerity is enough to establish an appropriate level of concentration. Even if a person does not understand what he is saying, as long as he knows he is praying for God, his prayers are not only valid, but they are performed with an appropriate level of *kavannah*. To some extent, all of Jewish mysticism, including Hasidism, recognized that an average person was not skilled enough to pray with *kavannah* consistently. As much as the Baal Shem Tov and his disciples wanted even the layman to be able to accomplish this goal, they fell into the same problem experienced in the Middle Ages, and the rabbinic period before that: *kavannah* was more of an ideal than a true possibility. Therefore, structure always was needed in the effort to become focused and heartfelt when praying.

By the nineteenth century, the Enlightenment had spread throughout much of Europe and resulted in a renewal of rationalism. Contemporary philosophers and theologians sought to preserve or to transform tradition while encouraging Jews to participate in ritual and practice in a more meaningful and personal way. What distinguishes modern from medieval thought in regard to prayer is that the earlier philosophies argued that prayer should reinforce man's

[110] Kaddish, *Kavvana*, 229.

understanding of God, while the moderns asserted that the purpose of prayer is self-growth and self-discovery. Prayer was still seen by some, but not all, as a dialogue between man and God; they demanded that any worshipper needed to embrace a theology reflecting both man and God. Hence, effective prayer requires both one's intellect and heart for self- realization to occur.[111]

The starting point for nineteenth-century philosophers when they speak about religion, including prayer, is reason. For Hermann Cohen, Jews needed to "pay careful attention to the environments in which they live, absorbing what is in keeping with the Jewish spirit and warding off dangers to that spirit."[112] Cohen believed that any approach to Judaism needed to begin by examining the traditional sources. With this in mind, the function of prayer was educational; prayer exemplified the most important ideas about Judaism. The primary lessons that prayer and all of religious observance taught were ethical. He argued that religion was an integral part of life that reveals truths about the world we live in. Cohen believed that the individual's religious practice was part of his role in the entire community. In essence, an authentic relationship with God only can be established when one prays with a congregation. Together, each individual can pursue not only his own growth, but contribute to the "moral improvement of humankind." [113]

Cohen argues that the God-idea is the highest embodiment of truth and ethics. God represents the moral ideal; man's ethical task is to discover himself in relation to God. As Jack Cohen suggests, without God humanity "has no focus, no purpose, and no possibility of fulfillment." [114] People, in turn, need to believe in God as an inspiration for living an ethical and moral life. Hermann Cohen explains that the experience of prayer requires concentration: "for all spiritual, for all moral action, the mind needs to withdraw into itself; it needs the

---

[111] Ibid., 230.
[112] Jack J. Cohen, *Major Philosophies of Jewish Prayer in the Twentieth Century*, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), 11.
[113] Ibid., 14.
[114] Ibid., 15.

concentration of all its inner forces and prospects."[115] Prayer is based in an intellectual trust in God and teaches what it means to be morally responsible. The mind, for Cohen, is what allows for an emotional connection with God.

Prayer is also an expression of humanity's love for God. Since the God-idea and ethics are considered one and the same, man's love is based in his commitment to become virtuous and just. Therefore, *kavannah* is a person's desire to improve his "knowledge of and dedication to moral goodness."[116] This longing for God is not about evoking a divine response, but about realizing what it means to be truly good. Prayer's effectiveness relies on one's *kavannah* "to gain, to restore, or preserve their moral purity."[117] This type of intentionality and devotion is what makes it possible for one to apprehend this moral ideal. Thus, prayer is the tool for self-examination and understanding one's self more deeply.

Hermann Cohen's lasting contribution to Judaism and his understanding of prayer is that he validated the importance of believing in God through reason. Franz Rosenzweig, a student of Cohen's, criticized his teacher for simplifying the relationship between man and God, claiming that moral and scientific thought could not account for this relationship. Rosenzweig agreed with Cohen that prayer and religious practice were the foremost expressions of monotheism, but the encounter between man and God is based in speech.[118] In his *The Star of Redemption*, Rosenzweig introduces his idea of "speech-thinking," which "depicts the dynamic process of reality and the movements of self, the human other, and the Infinite Other."[119] His speech-thinking is his model for understanding the coexistence between man, God, and the world.

---

[115] Herman Cohen, *Religion of Reason*, as quoted in Cohen, *Major Philosophies of Prayer*, 16.
[116] Ibid., 19.
[117] Ibid., 19.
[118] Yudit Kornberg Greenberg, *Better than Wine: Love, Poetry, and Prayer in the Thought of Franz Rosenzweig* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1996), 24-25.
[119] Ibid., 5.

Humanity and God are in constant dialogue with each other, but it is through prayer that God reveals Himself to man; it is the mode by which man can participate in this conversation.

Rosenzweig suggests that man, God, and the world are always in a dynamic relationship with each other, and uses the ideas of creation, revelation, and redemption to describe this process. Creation and redemption symbolize God and man's respective dialogue with the world; it is revelation where God and man meet. At the heart of Rosenzweig's understanding of revelation is prayer. Prayer is man's acknowledgement of his love for God:

> The commandment to love can only proceed from the mouth of the lover. Only the lover can and does say: love me! – and he really does so. In his mouth the commandment to love is not a strange commandment; it is no other than the voice of love itself.[120]

Much like Cohen, Rosenzweig argues that the traditional sources teach man about how to have a relationship with God. For Rosenzweig, the liturgy guides the individual in how to love God and express his love. While learning to love God effectively is an individual endeavor, it is best achieved through public worship. The prayer book reinforces man's love for God, and congregational prayer enhances man's ability to actualize this love. Rosenzweig compares man's love for God to man's love for his neighbor, in part because this is the closest humanity can tangibly understand what it means to love. As a result, communal prayer is "often more primary in the prayer experience than the spontaneous love of God."[121] Effective prayer occurs when the individual is part of the community and their collective desire to know love is fulfilled.[122]

Another important aspect of Rosenzweig's speech-thinking as it relates to prayer is that he discourages speech, language, and grammar that are monotonous. He explains that an aspect

---

[120] Franz Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption* as quoted in Jack J. Cohen, *Major Philosophies of Jewish Prayer in the Twentieth Century*, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), 29.
[121] Cohen, *Major Philosophies of Prayer in the Twentieth Century*, 28.
[122] Greenberg, *Better than Wine*, 14.

of speech-thinking is dialogue. When a man prays, he should do so as if it were a conversation. If revelation is being aware that prayer itself is the response to God's love, redemption is "the soul's action, wholly turned toward the neighbor in deed and consciousness."[123] In other words, part of the interaction between God and man through prayer relates to not just being of aware what prayer can achieve, but actually partaking in the act of prayer. Prayer is understood as an art form; it unveils a person's "insights, ideas and feelings" that "are waiting to spring forth into the open."[124] This process leads to a sense of recreation and renewal; worship becomes a model for the human's desire to love and is transformed into a fixed and eternal part of time and space. For that reason, the concept of speech-thinking is *kavannah* for Rosenzweig. As with Hermann Cohen, prayer is based on the commitment to gaining insight into the self. Its efficacy, though, is contingent on both the words of prayers and the environment in which one prays. Communal prayer exemplifies man's determination to improve the self and the world. With the right intentionality, prayer is the way that the triadic elements of creation, revelation, and redemption can interact with each other. [125]

Rosenzweig's speech-thinking is frequently associated with the dialogical philosophy that emerged during his time. His contemporary and close friend Martin Buber also stressed that the relationship between man and God is based in dialogue. However, Buber rejected the notion that the encounter between man and God should be treated as a unique experience. As with Rosenzweig, direct, open, and authentic dialogue with each other can lead to an encounter with God. What distinguishes Buber from Rosenzweig, however, is Buber's suggestion that if people treat every encounter they have in life as if it were an encounter with God, God's presence would be eternal:

---

[123] Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption* as quoted in. Cohen, *Major Philosophies of Jewish Prayer*, 32.
[124] Greenberg, *Better than Wine*, 78.
[125] Cohen, *Major Philosophies of Prayer in the Twentieth Century*, 33.

> If we named the speaker of this speech God, then it is always the God of a moment, a moment's God...In such a way, out of the givers of the signs, the speakers of the words in lived life, out of the moment's God there arises for us a single identity, the Lord of the voice, the One.[126]

Experiencing God is immediate and can occur through every human relationship, but the aim should not be to have an experience. Buber speaks about how dialogue is directing one's entire being into a relationship. To be in dialogue with God is living every moment and believing that our reality and God's reality are one and the same. Prayer, for Buber, represents man's whole-hearted conversation with God:

> We call prayer in the pregnant sense of the term that speech of [humans] to God which, whatever else is asked, ultimately asks for the manifestation of the divine Presence, for this Presence's becoming dialogically perceivable. The single presupposition of a genuine state of prayer is thus the readiness of the whole [person] for this presence, simple turned-towardness, unreserved spontaneity.[127]

Therefore, prayer signifies man's giving in his relationship with God. *Kavannah* is when an individual puts his entire being into turning towards God and opens himself to the idea that God is present everywhere he goes. Intentionality is not a matter of action according to Buber, but a matter of dedication. Buber fundamentally differed from Rosenzweig because prayer for Buber was something extremely personal. Dialogue with God is an individual duty; one can create sacred experiences and transform his prayers into inspiration for living completely. Buber himself admitted that there are no guarantees when conversing with God and even stressed that he didn't demand that people believe. However, he asserted that even though God is impossible to understand, God needs man and man needs God for the relationship to endure. By framing one's prayers and way of living as genuine, sincere manifestations of one's commitment to the relationship, God's voice can emerge in surprising and amazing ways:

---

[126] Martin Buber, *The Eclipse of God*, as quoted in Kenneth Paul Kramer, *Martin Buber's Spirituality: Hasidic Wisdom for Everyday Life* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2012), 113.
[127] Ibid., 112-113.

> Can it be our true task, in the world into which we have been set, to turn away from the things and beings that we meet on our way and that attract our hearts; our task is precisely to get in touch, by hallowing our relationship with them, with what manifests itself in them as beauty, pleasure, enjoyment....Any natural act, if hallowed, leads to God.[128]

Martin Buber sought for man to discover wonder in the world as if every experience was an encounter with God. For Abraham Joshua Heschel, humans have lost their ability to even recognize wonder when they see it. As a result, the need for prayer and God diminishes. Like Buber, when man only perceives the world based in humanity, he fails to see the larger picture. Prayer is consequently not the mechanism for humanity's quest for God, but is "a ladder on which thoughts mount to God to join the movement toward Him which surges unnoticed throughout the entire universe."[129] Man's aim in prayer is for God to need him as much as he needs God.

Heavily influenced by Hasidism, Heschel understood prayer as a specific way of understanding and viewing the world. Through prayer, man can examine the world from God's point of view and can rise to a higher level of existence. Worship allows man to sense "the presence of God in the world," and become "absorbed into the wonder and mystery of the outmost regions of existence."[130] This conception of worship mirrors that of *bittul*, as prayer demands an element of self-abandonment. Heschel encourages the worshipper to be open to the idea that the words he prays, the music he listens to, and the movements he engages himself in all are unified. Contemplation of God through prayer is the means by which man can step outside himself and have a transcendent experience.[131]

---

[128] Martin Buber, *The Way of Man*, as quoted in Kramer, *Martin Buber's Spirituality*, 113.
[128] Ibid., 112-113.
[129] Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Man's Quest for* God, as quoted in Cohen, *Major Philosophies of Jewish Prayer*, 33.
[130] Cohen, *Major Philosophies of Prayer*, 113.
[131] Ibid., 114.

This experience is purely emotive; the dialogue with God is based in one's passion when praying. While Heschel explains that man's desire for God and God's desire for man are fundamentally different, people must do what they can to acquire God's attention. Part of this process requires one to recognize the divine Presence by "taking the mind out of the narrowness of self-interest."[132] To be open to a reality of God does not involve man's rationality, compassion, or even desire to be in dialogue. Prayer is a fundamental part of life, but efficient prayer yields some type of discovery or revelation. It is only at this moment that one can say that they have penetrated beyond the human experience and encountered God:

> ....the source of truth is found not in a process 'forever unfolded in the heart of man' but in unique events that happened in unique moments in history. There are no substitutes for revelation, for prophetic events...At Sinai we learned that spiritual values are not only aspirations in us but a response to a transcendent appeal addressed to us. [133]

Heschel, like many other philosophers and theologians, believed that prayer was in some way a learning experience. Prayer is a reminder of the history of the Jewish people; it recalls the past, provides hope for the future, and becomes an aspect of the present. The words found in prayers, as Rivka Horowitz points out, "are the spiritual treasures of Judaism."[134] The prayers in the prayer book are empathetic prayers: they serve as a doorway that helps man rise to God. At the same time, the preparation of prayer and the structure involved in prayer are necessary means to help a person discover himself. Therefore, there are moments when prayer is the "outpouring of the heart," but there are also times when fixed prayers help one pray when he lacks the words to say.[135] Heschel doesn't attempt to reconcile this tension between *keva* and *kavannah*. He does assert that spontaneity is the goal, but it is a type of spontaneity that can also emerge

---

[132] Heschel, *Man's Quest for God*, as quoted in Rivka Horowitz, "Abraham Joshua Heschel on Prayer and His Hasidic Sources," in *Modern Judaism* 19 (Oct. 1999), 297.
[133] Cohen, *Major Philosophies of Jewish Prayer*, 117.
[134] Horowitz, "Abraham Joshua Heschel on Prayer", 300.
[135] Ibid., 300.

through order. In other words, one can achieve *kavannah* by participating in the *keva*. Man's longing for God has nothing to do with his own personal needs. By transferring his energy from longing for God into his prayers, he can affect the world around himself. Heschel wants man to forget himself in prayer, and praise God so that he can reflect on God. *Kavannah* can be understood here as inwardness; the focus is not on the thorough details of praying, but to reveal oneself to God and let God reveal Himself to man.[136]

The notion that embracing modernity meant forsaking the traditions of Judaism was a major concern for twentieth-century Jewish thinkers. Heschel made the conscious effort to demonstrate that a liberal approach to Judaism need not compromise traditional Jewish faith. Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik took this idea a step further by creating a theology that considered both Western and Jewish tradition. He utilized these sources to clarify and strengthen *halakhah* and validate Judaism. His goal was to show how philosophy is inherent in the *halakhah*. This is best illustrated in his discussions about prayer.

Soloveitchik asserts that tradition outwardly forbids man to approach and talk to God, but prayer is the only exception to this rule. Prayer is necessary for man because he has an "inner need to commune with God, to communicate with the infinite."[137] *Halakhah* responds to this need by emphasizing that one's prayers should adhere to the precise structure and forms of tradition and cannot deviate from it. Even though man should be prohibited from praying to God, it is a commandment. While man can never pray in his own words, he can pray as his ancestors did in hopes that their prayers, like those of their descendants, would be deemed worthy by God.

---

[136] Ibid., 301-303.
[137] Kaddish, *Kavvana*, 201.

Since praying is a *halakhic* obligation, *kavannah* is simply "obeying God's will."[138] Even the sincerity described in the Talmud is unimportant for Soloveitchik. Praying is not about focusing on the meaning of the words; it is about fulfilling an obligation that otherwise should be forbidden. In his article, "Redemption, Prayer, Talmud Torah," Soloveitchik links prayer to the idea of redemption. He explains that one of the major reasons that man's prayers are inadequate for God is that man is like a slave who has no self-awareness.[139] Prayer then is a liberating experience of becoming aware of one's own suffering and realizing what his needs are:

> God needs neither thanks nor hymns. He wants to hear the outcry of man, confronted with a ruthless reality. He expects prayer to rise from a suffering world cognizant of its genuine needs. In short, through prayer man finds himself. Prayer enlightens man about his needs. It tells man of the story of his hidden hopes and expectations. It teaches him how to behold the vision and how to strive in order to realize this vision...the very instant he finds himself, he becomes a redeemed being.[140]

For Soloveitchik, the very definition of *tefillah*, meaning to "discriminate, examine, and understand," unveils its purpose of helping a person realize his true self. The attitude involving prayer, the *kavannah*, is the desire to legitimize one's needs.[141] Since God cannot be influenced, prayer aids the individual in finding the right words to express to God. By intentfully and thoughtfully following the structure inherited by him, man can discern what is truly significant to him:

> Prayer is not just a shriek or a cry anymore. It is rather a well-defined thought, a clear conception...The term is related to thinking, judging, discrimination. In short, prayer is connected with the intellectual gesture...the outpouring of the heart merges with the insights of the mind...I pray for the gratification of some needs since I consider them worthy of being gratified. I refrain from petitioning God for the satisfaction of other wants because it will not enhance my dignity.[142]

---

[138] Ibid., 201.
[139] Ibid., 209.
[140] Joseph B. Soloveitchik, "Redemption, Prayer, Talmud Torah," in *Tradition: A Journal of Orthodox Thought* 17 (Winter 1983), 66.
[141] Kaddish, *Kavvana*, 201.
[141] Ibid., 213.
[142] Soloveitchik, "Redemption, Prayer, Talmud Torah," 67.

What is interesting about Soloveitchik's conception of prayer and *kavannah* is that he only makes reference to the *Amidah*. He remains conflicted about the idea of prayer because he insists that man in unworthy and undeserving of it. Yet, he also notes that prayer reveals what man should consider important in his life. The text of the *Amidah* communicates in human terms what man should prioritize as his needs. Soloveitchik is not concerned about prayer in the broader sense of the term, but does suggest that one's focus in prayer shouldn't be unclear. Having *kavannah* in prayer means gaining a deeper understanding of what it means to be in relationship with God:

> Prayer tells the individual, as well as the community, what his, or its, genuine needs are, what he should or should not, petition God about. Of the nineteen blessings in our *Amidah,* thirteen are concerned with basic human needs, individual as well as social and national...The person in need is summoned to pray.[143]

The focus here is not on the literal meaning of petitioning God or even the individual prayers themselves. *Kavannah* is not an emotional experience, but an intellectual one. By praying, man can uncover how his tradition speaks to him and understand aspects about himself that he cannot understand on his own.

There is no doubt that prayer has always been a fundamental aspect of the Jewish experience. From the Talmud to today, Jewish thinkers have struggled with creating a structure of prayer that would not compromise the prayer's internal and external meanings. The recurring concern throughout the history of Judaism has been determining what it means to fulfill the commandment of prayer. As a result, every notion about the function of prayer is considered to be the ideal. Because not everyone can be an effective worshipper, the expectation for any worshipper is that they *strive* for excellence. In regards to the idea of *kavannah*, to have any direction or aim when it comes to praying requires both an emotive and an intellectual element.

---

[143] Ibid., 65.

What appears to be common among all Jewish prayer concepts is that the worshipper must have some type of motivation, desire, or commitment to the act. Where these definitions of prayer and *kavannah* differ is in explaining what those motivations, desires, or commitments are. For some, prayer is for God: man prays because he seeks to cause God to respond to him. For others, prayer is for the worshipper: man prays because he seeks to further understand God, or in a more contemporary sense, seeks to better understand himself.

With all of these considerations in mind, the ideas of intentionality, devotion, thoughtfulness, attentiveness, openness, and willingness all encompass some aspect of what tradition has called *kavannah*. Today, worship leaders and even worshippers themselves have expressed the same frustrations as their predecessors. Even though attaining *kavannah* is the ideal, there is so much difficulty getting even close to attaining it. As a result, worship leaders and worshippers are often discouraged from praying. The fixity of prayer no longer is an aid for mindfulness, but a barrier to having any meaningful and purposeful experience. In the next chapter, we will examine the various trends and phenomenological concerns that both influenced how the concepts of prayer and *kavannah* have developed in modern Judaism and impact how we understand them today.

Part Two: *Kavannah* in Light of Modernity

Jews have always been challenged to assimilate and acculturate within the larger community. However, the end of the Middle Ages marked a significant turning point in Jewish history. Previously, Judaism was an entire way of life based in the traditions passed down from generation to generation. Jews lived in isolated communities and set up their own systems of government. To both the outsiders and themselves, they were a minority as well as a nationality. At the end of the eighteenth century, Western nation-states began to consider granting citizenship rights to Jews, and Jews actively began to seek this status for themselves to normalize their situation in Western societies. When this occurred, their Jewishness became only one identity marker that defined them. As such, politics, philosophy, science, and economics all influenced how a Jew viewed himself as part of society and how he related to his Judaism.[144]

Jews needed to demonstrate that their religious practices were compatible with the demands of Western society. Numerous ideological, intellectual, and physical reforms to tradition were made so that Jews could assure a place in the modern world. One of the most noteworthy expressions of these reforms was related to worship and the understanding of prayer. Jews questioned how the worship experience they inherited could remain meaningful to them. In this chapter, I will examine various factors that developed from the Age of Enlightenment to contemporary America that have significantly influenced how Jews conceive of *keva* and *kavannah* in a modern context.

Any new approach to prayer and worship in the eighteenth century was a direct outcome of the *Haskalah*, the Jewish offspring of the German Enlightenment. The forerunner of the *Haskalah*, Moses Mendelssohn, was the first Jew to defend Judaism as a rational religion that

[144] Leora Batinsky, *How Judaism Became a Religion: An Introduction to Modern Jewish Thought* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), 1-4.

complements, rather than challenges, Enlightenment ideals[145]. For him, Judaism did not need to be modernized because it was inherently modern; within it were universal truths that all Jews, in any period of history, could relate to. While Mendelssohn's conception of Judaism was the first to respond to the changing society in which he lived, many Jews argued that even though Judaism could be modern at its core, its outward expressions remained separate from those of its neighbors[146].

Because the Jew strongly desired to be both German and Jewish, his religiosity could not reflect the old and archaic rituals to which his ancestors adhered. Mendelssohn attempted to reinvigorate these ancient traditions by justifying their presence in the modern world, but it was Immanuel Kant who challenged Jews to fuse the past with the present. Kant believed that Judaism's focus on law and ritual prevented Jews from identifying the true, moral nature of religion. He believed in a modern German, pietistic understanding of religion based in ethics and morals that stemmed one's desires and passions[147]. Kant, who is often considered to be the most influential of thinkers for early modern Judaism, defined prayer as the means to a moral life. Worship needed to be fitting for the enlightened Jew; it was a person's "work upon himself (for the quickening of his disposition) by means of the idea of God."[148] Prayer was a worshipper's internal dialogue within himself. It was not an offering for God, or even the fulfillment of a commandment, but a device for an individual to deepen his moral commitment to righteousness.[149] Kant noticeably never used the terms *keva* and *kavannah*, but his conception of

---

[145] Ibid., 19-20.
[146] Michael A. Meyer, "Should and Can an Antiquated Religion Become Modern?: The Jewish Reform Movement in Germany as Seen by Christians and Jews," republished in *Judaism within Modernity: Essays on Jewish History and Religion*, ed. Michael A. Meyer, (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2001), 210-212.
[147] Batinsky, *How Judaism Became a Religion*, 6-7.
[148] Michael A. Meyer, "How Awesome is this Place!": The Reconceptualization of the Synagogue in Nineteenth-Century Germany," republished in *Judaism within Modernity: Essays on Jewish History and Religion*, ed. Michael A. Meyer, (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2001), 227.
[149] Meyer, "Antiquated Religion," 213-214.

piety in relation to prayer suggests that that he understood the *keva* of prayer as the framework that the service was based in; that is, the worshipper in conversation with himself in God. By actively reciting the prayers, as well as listening to the preacher, the individual could potentially leave inspired and morally improved. *Kavannah* was the full experience itself: worship needed to be enriching so that the feelings evoked during prayer would move the worshipper to act virtuously.[150]

As the eighteenth century came to a close, the rationalist tenets of the Enlightenment were attacked by the Romantics, who stressed that religion and piety "grew from the inner, subjective experience of the individual."[151] Religion could not solely be understood through a rational lens, but was the result of one's emotions and feelings. Romanticism, which is closely associated with German Protestantism, is best represented by Friedrich Schleiermacher. Schleiermacher believed that piety could be found through one's personal and individual experiences. Prayer, then, was a literal outpouring of the soul. Like Kant, Schleiermacher believed that one could leave the church transformed, but in his case, the moral imperative is based in the will of God.[152] One could argue that Schleiermacher did not distinguish between *keva* and *kavannah*, as the entire experience should be intentional in and of itself:

> We should raise ourselves from the powerlessness into which fear and greed drag human beings and attain the sense and full use of our powers, so that we can behave ourselves under all circumstances as is appropriate for everyone who considers that he lives and acts under the eyes and protection of the Highest.[153]

---

[150] Meyer, "How Awesome is this Place!," 234-235.
[151] Michael A. Meyer, *The Origins of the Modern Jew: Jewish Identity and European Culture in Germany, 1749-1924*, (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1967, 90.
[152] Meyer, "How Awesome is this Place!," 227.
[153] Ibid., 227.

Therefore, the actual act of praying is the *kavannah*; it is one's devotion to God and "an edification of the spirit, ennoblement of the heart, and awakening the spirit to true virtue and morality."[154] Here too, prayer led to *kavannah* and *kavannah* alone.

The ideas from both the Enlightenment and the Romantics set the stage for external and internal reforms to be made in Jewish worship. German culture was defined by proper manners, order, and conduct: everything and everyone should reflect the dignified nature of society. For Judaism to be beneficial to the modern Jew, all of its rituals and practices needed to mirror those of modern society. Early reforms to worship had to do with creating the appropriate setting for a Jew's inner state to be affected. For example, attendees needed to dress cleanly and neatly. Each synagogue developed specific rules to ensure proper behavior. The synagogue needed to be aesthetically pleasing. Children were either forbidden to attend services or were carefully supervised by their parents. Excessive emotion was avoided and congregational participation was eliminated. Each community established its own beliefs about what was essential and inessential to the service. The Jews of this time wanted to avoid a chaotic atmosphere that would distract them from the solemnity and devout nature of prayer. Grandiose music sung by the choir or accompaniment by an organ, as well as a German-language sermon modeled after the best Protestant preachers, all were included to enhance the prayer experience.[155]

The purpose of Jewish worship reform in the last years of the eighteenth and into the nineteenth centuries was to stimulate contemplation, inspire action, and be structured along the lines of Christian worship so that a Jew could fully integrate himself into European society. Previously, *keva* and *kavannah* were separate aspects needed for prayer. Now, in order for prayer to be meaningful, the liturgy, music, sermon, and even the building all contributed to the

[154] Meyer, "How Awesome is this Place!", 235.
[155] Meyer, *Origins of Modern Jew*, 132-133.

effectiveness of *kavannah.*[156] The rationalism of the Enlightenment forced Jews to examine the physical manifestations of prayer, and Romanticism allowed Jews to reinterpret their heritage by responding to the needs of the individual. As Isaac Euchel, a disciple of Moses Mendelssohn, argued, prayer was not simply an obligation to serve God, but needed to be of benefit for the worshipper himself. It is in the presence of God that one's "moral sensitivities are revived and raised to a higher level."[157] With this newly envisioned understanding of worship and restructuring of its physical appearance, the *kavannah* of prayer was associated with its purpose, function, and meaning. These worship patterns and trends of eighteenth and nineteenth century Europe were preserved as Jews began coming to America. As tradition increasingly was criticized for being outdated, America allowed for more changes in worship and the prayer experience than had ever occurred previously.

Even though Jews had a presence in North America beginning in 1654, very few changes were made to ritual and practice until the 1840s when a large influx of German Jews arrived in the United States. Early reforms to Judaism in America were almost identical to those instituted in Germany. Any changes brought about were primarily in appearance and for the sake of social conformity. However, America did not put the same limitations upon the Jews as had been the case in Europe. America was fundamentally different in the sense that it already was modern. As Jews arrived in the United States, they brought with them the ideological values of the Enlightenment and Romanticism, but were freer to choose their own values and priorities. The mindset of the fledgling nation was that of individualism: "Every person had the freedom to choose in matters of religion...to worship or not to worship in accordance with his or her own

[156] Meyer, "How Awesome is this Place!," 235.
[157] Michael A. Meyer, "The Origins of the Reform Concept of Prayer: An Eighteenth Century Essay by Isaac Euchel," in *The CCAR Journal: The Reform Jewish Quarterly*, Vol. 59, No. 3 (Summer, 2012).

individual conscience."[158] For the first time, Jews could voluntarily participate in religion without it conflicting with their day-to-day lives in the surrounding society.

The most prevalent Jewish worship changes that occurred in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century America can be found in the developing Reform movement. Like his German predecessors, the American Reform Jew wanted his Judaism to be highly personalized. If tradition was not the only factor that dictated one's morals, then Judaism needed to "be guided by rational thought and by personal emotions."[159] Worship services retained their grandiosity and sophistication, but stressed that the access point for *kavannah* was through familiarity. The organ and choirs continued to be the major performers of music, but the repertoire expanded "to include abundant hymns, the texts of which were English translations of Hebrew prayers or adaptations of Protestant favorites."[160] The liturgical changes in the prayer book reflected the Protestant worship style as well as stressing the American ideal of autonomy. Jews wanted all of Jewish practice to "meet them where they are rather than accepting that a divinely revealed religion has certain truths that have to be believed and observed."[161] Ideas of social justice and the words of the biblical prophets aligned nicely with the conscience of American Reform Judaism, since "the prophets spoke for the underdog...here were individuals who spoke out of their personal experience with God."[162] Prayer could inspire the Jew to be actively involved in

---

[158] David N. Power, "Worship in a New World: Some Theological Considerations," in *The Changing Face of Jewish and Christian Worship in North America*, ed. Paul F. Bradshaw and Lawrence A. Hoffman, (University of Notre Dame Press: Notre Dame, IN, 1991), 227-230.

[159] Walter Jacob, "The Law of the Lord is Perfect: Halakhah and Antinomism in Reform Judaism," in *The CCAR Journal: The Reform Jewish Quarterly*, Volume 51, no. 3 (Summer2004), 78.

[160] Benjie-Ellen Schiller, *The Hymnal as an Index of Musical Change in Reform Synagogues*, in *Sacred Sound and Social Change: Liturgical Music in Jewish and Christian Experience*, ed. Lawrence A. Hoffman and Janet R Walton, (University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, IN: 1992), 189.

[161] Dana Evan Kaplan, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to American Judaism*, (Cambridge University Press, New York: 2005), 7.

[162] Walter Jacob, "Renewing Reform Judaism: From Pittsburgh to Pittsburgh," in *Platforms and Prayer Books: Theological an Liturgical Perspectives on Reform Judaism*, ed. Dana Evan Kaplan, (Rowman and Littlefield, Lantham Maryland:2002), 84.

social change, and the sermon remained a focal point of the service to stress social action and religiosity.

In order to make worship accessible and more decorous, *keva* also had to increase. The terms "minister", "hymns," and "silent devotion," which had previously been unknown to Jews, were included in the prayer book. Performance directions were clearly delineated in the prayer book so that the worshipper could follow along during the service.[163] The prayer book opened from left to right instead of right to left, suggesting that the use of Hebrew should be limited. Entire prayers and sections in the prayer book were eliminated to avoid repetition, allow for more modern readings, and prevent the risk of the service becoming boring to the worshipper.

While most Jews in America had "already shaken off the obligations of ritual observance, where there was no traditional rabbinic establishment that could counter innovation," others resisted the Reform movement's intentional efforts to separate themselves and criticized them for completely abandoning tradition.[164] Also having their roots in Europe, Conservative Judaism and Orthodoxy took shape in late nineteenth-century America. In addition, as the Reform movement fully institutionalized itself in America, the mass immigration of Eastern European Jews between 1882 and 1924 challenged Reform Judaism's claim to being the most authentic expression of Judaism in America. So, any changes by the Reform movement in regard to the function of prayer and to the liturgy itself were undertaken to distinguish itself from the culture of the new immigrants, as specifically an American Judaism based in universalism and pluralism. Because Reform rejected the notion that *halakhah* was binding, innovation, creativity, and variety could ensue. The purpose of prayer was to tell the "worshippers that they were

---

[163] David Ellenson, "Reform Judaism in Twentieth Century America: The Evidence of the Union Prayerbook and Gates of Prayer," in *Between Tradition and Culture: The Dialectics of Modern Jewish Religion and Identity* (Scholars Press, Atlanta, GA: 1994), 198.

[164] Lawrence Grossman, "Jewish Religious Denominations," in *The Cambridge Companion to American Judaism*, ed. Dana Evan Kaplan, (Cambridge University Press, New York: 2005), 82.

praying as part of American Israel, a community at home in and acculturated to American values."[165] The focus on *keva* and structure existed to eliminate the worshipper's anxiety that Judaism would be in turmoil as it had been in the past, as well as to conform to western notions of order and decorum in the worship service. As Lawrence Hoffman notes, even the title of the first American Reform prayer book, the *Union Prayer Book*, showed that its authors and advocates wanted to "fix an American rite, limiting local custom as much as possible, and instructing people who no longer predicate Jewish customs on traditional Jewish law how to best constitute a modern Jewish community."[166]

As previously stated, beyond what had been done in the second half of the nineteenth century, the reforms made to worship in early twentieth-century America were minimal. The structure and order of the service was "the very essence of religious respectability and spirituality."[167] Yet, the Jewish community gradually became more and more diverse and the uniformity of worship could not persist. Jews had become an integral part of American society and embraced an American way of life. The continued influx of Eastern European Jews until the 1920s, followed by the Great Depression, the Holocaust, and the establishment of the State of Israel all greatly impacted how Jews related to their Judaism. As a whole, Jews in the second half of the twentieth century turned back to their religion and reaffirmed Jewish practice, including worship. Ritual and practice had lost their authenticity and now needed to "speak to the Jewish spirit and have [their] roots in Jewish sources rather than borrowed ones."[168] In particular, the Reform movement greatly revised its liturgy to include more Hebrew, be more thoughtful in specific ritual practices for Shabbat, and return to a more traditional structure of

---

[165] Lawrence Hoffman, "The Liturgical Message," in *Gates of Understanding: A Companion Volume to Shaarei Tefillah: Gates of Prayer* (New York: CCAR, 1977), 145.
[166] Ibid., 145-146.
[167] Ibid., 150.
[168] Benjie-Ellen Schiller, *The Hymnal as an Index of Musical Change*, 199.

services. The prayers themselves also demonstrated an increase in intentionality: the prayers for social justice were more explicit and direct, and the rational element found in earlier liturgies balanced or replaced with texts that evoked emotion.[169] At the same time, the importance of structure, order, and decorum remained prevalent. Perhaps even more direction in performance practice appeared in the Reform prayer books. Congregational participation was guided by uniform responsive readings. The language of prayer was eloquent, poetic, and inspirational. *Kavannah* was about embracing tradition and acknowledging its importance today.

While changes in Reform liturgy slowly emerged through the 1950s, every incarnation of a meaningful worship experience was rooted in the aestheticism Jews brought with them from Germany decades before. Finding meaning within Judaism was more about feeling a sense of belonging rather than feeling a connection with God. The return to tradition, then, was more about an expression of practice as an identity marker instead of belief. Jews had moved to the suburbs and the synagogue became not only a place of worship, but also a place of community. To affirm their identities, Jewish expression was about defining what they were not, rather than defining what they were. As a result, synagogues and worship services became symbolic expressions of Jewish identity rather than expressions of religious commitment.[170] In essence, *kavannah* referred to upholding rituals and experiences that could be understood as meaningful within the constructs of modernity. This shift led to an increase in innovation and creativity in services and a newfound emphasis on the child's involvement in life-cycle events. The goal of all aspects of Jewish life was to evoke a sense of pride in being Jewish.[171]

---

[169] Herbert Bronstein, "Platforms and Prayer Books: From Exclusivity to Inclusivity in Reform Judaism" in *Platforms and Prayer Books: Theological an Liturgical Perspectives on Reform Judaism*, ed. Dana Evan Kaplan, (Rowman and Littlefield, Lantham Maryland: 2002), 34.
[170] Dana Evan Kaplan, "Trends in American Judaism from 1945 to present", in *The Cambridge Companion to American Judaism*, ed. Dana Evan Kaplan, (Cambridge University Press, New York: 2005), 63-65.
[171] Lawrence Grossman, "Jewish Religious Denominations," 101-105.

If the 1950s marked a period of Judaism attempting to redefine itself after the Second World War and the Holocaust, the 1960s marked new opportunities for Jews to become actively involved in their synagogues as well as to develop an interest in their religious life. For many, one's Judaism was about survival instead of religiosity. Synagogues were challenged to respond to the ambivalence of American Jewry and needed to fully re-envision a Judaism that was relevant, essential, and important. [172] The order and decorum once emphasized by German culture was abandoned so that Jewish practice could be a reflection of the "enthusiasm and deeply felt emotion" of its adherents.[173] By the 1970s, youth had returned from summer camps and inspired congregations to integrate their camp music and group singing within services. Music became the primary form of creating meaning in worship; singing "spirited folk tunes and neo-Hasidic melodies" was a more inviting and warm worship experience than the music of the past.[174] Music became increasingly more performative; its Jewishness was found in its lyrics, but its style was "pop, rock, easy listening, blues, country, and other musical influences" that were popular and participatory during the time.[175] Songwriters such as Debbie Friedman and Jeff Klepper enthusiastically and successfully took the styles of the American music scene and appealed to the families and children who otherwise had no connection with their Judaism.[176]

As Rabbi Daniel Freelander notes, music created "special and spiritual moments" that were shaped each time that they were sung.[177] This type of music offered opportunities for intense peer-bonding and a strong sense of a generational cohort identity. Freelander argues that this type of intimacy was directly impacted, cross-denominationally, by the camp movement. At

---

[172] Mark Kligman, "Recent Trends in American Jewish Music," in *The Cambridge Companion to American Judaism*, ed. Dana Evan Kaplan, (Cambridge University Press, New York: 2005), 365-366.
[173] Ibid., 78.
[174] Ibid., 366.
[175] Ibid., 366.
[176] Ibid., 368-369.
[177] Rabbi Daniel Freelander, as quoted in Kligman, "Recent Trends in American Jewish Music," 368.

camp, to pray was to be part of a peer community instead of being intimidated. Rabbi Jeffery Salkin explains that "where synagogue music was lofty, accessible only to those with deep, intensive training, camp music was inviting, simple to learn and to join, accessible to all."[178] The worshipper could discover a prayer's *kavannah* through song and community: "Our souls open up, and we sing familiar sounding melodies and words, and feel comfortably connected once again to our community and our God."[179] Prayer could be uplifting, transformative, and inspirational; it could respond to the need of belongingness that was apparent for Jews in America, and ensure a connection between Jews that was rewarding and meaningful. Because of the new worship style in the camp environment, and the youth who brought it to the synagogues, congregants became more committed, active, and affiliated to their Judaism.

The late twentieth century also produced a counterculture in which Jews began to look inward and seek a new Judaism based in individualism and community, where one's personal relationship to their Judaism contributed to closeness with other Jews. Even though many American Jews were spiritually detached from their religion, "a passionate minority of Jews has invested a lot of energy in creating and nurturing innovative programs that encourage religious renewal."[180] The Havurah movement was established in the late 1960s and 1970s by college-aged baby boomers who believed the institutionalized Jewish community was impersonal and could not provide the intimacy and personalization that they strived for. These independent communities stressed "the importance of, and seriousness about, prayer."[181] By rejecting the hierarchy of the synagogue and embracing diverse practices, meaningful experiences could

---

[178] Rabbi Jeffery Salkin, as quoted in Ramie Arian, "On the Influence of Camp," *eJewish Philanthropy*, 27 January 2012.
[179] Rabbi Daniel Freelander, as quoted in Kligman, "Recent Trends in American Jewish Music," 368.
[180] Jack Werthheimer, *A People Divided: Judaism in a Contemporary America*, (Brandeis University Press, Hanover, NH: 1993), 66.
[181] Riv-Ellen Prell, "Independent Minyanim and Prayer Groups of the 1970s: Historical and Sociological Perspectives," in *Zeek: A Journal of Jewish Thought and Culture*, January 2008.

emerge. They believed that worship was based too much in the *keva* and imposed too much Americanism and too little Judaism. In order for prayer to be spiritually meaningful, it had to be directed by the needs of the community.

Among the countercultural movements that formed was also the Jewish Renewal movement, which integrated Eastern religion and the self-actualization movement with Jewish mysticism and Hasidism.[182] Founded by Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, Jewish Renewal became a full-fledged institution by the 1980s. Originally called the P'nai Or Religious Fellowship, and now going by the name ALEPH, the Renewal movement's goal is the search for:

> ...the inner meaning of Torah, Kabbalistic philosophy, Chasidic prayer, meditation, humanistic and transpersonal psychology, and *halakha* to gain a practical orientation to Jewish spiritual life. By understanding their intention, the individual derives a new appreciation of Judaism as a path to inner balance and inter-connectedness with others, and with the world we live in.[183]

In essence, Reb Zalman Schachter-Shalomi advocated for a Judaism based in self-expression. He wanted Jews to identify with their Judaism in a way that helped them find harmony in what he believed to be a non-harmonious world. Prayer, then, is one way to engage in this quest. Reb Zalman recognized that worshippers hardly had an emotional connection to prayers, and was able to articulate the problem of Jewish worship, and implicitly of all religious practice, clearly:

> We have learned to think of prayer as something that happens in houses of worship, and what happens in our synagogues – the responsive readings, the cantor, the choir – rarely touches that feeling space inside us. The hushed reverence that synagogues try to preserve unfortunately inhibits any spontaneous expression of wonder or joy. But, over the past ten years or so....they [Jews] are enthused by the possibility that a given Jewish ceremony can help them in their quest for enlightenment.[184]

---

[182] Jack Werthheimer, *A People Divided*, 77.
[183] Jack Wertheimer,"The America Synagogue: Recent Issues and Trends," in *American Jewish Year Book*, 2005), 98.
[184] Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, as quoted in Dana Evan Kaplan, *Contemporary American Judaism: Transformation and Renewal*, (Columbia University Press, New York: 2009), 69.

Reb Zalman's solution was that by singing songs, wordless melodies, and reciting the prayers in Hebrew with devotion, one could "engage in a deep and sincere search for the meaning of life."[185] Judaism can be renewed and revitalized by discovering its "inner spirit," and turning to the "legacy of Jewish mystical and Hasidic traditions, which is expressed in the cultivation of traditional practices such as meditation, chanting, and davenning…to enhance both individual and communal practice."[186] Prayer required a level of personalization so that the prayer book could be treated as a living document; the worshipper should be able to pray in the words that best resonate with him. For these counter cultural movements, *kavannah* is of upmost importance, seeking to transform one's spirituality and foster a "personal connection to the Divine by infusing ancient Jewish wisdom with a modern, egalitarian and socially progressive consciousness."[187]

Judaism has become so diverse that there are now a variety of ways in which a worshipper's needs are met. Mainstream and counter-movements that developed all wanted to meet the needs of worshippers by giving them choices. In addition, particularly in the Reform movement, there has been an increase in intermarriages and Jews by choice. The GLBT community progressively has been given a greater voice in the community. As such, congregations have needed to be more inclusive of everyone's beliefs, practices, and orientations. Some congregations pray entirely in Hebrew and their congregants wear traditional ritual garb, while others pray primarily in English with a combination of classic and contemporary melodies and readings.[188]

---

[185] Dana Evan Kaplan, *Contemporary American Judaism: Transformation and Renewal*, (Columbia University Press, New York: 2009), 265-267.
[186] "What is Jewish Renewal?," in *P'nai Or: Jewish Renewal Congregation of Philadelphia*, <http://www.pnaior-phila.org/renewal>.
[187] Ibid., "What is Jewish Renewal?," <http://www.pnaior-phila.org/renewal>.
[188] Bruce Phillips, "American Judaism in the Twenty-First Century," in Kaplan, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to American Judaism*, 397-414.

Lawrence Hoffman notes that American Judaism has always been involved in worship wars. Some communities are fighting to preserve tradition and believe that any creativity in worship compromises its original intent.[189] Other communities want to acknowledge and honor tradition, but insist that any innovation enhances a person's relationship with prayer. As we have seen, *keva* and *kavannah* have increasingly become difficult to differentiate as the focus is now on finding meaning in the entire worship experience, both through structure and innovation. Influenced by the many trends that came before them, a variety of organizations and initiatives have formed as an attempt to address the needs of those who want to preserve tradition while at the same time being contemporary.

Dana Evan Kaplan suggests that the most recent decades of American Jewish history have been characterized by a split community. The majority of Jews are completely detached from their Judaism, while the minority population represents those who are active in their congregations and whose Judaism is an essential aspect of their identities. By the early 1990s, the Jewish communal world began setting aside funds to transform the synagogue experience and renew the vibrancy of Jewish life in the synagogue. A new Romanticism, that mirrored and continued what had begun in the 1960's, focused on deepening one's connection to their Judaism. In 1995, the first Synagogue 2000 conference brought together Jewish leaders and clergy from all denominations to discuss worship transformation. This group wanted "to break down arbitrary barriers separating clergy from congregants and congregants from each other."[190] The trends that emerged from this conference included drawing from numerous musical styles, from Shlomo Carlebach to Debbie Friedman to Jeff Klepper, to reach all populations. Synagogue 2000 (now Synagogue 3000), co-founded by Rabbi Lawrence Hoffman and Dr. Ron

[189] Isa Aron, Steven M. Cohen, Lawrence A. Hoffman, and Ari Y. Kelman, *Sacred Strategies: Transforming Synagogues from Functional to Visionary*, (Alban Institute, Herndon, VA: 2010), 45-47.
[190] Ibid., 48.

Wolfson, was formed to "deepen the spiritual engagement" of congregants, and challenge congregations to "rethink what the synagogue stood for."[191] They created a new model for transforming religious life and practice by integrating Jewish values, texts, and traditions with theories provided by social sciences (sociology, psychology, anthropology). Unique to Synagogue 3000 is that its leaders and supporters come from "the entire spectrum of Jewish religious life."[192]

Shortly after the first Synagogue 2000 conference, a variety of different alternatives for developing a spiritual relationship to Judaism emerged. In 1997, musician and songwriter Craig Taubman created "Friday Night Live" at Sinai Temple in Los Angeles, CA. The goal was to appeal to the twenty- and thirty-year-olds in the community, "to bring them back to synagogue and make them realize that Judaism has a great deal to offer to them."[193] The Friday Night Live model and Craig Taubman's music became the forerunner of "Shabbat Unplugged," "Rock Shabbat," and "Soulful Shabbat" service experiences that occur in numerous synagogues on a weekly basis. In addition, Taubman led the way for the music of singer-songwriters such as Dan Nichols, Josh Nelson, and Rick Recht to be incorporated in Shabbat worship. Taubman, in many respects, brought back the nostalgic camp environment that the youth had brought into congregations decades prior.[194]

Also emerging at the turn of the century was the organization STAR (Synagogue: Transformation and Renewal), whose Synaplex model was developed to provide numerous opportunities for a congregant to engage in observing Shabbat. Innovative worship services, as well as social, educational, and cultural programs, were to occur simultaneously so that every

---

[191] Dana Evan Kaplan, *Contemporary American Judaism*, 364-365.
[192] Ibid., 364-365.
[193] Rabbi David Wolpe, as quoted in Dana Evan Kaplan, *Contemporary American Judaism: Transformation and Renewal*, (Columbia University Press, New York: 2009), 336.
[194] Dana Evan Kaplan, *Contemporary American Judaism*, 336-337.

person could come to the synagogue and engage in a Jewish experience from his or her own vantage point. Like other initiatives, STAR sought to inspire individuals to return to the synagogue and become part of sub-communities that spoke to their Judaism. While STAR has closed its doors in recent years, its Synaplex model led to congregations offering multiple services at once or having special themed services throughout the month. Furthermore, congregations now are using a variety of different prayer books to reach their congregants. One week a synagogue may use a congregationally-made prayer book, and other weeks they would have a "classic" Shabbat that would be led from the *Union Prayer Book*, for example. Congregations have also experimented with having a "pre-neg," offering appetizers or wine and cheese prior to services rather than having an elaborate dessert oneg after services, in order to help congregants separate themselves from the work week and mindfully prepare for Shabbat.[195]

As previously stated, the most dramatic changes to worship life in America have always occurred in the Reform movement. In 1999, UAHC President Rabbi Eric Yoffie called for a "worship revolution" that would allow Reform Jews to "rediscover the power of prayer." He challenged clergy to make worship a priority within their congregations and encouraged synagogue boards to discuss the importance of worship and what it could look like for them.[196] As a result of Rabbi Yoffie's speech, the UAHC (now URJ) published the worship guides *Iv'du B'simcha: Worship with Joy*, and *Divrei Shir: Words of Song*, which consist of lessons to help congregations create meaningful worship visions and incorporate various musical styles into their congregation. In addition, the Reform movement published its first new prayer book in over thirty years, *Mishkan Tefillah: A Reform Siddur*, in 2007. New prayer books for the Conservative and Reconstructionist movements came somewhat earlier, all geared to allowing

[195] Dana Evan Kaplan, *Contemporary American Judaism*, 373-375.
[196] Ibid., 341.

individuals "to be involved in the ritual rather than just observing it" so "they would be better equipped to derive spiritual benefit from synagogue services."[197]

By the mid-2000s, the enterprise of worship and synagogue transformation had impacted American Judaism cross-denominationally. At the same time, other organizations such as the Institute of Jewish Spirituality were formed to provide the clergy, instead of the congregations themselves, with "valuable skills for effective leadership while creating opportunities to deepen their spiritual lives and connect meaningfully with the Divine."[198] The Institute's hope is that by aiding clergy leaders in their own exploration of their spiritual practice, through Torah study, meditation, prayer, yoga, and retreats, both the synagogue and spiritual leaders can be more aware of the possibility of a transformative Judaism.[199] Of note is that its leadership consists of members from the Reform, Reconstructionist, and Conservative movements. At the same time, the Institute's programs, as well as those of related organizations such as Elat Chayyim, The Awakened Heart Project, Makom: The Center for Mindfulness, and C-DEEP, all turn to the practices of Jewish Renewal, Hasidism, mysticism, and Eastern religions.[200] In essence, the Institute and its contemporaries advocate for all practices that enhance one's mindfulness. Many retreats are held in complete silence; yoga poses and body movements are integrated within worship; and chanting inspired by Eastern European *niggunim* are taught. The goal is for individuals to experience a sensual, embodied Jewish practice that trains their hearts and minds to see themselves, their bodies, and others with lovingkindness. By deepening one's awareness of the present moment, the potential for an ecstatic worship experience can arise.[201]

---

[197] Ibid., 342.
[198] *The Institute of Jewish Spirituality*, < http://www.jewishspirituality.org/about-us/our-mission-vision/>.
[199] Ibid., <http://www.jewishspirituality.org/about-us/our-mission-vision/>.
[200] Ibid., <http://www.jewishspirituality.org/resources/related-organizations/>.
[201] Ibid., <http://www.jewishspirituality.org/our-spiritual-practices/>.

An element of this surge in reinvigorating synagogue life is that many unaffiliated Jews are turning to other places to fulfill their spiritual inclinations. Recently, there has been an increase of independent minyanim throughout the country, which, as Dana Evan Kaplan suggests, are a "second wave of the havurah movement of the 1960s and 1970s, but with a renewed focus on traditional prayer and a focus on the quality of the worship experience."[202] One of these communities, Kehilat Hadar, was established in 2001 by Rabbi Elie Kaunfer. Hadar is "devoted to a full liturgy, egalitarian participation, and a spirited approach to services," and attracts hundreds of worshippers on a weekly basis.[203] Mainstream synagogues were deemed not to offer a warm, welcoming environment for the younger Jewish population, who felt alienated, judged, and not respected. At Hadar, efforts have been made to ensure that its members are embraced, included, and part of a community that "allows people to take ownership of their Jewish experience by actively creating a world of prayer, study and social action."[204]

One way in which the Reform movement has attempted to inspire congregants to take ownership of their Judaism and worship practice is through Visual T'filah. Created by Rabbi Dan Medwin in 2010, Visual T'filah "is a way to enhance prayer and assist worshippers in finding new or deeper meaning in prayers" by using "contemporary technology…to display liturgy for the community intermingled with art and other visual imagery."[205] Medwin emphasizes that the goal of Visual T'filah is to help the worshipper become more aware of a prayer's holiness by evoking feelings from art and visuals. The benefit, as he notes, is that worshippers are not attached to their prayer books; they can engage with each other and see each other's faces as they are inspired by the images that they see. Because many congregants cannot

---

[202] Dana Evan Kaplan, *Contemporary American Judaism*, 368.
[203] Dana Evan Kaplan, *Contemporary American Judaism*, 368.
[204] Dana Evan Kaplan, *Contemporary American Judaism*, 369.
[205] Dan Medwin, "Visual T'filah: Historical Antecedents and Guide to Best Practices," Rabbinic Thesis, (Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion, Los Angeles, CA: 2010) 3.

read Hebrew and find the meaning of prayer difficult, Visual T'filah can help a person better understand the ancient prayers in a way that is helpful to them.[206]

One of the primary functions of a synagogue has always been as a place for worship. In order for congregations to be successful in creating meaningful, effective, and engaging worship experiences, they need to respond to the needs of the congregants. Individuals want to be included and cared for and they want the synagogue to create programming specifically for them and those who share similar interests.[207] They want an opportunity for individual and personal prayer, and use music to "overcome sterility and rote renditions of the prayer service."[208] In order for worship to be a priority, congregations need to rethink how their space is used and to "create more suitable spaces for prayer" that allow for worshippers to connect with each other.[209] The choreography of the service needs to be participatory; congregants want to involve themselves in all aspects of the service: they want to sing, chant, bless, dance, and help activate their own *kavannah*.[210]

American Jewry continues to be at a crossroads. Rabbis, cantors, educators, and lay leaders today all are struggling with the same issues their predecessors did: how to honor the structure and tradition that has been passed down to them while responding to the need for meaningful, thoughtful, emotionally moving, and intentional experiences that are clear in their purpose and function. The leadership of congregations today all are quite aware of the trends that have come before them. They look to traditional texts and sources to help guide their decision-making processes in terms of worship planning. They reflect upon the ideologies of both Jewish and non-Jewish movements that have formed throughout history to bring new

---

[206] Ibid., 52-53.
[207] Jack Wertheimer, "Recent Issues and Trends," 71-73.
[208] Ibid., 74-75.
[209] Ibid., 75.
[210] Ibid., 76.

meaning to the sacred words recited during services. They utilize the models introduced by the countercultural movements of the 1960s and 1970s, as well as the variety of initiatives that sprang up over the past thirty years. The balance between *keva* and *kavannah* has always been at the heart of these discussions. At their core, these concepts have only evolved in meaning throughout the ages, but never have been changed in terms of understanding the importance of order and spontaneity in prayer. Over time, new voices have only added to this discussion, and, in some sense, have made it increasingly difficult to distinguish between *keva* and *kavannah.* At the same time, what emerges from these discussions are simply different expressions of the same values that encompass the ideas of *keva* and *kavannah.* Today, the notions of *keva* and *kavannah* within worship strongly refer to what it means to be an effective worship leader who inspires worshippers to create a worship vision that reflects the congregation, and to implement this vision through intentional planning, preparation, and practice.

I have had both the honor and pleasure of interviewing rabbis, cantors, musicians, and scholars who have been considered thoughtful in their worship planning, visioning, and implementation, particularly in the Reform movement. In addition, I have carefully examined numerous traditional and contemporary sources, many of which are discussed in the first two chapters, which address enhancing prayer and worship in the synagogue and have been inspirational for those whom I have interviewed. What follows is a synthesis of my research, study, and interviews in the form of a reflective worship guide that brings together all of the many voices I have encountered.

Part Three: ***Moreh L'Kavannah Ba-T'filah – A Worship Guide***

Contents

Introduction

Our concepts of prayer are constantly evolving and are becoming increasingly diverse. The act of worship no longer simply refers to devotion to God. For some, worship and prayer are about enhancing one's Jewish identity. For others, they are about being part of a community and socializing with others in a unique way and setting. Individuals want the worship and prayer experience to be relevant and meaningful to them, even with a sense that what they are doing links them to their ancestral past. Like their predecessors, they want prayer to reflect their time and generation. Yet, perhaps more than ever, social and cultural influences are impacting how an individual relates to the world that he lives in. As such, congregations are seeking new ways to engage their worshippers. Whether it is through technology, making references to pop culture, or even applying contemporary musical genres to the liturgy, people want prayer to be easy to navigate, accessible, and purposeful. Even though adapting specific elements of prayer in congregations may be the desired solution, an examination of the broader ideas behind these elements is necessary for there to be an effective result.

As worship leaders, we need to become more reflective and thoughtful about how we understand and then implement these elements. We need to constantly be thinking about what messages we want to convey in the services that we lead and how to inspire and teach our congregants about our tradition in a way that is meaningful to them. ***Moreh L'Kavannah Ba-T'filah – A Worship Guide*** is a compilation of reflections from rabbis, cantors, and musicians who have spent time thinking about the enduring aspects connected with prayer. These aspects include: (1) The purpose and function of prayer; (2) the meaning of *kavannah*; (3) the roles of the worship leader and worshipper; (4) creating a worship vision and sacred space; and (5) the use of music, liturgy, and language. By examining these elements, I believe that we can be more

effective in our own worship visioning, planning, and implementation. Like the concept of prayer, this worship guide is a work in progress, continuously evolving, ever expanding, and exploring the deeper meaning of meaningful and effective worship experiences.

The Purpose and Function of Prayer[1] 1a[2]

From Rabbi Nadia Siritsky: I believe that the purpose of prayer is to unite our hearts, minds, souls, and bodies into a service of God in order to bring God into this world. There are moments when we need to recharge and reconnect with God, and prayer allows us to re-center ourselves in order for us to be with God more fully.[3]

For Cantor Erik Contzius: A lot of times people come to the synagogue for comfort and escape, whereas I see prayer as something that is more about a reflection of the human condition and how we can grow from it.

According to Richard Hirsch, [Prayer draws] us in through enticement, challenging us to be open to change and shifting the ways we think, act, and speak during the many minutes, hours, and days that comprise our lives. Prayer ought to open us up to the world in a new way - not to a new world, but a new way of seeing our world...prayer ought to be both inspiration and reassurance that we can take that risk.

As Cantor Ellen Dreskin notes, I'm unimpressed by the idea that prayer is just to make you feel good or feel better. Prayer is also supposed to challenge you. I appreciate the quote, "Prayer comforts the afflicted and afflicts the comfortable." I like that a lot. There's often too much emphasis on feeling good. It's all about changing yourself in order to change the world. When you walk out a better person, prayer works.

In the words of Rabbi Laura Geller, What prayer means to me is turning myself so that I'm no longer the center of the story...At my best, prayer is about getting out of my own way and, as much as possible, trying to see the world for a moment through the metaphoric eyes of God.

Rambam, Hilchot T'fillah 1:1-3

It is a positive commandment to pray every day, as it is written: "And you shall serve the Lord your God (Exodus 23:25)." From our oral tradition, we learn that this service refers to prayer, as it says: "And you shall serve Him with all your heart (Deuteronomy 11:13)." The rabbis asked, in *Taanit* 2a, "What is the service of the heart?" They replied, "This is prayer."[4]

Rabbi Lawrence Hoffman suggests that: Worship establishes a present and links us to a past. But it also has an impact on our future. The story we establish as our own has consequences for what we will become, not just for what we were.

He adds: Perhaps first and foremost, prayer is a delivery system for committing us to the great ideas that make life worth living, because ideas that are ritually construed empower us to do what we would otherwise never have the courage to do. Prayer moves us to see our lives more clearly against the backdrop of eternity, concentrating our attention on verities that we would otherwise forget. It imparts Judaism's canon of great concepts and moves us to live our lives by them.

Rabbi Sue Ann Wasserman explains that Jewish worship is a carefully choreographed, multilayered dialogue between prayer leaders and the congregation, between individual worshipers and their communities, between each individual and God and between the individual worshiper and herself or himself. Therefore, worship change requires a partnership between the congregants and the clergy.

The Purpose and Function of Prayer 1b

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

According to P.J. Schwartz,

Prayer represents one access point for us to express to our Judaism. Since it is only one way that we can connect with our Jewish identity, it can represent something different for each person. In order for prayer to have meaning in our lives, we have to be willing to walk into the sanctuary and actively engage in the experience. We live in a world that demands that we have order and structure in our lives and live in a society full of expectations. Prayer challenges this reality because it is completely about the unexpected and entering the experience the moment being attached to no particular outcome.

Prayer requires us to be risk takers. We need to embrace the unknown, and discover the purpose of prayer and worship as we participate in it. No matter what prayer book is utilized, what music is sung, or which creative renditions of the prayers are used, the purpose of prayer must begin with our hearts. We have to go against our inclinations of knowing everything and every part of what we are about to do. We need to let go of ourselves, our desires, our needs, and, in many respects, free-associate. Prayer asks us to get out of our heads so we can truly get into our minds.

We will struggle with prayer. Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel understands this type of struggle as *spiritual audacity* – we need to question and contemplate the entire experience, including what we are saying and doing. Prayer is only a roadmap of a story that tells the forming of a community. It has the potential of elevating particular values and morals that we need to adhere to. Heschel would encourage us to ask ourselves, "What do I like or dislike about this experience?" "What is frustrating about these prayers?" and "Do I – or can I – find meaning to them?"

We have the permission to disagree with the messages a prayer conveys, or even be offended by what the worship leader says. While it may be important to avoid distractions so that we can truly experience prayer, we may need to hold on to things we can control so that we can embrace the experience. Sometimes we will look at our watches to see how much longer we have left in the service. Sometimes we may glance at our phones only to find a missed called or a new e-mail. Nevertheless, because we came to services, we did take the risk. I think that the risk allows us to discover something that may inspire us each time we pray.

I'd like to think that the purpose and function and prayer are about embracing the possibility for something special. The chance that we will leave wanting to better ourselves, with the prospect of learning something new, gaining some content and satisfaction in prayer. We are not always going to be transformed, but we can leave more willing to grow. Personal growth is a difficult journey, but those moments of clarity, revelation, or connection makes the struggle worth it. Prayer can do that for us. As such, even though our tradition explains that prayer is an obligation, we now can choose it to be one. We deem prayer to be a *mitzvah* worth pursuing. And, in doing so, we have fulfilled the *mitzvah* of prayer.[5]

How to Use This Guide

1 and 2: At the top of each page in **Cambria** font one will be able to identify the **Title of the Section**. **Numbers** are assigned to each section and **the pages** of each section are identified by **lowercase letters.**

3: Each page is divided into **three columns**. All quotes, taken from interviews and numerous print materials, are in **Book Antiqua** font.

4: In the **center** of the **first page of each section** is a quote from traditional Jewish *sources in **Garamond** font.*

5: Towards the **right hand side** of certain pages one will find my reflections and commentary in **Times New Roman Font**. When my commentary extends beyond a page, it will continue on the following page in **single columns**.

The Purpose and Function of Prayer 1a

From Rabbi Nadia Siritsky: I believe that the purpose of prayer is to unite our hearts, minds, souls, and bodies into a service of God in order to bring God into this world. There are moments when we need to recharge and reconnect with God, and prayer allows us to re-center ourselves in order for us to be with God more fully.

For Cantor Erik Contzius: A lot of times people come to the synagogue for comfort and escape, whereas I see prayer as something that is more about a reflection of the human condition and how we can grow from it.

According to Richard Hirsch, [Prayer draws] us in through enticement, challenging us to be open to change and shifting the ways we think, act, and speak during the many minutes, hours, and days that comprise our lives. Prayer ought to open us up to the world in a new way – not to a new world, but a new way of seeing our world...prayer ought to be both inspiration and reassurance that we can take that risk.[1]

As Cantor Ellen Dreskin notes, I'm unimpressed by the idea that prayer is just to make you feel good or feel better. Prayer is also supposed to challenge you. I appreciate the quote, "Prayer comforts the afflicted and afflicts the comfortable." I like that a lot. There's often too much emphasis on feeling good. It's all about changing yourself in order to change the world. When you walk out a better person, prayer works.[2]

In the words of Rabbi Laura Geller, What prayer means to me is turning myself so that I'm no longer the center of the story...At my best, prayer is about getting out of my own way and, as much as possible, trying to see the world for a moment through the metaphoric eyes of God.[3]

Rambam, Hilchot T'fillah 1:1-3

It is a positive commandment to pray every day, as it is written: "And you shall serve the Lord your God (Exodus 23:25)." From our oral tradition, we learn that this service refers to prayer, as it says: "And you shall serve Him with all your heart (Deuteronomy 11:13)." The rabbis asked, in *Taanit* 2a, "What is the service of the heart?" They replied, "This is prayer."

Rabbi Lawrence Hoffman suggests that: Worship establishes a present and links us to a past. But it also has an impact on our future. The story we establish as our own has consequences for what we will become, not just for what we were.[4]

He adds: Perhaps first and foremost, prayer is a delivery system for committing us to the great ideas that make life worth living, because ideas that are ritually construed empower us to do what we would otherwise never have the courage to do. Prayer moves us to see our lives more clearly against the backdrop of eternity, concentrating our attention on verities that we would otherwise forget. It imparts Judaism's canon of great concepts and moves us to live our lives by them.[5]

In the name of Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel: Prayer is an invitation to God to intervene in our lives, to let His will prevail our affairs; it is the opening of a window to Him in our will, an effort to make Him the Lord of our soul....Prayer is the soul's imitation of the spirit, of the spirit that is contained in the liturgical word.[6]

Rabbi Sue Ann Wasserman explains that Jewish worship is a carefully choreographed, multilayered dialogue between prayer leaders and the congregation, between individual worshipers and their communities, between each individual and God and between the individual worshiper and herself or himself. Therefore, worship change requires a partnership between the congregants and the clergy.[7]

The Purpose and Function of Prayer 1b

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks writes: Prayer is the language of the soul in conversation with God. It is the most intimate gesture of the religious life, and the most transformative. The very fact that we can pray testifies to the deepest elements of Jewish faith: that the universe did not come into existence accidentally, nor are our lives destined to be bereft of meaning. The universe exists, and we exist, because someone—the One God, Author of all—brought us into existence with love. It is this belief more than any other that redeems life from solitude and fate from tragedy.[8]

According to P.J. Schwartz,

Prayer represents one access point for us to express to our Judaism. Since it is only one way that we can connect with our Jewish identity, it can represent something different for each person. In order for prayer to have meaning in our lives, we have to be willing to walk into the sanctuary and actively engage in the experience. We live in a world that demands that we have order and structure in our lives and live in a society full of expectations. Prayer challenges this reality because it is about entering the experience of the moment without being attached to any particular outcome. While ritual, too, involves a level of order and structure, its influence upon us emerges once we recognize that how it impacts us will not necessarily be the same each time we pray.

Prayer requires us to be risk-takers. We need to embrace the unknown, and discover the purpose of prayer and worship as we participate in it. No matter which prayer book is utilized, what music is sung, or which creative renditions of the prayers are used, the purpose of prayer must begin with our hearts. We have to go against our inclinations of knowing everything and every part of what we are about to do. We need to let go of ourselves, our desires, our needs, and, in many respects, free-associate. Prayer asks us to get out of our heads so we can truly get into our minds.

We will struggle with prayer. Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel understands this type of struggle as *spiritual audacity* – we need to question and contemplate the entire experience, including what we are saying and doing. Prayer is only a roadmap of a story that tells the forming of a community. It has the potential of elevating particular values and morals that we need to adhere to. Heschel would encourage us to ask ourselves, "What do I like or dislike about this experience?" "What is frustrating about these prayers?" and "Do I – or can I – find meaning to them?"

We have the permission to disagree with the messages a prayer conveys, or even be offended by what the worship leader says. While it may be important to avoid distractions so that we can truly experience prayer, we may need to hold on to things we can control so that we can embrace the experience. Sometimes we will look at our watches to see how much longer we have left in the service. Sometimes we may glance at our phones only to find a missed called or a new e-mail. Nevertheless, because we came to services, we did take the risk. I think that the risk allows us to discover something that may inspire us each time we pray.

I'd like to think that the purpose and function and prayer are about embracing the possibility for something special: The chance that we will leave wanting to better ourselves, with the prospect of learning something new, gaining some content and satisfaction in prayer. We are not always going to be transformed, but we can leave more willing to grow. Personal growth is a difficult journey, but those moments of clarity, revelation, or connection makes the struggle worth it. Prayer can do that for us. As such, even though our tradition explains that prayer is an obligation, we now can choose it to be one. We deem prayer to be a *mitzvah* worth pursuing. And, in doing so, we have fulfilled the *mitzvah* of prayer.

Defining Kavannah

2a

Rabbi Lawrence Kushner says: In some sense, *kavannah* is a type of meditation – it's what centers you when you pray, it helps you get into the right mindset for prayer, and it's vital to our well-being. We can't be stuck in the order of things all the time.

In the words of Cantor Jodi Sufrin: *Kavannah* is a type of spirituality that feels very new and exciting, but is based in always asking the question, "What is the foundation of what we are doing?" It is the balance between innovation and creativity and understanding the importance of the power of memory.

For Rabbi Daniel Freelander, *Kavannah,* within the context of *tefillah,* is to have some sense of how we use the script to get us where we want to go. We want to get in touch with the universe, ourselves, and God and we want to get out of our "9 to 5" state of mind. Prayer can get our heads to a different place. We can create an intentionality of a moment by using the resources of the *keva.*

For Rabbi Shefa Gold, In building the power of intention, I am continually thinking about how I can become more present in the moment. The very first question that God asks us is, *"Ayekah?"* Where are you? That question is something I always think about, and I hear it each time I create my intention, each time I open my mouth to chant. For me, *kavannah* feels as if I am claiming my rightful inheritance and stepping into the larger life that I was meant to live.

Rambam, Hilchot T'fillah, 4:15

What is the rule about *kavannat ha-lev*? Any prayer without *kavannah* is not a prayer. So, if one prays without *kavannah* he must pray again with *kavannah.* Therefore, one who returns from a journey fatigued or in pain is forbidden to prayer until his mind is at ease. The rabbis said he should wait three days until he is rested, and then he should pray.

Rabbi Shira Milgrom suggests, *Kavannah* refers to creating a mindset for a particular prayer. The prayers are always different from each other, at different moments and different times. It is about making the prayer real; it is very important to us that our prayer is honest.

According to Sylvia Borestein, Mindfulness is a natural capacity of mind. It's balanced awareness of the truth of present experience. and steadies the mind so that confusion is recognized and clarity maintained. I think of mindfulness as a practice that develops over time, as well as sufficient unto itself in every moment. It's *becoming* wise and *being* wise at the same time. The becoming wise aspect happens gradually. By paying attention calmly, in all situations, we begin to see clearly the truth of life experience.[9]

Danny Maseng notes, Kavannah comes from the Hebrew word that also means to aim at, to target; to be on target. It's an archer's term or a spear thrower's term. So, you aim at a target and you throw at it. It is both the vehicle through which one reaches the very goal one is intending on to begin with, but it is also, in and of itself, something one has to strive for. Oddly enough, that's exactly what it means in Zen Buddhism as well. When you talk about really meditating, really sitting, to really find that focus, you have to be like an archer, becoming one with the target. This idea of becoming one with the target is really what kavannah is all about.

In the name of Rabbi Jonathan Slater: Mindfulness involves connecting with our entire being, using all of our senses and experiences to connect with the Divine and center ourselves in the moments of prayer.

Defining Kavannah 2b

Yitzhak Buxbaum writes, Be aware that prayers come from the heart, not the head... There are times when it is possible to pray fast, but for most individuals, praying with *kavannah* means doing so slowly. Sometimes, pausing between words can allow one to better understand what they are saying and put the prayers into their own words... Sometimes it is better to say fewer things in the prayer service in the prayer book and to say them more slowly and with fully and deeper intention, than to say everything but without true intention.[10]

Cantor Ellen Dreskin states, I believe we need to try and infuse the *keva* with the *kavannah.* I don't think it is an either *keva* or *kavannah* conversation because it is the *kavannah* that allows for the *keva. Kavannah* brings the words to life; it is the living relationship between me and the words.

Rabbi Elaine Zecher suggests: *Kavannah* is paying attention to the big idea of being connected in the act of praying.

For Rabbi Don Goor, Kavannah, for me, is whether I actually prayed during the service. I always ask myself, "Did something really touch my soul on a very personal level? Was I swept away from the intellectual and have an experience that moved me? Did I have a deep sense of intent?"

For Cantor Erik Contzius: I pretty much describe them in a classical sense. Keva is the action of praying and kavannah is the intention of praying. A concrete example of this tension is the keva is what's on the page of a prayer book and kavannah is what you bring to the page in a prayer book.

Musician Craig Taubman argues, We frequently feel like we need to choose between *keva* and *kavannah,* but I don't necessarily think it's about a choice between intentionality and content. Both need to complement and reflect each other in order for the integrity of both to exist. The issue is really about authenticity. How authentic *keva* is directly impacts how authentic *kavannah* is, and vice versa. I really think that we need to practice what we preach - our words need to reflect our actions, and our actions need to be reflective of our words.

In the words of P.J. Schwartz: I believe that prayer is the pursuit of possibility, wonder and amazement. *Kavannah* is how we engage in this pursuit. The rote of services aren't going to do the job for us – the text, structure, order, planning, reflection, choreography, and the repertoire – all of the *keva* involved in prayer has absolutely no meaning without the meaning we bring to it.

Kavannah is about finding our own reasons for praying. When we pray with *kavannah,* our reasons for praying may allow us to have a shared experience. Our commitment and devotion to the experiences allows us to take ownership in understanding what we are saying and helps us become related to the service itself. The investment into prayer is our *kavannah* – it's the drive, the motivation, the force that pushes us to discover something new every time we pray.

The *keva* of the service can be a tool to help us reach a state of *kavannah,* but we need to know how and what this tool is to be used for. However, like all tools, the *keva* is not always going to work. It's one of the reasons why we spend a lot of time changing the elements of the service so that we can fine-tune the tools we have so they can better help us get to the *kavannah.* I truly believe that improving the tools we have won't necessarily do what we think it could do. When we pray with *kavannah,* we go beyond the mundane and enter the sacred. I've been greatly impacted by the notion that the word *kavannah* in Hebrew is rooted in the concept of aiming. I like to think that when we pray, we each have

a bow and arrow. There is a target right in front of us. It's far enough away to not be 100% sure what it looks like, but close enough to see the circles that lead to the center. Before we shoot the arrow, we have to align it just right on our shoulder. We keep one eye open and focus directly on the target. After some breaths of concentration, we finally let go. We aren't always going to hit the target from afar, but we always can get in the right mindset to aim for it. *Kavannah* is represented by the breaths of concentration we take right before we let go of the arrow. The sighs of relief we have after the arrow lands, regardless of where it lands, is what happens when we completely lose ourselves in the moment and in the intention.

I think that a one-sentence definition of *kavannah* is difficult to formulate – it's our own intellectual understanding of what we are saying, the emotion we put into what we say because we believe it to be true, and the relinquishing of that which we can control. *Kavannah* is just letting it – whatever it may be for us – happen. I've always been attracted to the notion that our intellect comes from both our minds and our hearts. They both need to be aligned for true, authentic, meaningful knowledge to occur. We have to take the breaths in order to get into the right mindset and we have to concentrate on being in the moment. *Kavannah* is about letting go of the past regrets, the present turmoil, and concerns for the future – it's about being in the now, having no expectations, and seeking all possibility. I firmly believe that *kavannah* is different for everybody because it's like other abstract concepts, such as love, that we have in this world. When you know that you are in love, you just know it to be true. You have a "feeling," and that feeling isn't the same for everyone. When it's *beshert*, you know it's meant to be. You know it's meant to be not necessarily for any particular reason other than you just know. To love just is to love. To be meant to be is just to be meant to be. To pray with *kavannah* just is – because it will happen when you least expect it, perhaps even when you are already distracted, but when it hits you, you know it's there, might even feel it coming, and it definitely will leave an imprint after it occurs.

Role of the Worship Leader 3a

Rabbi Jonathan Blake said: The key to creating a worship experience with *kavannah* is not about the liturgy, and it's not about the song selections and it's not about how good or bad the voices of the *shalechei tzibbur* are. It's not about how eloquent they are. It's about how authentic they are in their own prayer. In other words, you can't create *kavannah* for congregants if there is no *kavannah* coming from the *bimah*. The leaders need to be an example for what the community needs to be doing.

In the words of Rabbi David Stern: [As worship leaders] we tell [the congregation], here is why this prayer is difficult, and here is how I, as your worship leader, think of it as I lead you through it.

According to Rabbi Edwin Goldberg, My congregants know that I'm both praying and leading them in worship. They understand that this is not just a rehearsal for me. When I lead prayer, I can't look at it as my job or as if I am just coming to work. I have my own spiritual needs as well and when I lead, my needs can be met as I pray with the congregation. Not out of selfishness, but because I want to be a mentor.

Cantor Rosalie Boxt said: It's our job as clergy, to some extent, to provide more and more doorways and pathways for people's experiences to be deeper and richer.

For Cantor Alaine Katzew, As soon as another person enters the sphere of worship partnership, a conversation has to take place. A communication has to take place. And the way that communication happens is going to have an impact on everyone.

Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim, 53

A Shali'ach Tzibur [one who conducts the service on behalf of the congregation] who lengthens his prayers so that his voice may be clearly heard, if [he does this] because his heart rejoices at the giving of thanks to God in a pleasant manner then blessing will come upon him, provided that he prays in a respectful manner and stands in awe and fear of God.

Rabbi Lawrence Kushner states: I think that the leaders need to be honest with themselves and the worshippers. They need to tell the congregation that prayer is not going to always create a meaningful experience for people. We have to just do the best we can and not everyone is going to be satisfied. If prayer is about us and God, we, as leaders, have to pray. We are praying for ourselves and so that we can be a model for them and so our congregants can have something to work from.

Josh Nelson said, As worship leaders, we need to create a point of access that embraces their [the worshipper's] confidence. And from there, once they are confident and in an environment where they're able to come to God in a meaningful way, we can give them an opportunity to grow, to learn and to become confident in other ways as well.

Rabbi Elyse Frishman explains: The opportunity to select one piece over another is completely related to who I need to attend to most as a facilitator of worship. If I feel that I am successful in doing that, then I have a worship experience as well. The goal, then, is to get outside of "me" and become part of "we." To achieve that, I must pay attention to others and not to myself.

Rabbi Daniel Freelander asserts that: We are communal worship facilitators: We are the conductors of an orchestra. The orchestra is made up of worshippers. It is our job, as the conductor, to get inside the worshipper's heads and drag out as much *kavannah* as possible to focus them to be part of the community and be part of a great symphony that demonstrates something beyond what can be done alone. It is the choices that

the conductor makes that leads to new sounds and new experiences of the orchestra. This is our creative contribution to Jewish worship.

Cantor Susan Caro asserts: As leaders, we do have to be heard, have to be seen, and have to be felt. People have to believe you and those elements join in some way. The crucial, the key element is that you need to believe what you're telling people. Tell them what you think. Show them what you feel. Tell them where you are and I believe they will listen. You really need to make sure you've got that one straight. Until you do, nobody is listening to you really well. If they are not listening to you very well, then there's kind of chaos at that moment. There is unfocused energy.

In the words of Cantor Erik Contzius, The *sheliach tzibbur* is the steward of the prayer book, of prayer, and the engagement of the Divine. They need to lead the congregation towards a specific *kavannah* that is fundamentally different because it is holy and not profane. In order to be successful, I do my own personal check-in, because if I am the one leading and conveying the service and its meaning, I need to express what is in my mind and spirit. If I am the person that my worshippers count on in order to even have a chance at an experience, I have to make efforts towards balance and at the same time raise people up. I always ask, "Is there something better that I can do, or something better that I have, to bring the prayer book and service to life?"

In the name of Rabbi Don Goor: I think that a leader really needs to know himself. He needs to know what moves them in prayer, both in music and in words. If it's not going to move them, it definitely will not move the congregation. A leader also needs to know the team he is working with and the team needs to really be in line with each other in terms of what they want to happen in the sanctuary during prayer.

P.J. Schwartz believes that: The worship leader sets the tone for the service. Therefore, he must be in the mindset to lead from the very beginning. There has to be a sense of dignity he or she brings to prayer so that people can believe in themselves and believe there is a purpose for them doing what they are doing. The worship leader should inspire, presenting an idea or understanding about prayer that could be taken take home and reflected upon. As worship leaders, we need to constantly remind ourselves why we are leading and what its purpose is. We need to always ask, "What is congregational prayer for?" I believe it is so we can seek what Judaism's influence is in our lives.

Often when someone is leading a congregation in prayer they have the tendency to preach instead. Many people call this having a "rabbi voice" when on the *bimah*. Sometimes our voice alone hides us from the congregation and places us in a position of mystery. We can't be models of worship if we are not completely being ourselves.

Leading a congregation in prayer is, in effect, leading people into a potential dialogue with God.

Even when leading a congregation in prayer, the words of the prayer book should be in line with the authentic voice of the leader. If the words don't speak to you, don't say them. When I led from *Gate sof Prayer*, I frequently made the language gender-neutral. When I lead in prayer today, I don't always read a passage word for word. Sometimes I take the message that the prayer book provides and go off the page so I can make sure that I can add my voice to what is provided.

Many people question whether they can actually pray when they lead. As agents of the community, the leader should have not only intentionality in praying in the name of the entire

congregation, but also for himself. Even though the leader is indeed praying for the congregation in many respects, why can't he pray for himself as well? Tradition notes that the leader should demonstrate a sense of humility, knowledge of the prayers and the structure of the service, an agreeable voice, and be accepted by the community. How can the leader be accepted if he is not being the best representative of the congregation that he can be? He, too, is a congregant and member of the community. He should be inspired to inspire others. His personal connection to the prayers should be evident to those who follow his lead. When the leader seeks God and is in dialogue with tradition, his congregants can be as well. The worship leader is the prime mover in the prayer-work of the community. When he puts his energy into that work, he helps his congregants move through the service experience.

Worship leaders are role models for the worshippers themselves. In some respects, their worship experience, and even the fulfillment of their obligation to have *kavannah* while praying, is in the leader's hands. For many leaders, there is a concern as to whether or not they should participate in the act of prayer while leading. If, as leaders, we impact and influence how an individual understands the meanings of prayer and the function of praying, we need to be actively praying ourselves. There are many instances when rabbis and cantors struggle with this concept because the worship practice of the congregation is not congruent with their own practice.

Effective and intentional worship leaders can influence the *kavannah* of the service even if they don't share the same prayer practice entirely. If the leader can say what he means, mean what he says, and demonstrate this to his congregants, then prayer has the potential for being meaningful for everyone. He should give the service the credit and respect it deserves. Leaders of prayer not only need to stand in awe of God, but in awe of those whom they lead. If they believe in their congregants, that, too can create a meaningful prayer experience.

Therefore, I believe that effective worship leaders are in conversation with their congregants. They are simple, direct, and take their time when speaking. They have no sense of distance between themselves and the worshippers and do not come across as being "above" those whom they are leading. They are present and in the moment; they take the sacred task seriously and come prepared to lead. They realize that preparation doesn't always mean crossing every "t" and dotting every "i," but are open to the possibilities that emerge when praying with the congregation instead of praying for the congregants.

Role of Worshipper

4a

For Cantor Jodi Sufrin: It is unusual to have a congregation that is so willing to be a partner in worship and be open to trying new things. I think the best community of worshippers is those who trust the leaders and are okay with going outside their comfort zone.

According to Rabbi Shira Milgrom, As worshippers, we step into an ordered universe in prayer. It is really important to have a structure that people own, know and can count on. The prayer book is from our ancestors and, is, in a sense, an ordered universe. But, if that is all there is, then the universe cannot be brought into this reality. When we pray, we need to respond to the moment, to be able to identify a moment when it happens, and really breathe life into the structure. Stop and say the blessing. Name the moment.

In the words of Rabbi Nadia Siritsky: Being present is essential for the worshipper – it's the greatest form of participation. Active participation is about moving past our neurosis, anxiety, and unresolved issues so we can enter a place of order amidst the chaos.

In the opinion of Rabbi Lawrence Kushner: You aren't always going to be successful when you pray. You are going to make mistakes and doing it right may not be the same for everyone. To be a pray-er is part of Judaism – you continue to do things because it's an obligation to do them. It has evoked meaning before, so there's a hope that it will be meaningful again. Worshippers may feel like they are leaving the service without gaining anything, but it's all about perspective. I can guarantee though that a lack of satisfaction doesn't mean you can't learn something from the experience. If worshippers allow themselves to be vulnerable and open to the challenge of prayer, they are fulfilling the obligation to pray.

Mishnah Berachot 5:1

One should never stand up to pray without appropriate seriousness. The pious ones of old used to meditate one hour before praying in order to focus their hearts on the task.

Danny Maseng says: The congregants' role is first and foremost a willingness to have an open heart and an open mind. Have nothing in mind, no expectations. Just come in and sit and then engage. Engage in the text.

For Rabbi Elaine Zecher: One of the things we forget as worshippers (and also leaders) is that prayer is not about performance. In a lot of ways, prayer is like the removal of the fourth wall in theatre – we don't want to be passive worshippers, we want to be actively engaged. Part of that is about creating an environment in which congregants have some type of ownership in the experiences and are empowered to foster the experience.

Rabbi Zoe Klein says, When worshippers pray, they have the opportunity to share their personal stories with those around them. Prayer brings all those stories together and invites us to be the best we can be. How we share those stories might not be the same for everyone. Worshippers need to be participating in the service to tell their story, but we need to remember that sometimes participation doesn't always mean saying every word or singing every song. Let the congregants tell their story in their own words, in their own moments, and in their own way.

Cantor Erik Contzius argues, I like the traditional story that tells us that we don't have to study the *siddur* when you have learned it because the prayers themselves don't change. It is you that is doing the changing. So, when you read or pray something, you can change your attitude to the words based on how you have been impacted by what has happened to you during the day.

Role of Worshipper 4a

P.J. Schwartz asserts, I think that many people are afraid to pray because they are so concerned about whether they are praying correctly or not. In new environments, we sometimes feel lost amongst a crowd of people who know exactly what's going on. And even after the second, third, and fourth time that a person goes to pray, he or she may still feel uncomfortable. We need to allow ourselves to be uncomfortable. Prayer is all about relationship-building. You're getting to know the environment: the people around you, the music, the words, and the space. The job of the worshipper is to engage in the prayer experience: talk to the people, listen to the music, spend time with the prayer book and participate the best you can. If a person spends all their energy worrying about the right and wrong way to pray, then they are missing the point of prayer itself. As worshippers, prayer is what we make of it. I think that we can use prayer to get us into the present moment. It can center us, give us focus, and separate us from the normal stream of life. If we allow it, it can push us in a direction of greater awareness and wholeness.

I sometimes compare a sanctuary to a classroom and worshippers to students. As students, worshippers should realize that learning about prayer is a life-long task. The job of a worshipper is to constantly strive for better understanding and insight into the entire experience. Unlike school, though, the focus shouldn't be getting all A's on the test. Worshipping requires active learning – prayer is visual, auditory, and kinesthetic. The test of worship is finding the best way for a person to be an active learner. Sometimes that requires setting goals each time they pray. One day they could focus on just listening to the music and evaluating the types of prayer music they like. Another time, they could focus on better understanding the order of the prayers, or studying the various interpretations of a prayer's meaning. Regardless, to become a skilled worshipper takes time – and to be skilled is very individual. The worshiper's demonstration of his knowledge is not about knowing every word or every movement or every song. It's about his willingness to grow, his desire to try new things and be engaged in a way that he feels most comfortable being in.

Prayer doesn't have to be something you do in the sanctuary and can't think about anywhere else. Prayer is about dialogue – not just with God, but with other worshippers. If worshippers are truly interested in developing a prayer practice, it is their job to think. When thinking, they should be able to find some prior experience or knowledge to apply this experience to. When doing so, they should mentally prepare themselves to learn more about this new concept or idea. Now, this does not always happen, but a worshipper who wants to be actively involved in developing their worship practice needs to think about it. Spend time with others and reflect upon the prayer experience. Ask yourself, "What works for you and what doesn't?" There is no right or wrong answer to this question. You should feel free to ask questions, or express your own ideas about prayer. This allows you to construct your own knowledge about how prayer impacts you, and apply it to how you pray. In other words, take the *keva* of the service and make it your own. In doing so, the *kavannah* will come.

Creating a Worship Vision 5a

In the name of Rabbi Sue Ann Wasserman: There is a dialogue that worship leaders and worshippers have together as a community - *kavannah* is the moving target; it's anything that's of the spirit, it never sits still. In creating a worship vision, the *kavannah* is about asking how open both the leaders and congregants are to instilling a sense of spirit into worship, exploring how it can take place and how they plan to contribute to that spirit.

In the words of Shoni Labowitz: The magical beauty of a prayer service is in its art form. As a potter forms a vessel from clay, a prayer leader sculpts or choreographs with energy. The energy is first gathered, kneaded, and centered. Once centered, it can ever so gently rise and pause, rise and pause until it reaches the appropriate height for becoming a stable, empty, and reflective vessel. At that point it is anointed and adorned with its own unique characteristics and set out in the environment to fulfill its own destiny.[11]

According to Rabbi Nancy Flam: One way to understand prayer is that it is a transformation of consciousness. So we need to ask ourselves, "Where are we starting from? Where are we trying to go? What are the prayer strategies or practices that we know from experience are likely to us there?"[12]

Rabbi Jonathan Blake suggests: We believe that how we pray is the most outward and most public expression of who we are as a congregation. It's very important that if that's what we believe, then our investment should be large there. You have to be thoughtful about it, and that also applies to the overarching ideals that something feels organic and integrated.

Zohar, Beshallach, 2:63

Rabbi Hizkiyah said: When the Ancient One, concealed of all concealed, desires to provide for the worlds, He pours all and includes all in this supernal depth, and from here the well draws and flows, gushing and feeding streams and springs.

Whoever offers his prayer should concentrate heart and will to draw blessings from that depth of all, so that his prayer may be accepted and his desire fulfilled.[13]

In the name of Rabbi Elaine Zecher: The place where you start needs to be different from the place that you end in. I like the metaphor that an authentic worship experience is when everyone, hand in hand, is open to possibility. Not only should we focus on the structure of the service, but we should focus on what we get out of the structure - you need to end up in a higher place than where you started. That's what you focus on when visioning what you want prayer to look like.

According to Rabbi David Stern, When we think about creating a worship vision, we needs to look at the contexts of that vision: the individual levels, the communal levels, the textual levels, and the global levels. Each of these levels shape how we understand the impact prayer can have for the congregation and in our lives. When we look at the levels, we can realize what boundaries are needed to create a vision that best represents who the congregation is and what they want to achieve.

Josh Nelson suggests, I believe that everybody is searching for something and worship can guide them in that search with a little bit wider vision or more awareness or more sensitivity and in that place of connection. What I think makes intention when we create a worship vision is an acknowledgement of where we are trying to go. I think that a big problem with the worship is that we often forget to think about where we were trying to go.

Creating a Worship Vision 5b

Rabbi Janet Marder states, We need to be extremely clear, direct, and explicit about what we want to accomplish in worship so we can picture what it could looks like, sounds like, and feels like.

For Rabbi Edwin Goldberg, The problem isn't necessarily about what worship can look like or how it can be effective for our congregants, but it's about having a conversation as a community that centers us and our lives.

Cantor Ellen Dreskin argues, Visioning is about inviting the entire community to take responsibility for prayer. If we begin from the vantage point that there is indeed, value to prayer, the goal is to discover how the gems of worship shine and what it means to admire it.

Merri Arian reminds us, There are many different colors to worship. No worship vision needs to be the same, and it can change over time. Our vision is an expression of those colors and how the different shades come together to create something beautiful.

Rabbi Jonathan Blake asserts, There are numerous questions our community asks when we think about worship. We think about how the drama of the service relates to us, how there is an inherent cohesiveness and flow, and how prayer can be accessible to everyone.

Cantor Alaine Katzew says: In some sense, worship visioning is very pedagogical. Frequently, we spend so much time thinking about the parts of the service and not enough time thinking about the big ideas. Instead of focusing on the actual content, our vision should be conceptual and we need to ensure that our concept of worship aligns with what we do.

Rabbi Sue Ann Wasserman explains, Planning isn't just about creating a service outline or writing word-for-word what you are going to say, but it requires individual thought and reflection, as well as collaboration with the other members of the clergy and congregation.

Rabbi Lawrence Hoffman stresses, You have to look at how worship fits within the larger structure of the congregation. What's important to remember is that you cannot force meaning to something that isn't meaningful. Therefore, you have to create a situation where the congregants can be stakeholders in how worship is shaped within the congregation.

For P.J. Schwartz, Worship visioning should begin with the end in mind. As worship leaders, we must ask ourselves, "What do we want our worshippers to understand and connect with at the end of services?," or "What values drive our congregation, and how can they be expressed in worship and prayer?" When visioning, we need to go beyond the structure and the elements of a service. We need to take a step back and really contemplate what we are trying to do. In the educational world, we could use a "backwards design" model to help us accomplish this.

When creating a worship vision, we should start with the big ideas first and then figure out how you are going to get there. We could plan every moment of a service and completely miss the boat. In order to determine the big ideas or enduring understandings, it's important to be in constant dialogue with your congregants. Talk with them; be reflective about what they are experiencing and what you are doing to evoke that experience. We need to be explicit and intentional with our congregants both during and after services. We can't keep them in the dark about what we are trying to accomplish. Visioning doesn't just happen behind closed doors – it occurs in the playing field, requires us to try new things, constantly adapt and make new changes, and be refined each time we execute the vision.

Creating a Worship Vision 5c

The big ideas or values that drive a vision of worship can be tested in the sense that there should be no "right" way of conveying what you are trying to convey. Visioning doesn't always have to be linear. A visioning process looks toward the future and asks, "If worship could look like anything you want it to, what would it look like?" Explore those factors that may challenge this vision from happening. I'm not necessarily a big fan of small committees that represent a larger group of people. Have town hall meetings. Send out congregational surveys. Use these as feedback and tools to figure out what means most for the congregation. Look at your congregational vision statement – does worship fit in with this vision as well? Every concrete expression of the vision must support it. When you implement a worship vision, you don't just read English for the sake of reading English, or sing a specific Mi Chamocha because that's the only one the congregation knows. I learned once that transformational change takes about five years to occur. I think that could be applied to visioning. Implementing a vision takes time, takes effort, and demands a sense of *kavannah.* Everyone needs to be committed to the creation of and implementation of a vision that is representative of the congregation as a whole.

I believe that not only does a visioning process require us to look to the future, but also to use the past as a guide. What is your congregation's history? Where did you come from and how did you get there? What patterns and themes transcend this history? Visioning demands that we create a future, but it also links the learning from the past. As a result, in some sense, a vision for worship is never complete. We shouldn't just reflect after each service because I feel like we'll get trapped in fixing the elements rather than looking at the bigger picture. Some congregations do deep reflection and contemplation at the beginning of the year to examine where they have grown and what they still can work on. Set one goal each year that supports the larger understandings. Create reflection questions that require contemplation, thought, and have multiple answers. Reflective questions should evoke dialogue and challenge us to justify our solutions and actions. These questions should help worshippers make sense of what is important in terms of prayer and allow them to make personal connections with the worship experience.

Creating Sacred Space 6a

For Richard Vosko, Working toward a common vision in designing our places for worship is not only about examining the historical development of the liturgy or the evolution of devotional customs. The work also must be coupled with a consideration of the ongoing transformation of the church and the various societies it serves...The worship space should reflect these transitions – or risk becoming coincidental to the life of the parish. It should tell stories, honor the tradition, and sustain these particular people in their life passages.[14]

The Union of Reform Judaism asserts: Physical space, in and of itself, is not sacred. But a synagogue must, by definition and design, provide an environment that invites holiness, enhances spirituality, and creates the opportunity for sacred encounter...To design sacred communal space, we must develop a program of use that responds to the needs of the congregational community. We must develop a program of spirit that reflects the ideals of Judaism and the history of the Jewish people.[15]

Rabbi Lawrence Hoffman notes: We need spaces that do not separate laity from clergy; music that collapses social distance; accessible, warm melodies and poetically touching texts. In addition, we must avoid such messages...that exclude those about whom we say we care...We must discover the joy of knowing how it feels to be part of a closely knit fabric of people in touch with one another in an environment of absolute care and compassion. This is what is called a community of total liability, for it is there that we find God.[16]

Babylonian Talmud, *Berachot 6a*

For it is said: "God stands in the divine assembly." And how do you know that if ten people pray together the Divine Presence is with them? For it is said: "God stands in the divine assembly." And how do you know that if two are sitting and studying the Torah together, the Divine Presence is with them? For it is said: "In this vein have those who revere Adonai been talking to one another. Adonai has heard and noted it, and a scroll of remembrance has been written at [God's] behest concerning those who revere Adonai and esteem [God's] name."

Rabbi Joel Sisenwine says, You know a space is sacred when the people who are in it are willing to let go and not be worried about what they left behind.

Cantor Erik Contzius explains: Worshippers need to feel safe and believe that they can look for moments that address where they are at in the moment. They need to feel comfortable, but also should feel like they should go on a journey when they pray. If at the end of the service they haven't gone anywhere, or haven't aspired towards transcendence or something greater than themselves, they leave without any revelation or realization that they may have been seeking in the first place.

For Rabbi Elaine Zecher: Sacred space is created when we understand that when we are with others, we need to meet each other where we are at in the moment. Everyone's expectations are different and in order to be one, there has to be some type of synergy between what you want to experience and what others want to experience.

Erica Rosenfeld suggests, Space can enable or disable, it can enhance or detract, it can fill us with awe or inspire intimacy. What we expect of a sanctuary space depends on who we are, what we believe to be God's place in our lives, and what we mean by worship.[17]

In the name of James Brandt: The communal character of Judaism demands that we designate space for the activities of the community, for prayer, study, celebration and commemoration. Humanity requires enclosure; community demands architecture. For the religious community it

means an architecture that brings people to God. It means a sanctified place that is set apart from the secular, a place that invites the presence of God to dwell among the congregation. Synagogue architecture, be it in a sanctuary or classroom, is a reflection of the ideals of the community and a symbol of shared beliefs and values.[18]

For P.J. Schwartz: Being together in the same physical space strengthens the bonds to and relationship with those who are also in that space. The space becomes a focal point for community. We create sacred space because we want to be in community with each other. We want to share our connections with each other, be with each other after the hectic week, and appreciate the fact that the time that we are together is sacred. The space is cultivated by those who are in it – it is an opportunity for being present with other Jews and creates a sense of intimacy.

I believe that sacred spaces are not inherently sacred. It's what we bring to the space that makes it sacred. A sacred space separates the world you spend the majority of time in from the world you enter when you pray. The symbols that surround you create a sense of renewal and transformation. Prayer is about belonging, belonging to a community, belonging to the Jewish people and owning one's Judaism. Group participation in rituals should be promoted to give a sense of spiritual collectivity. The bimah has become too much of a stage that the leader performs on.

.

We create sacred spaces when we offer ourselves to others, invite a connection between human and human, and in meeting, between human and God. Being together evokes a different kind of awareness for us, an awareness that being welcoming and opening up ourselves to others enables us to bring the best of ourselves into the world. Welcoming is a two-way street – creating sacred space is about highlighting new connections between individuals and for the group to learn more about itself through the integration of its members.

I tend to have a mystical sense of the idea of *b'tzelem elohim.* We all are created in the image of God, which means, for me, that there is a spark of the Divine within each of us. Being together in community is one way in which we can see the sparks of the Divine within, bring them out, and let them shine. I sometimes wonder, though, if we are human beings with aspects of divinity within us, or divine beings confined by our humanity? When we create sacred spaces, it changes how we look upon something. We have a heightened self-awareness, feelings of calm, are able to concentrate and be in concentration with each other. We can feel empathy and show compassion because we have entered a space in which everyone belongs and is part of the community.

We are so concerned about the numbers – how many people come to the event, how many people stay the entire time, or how many come back. But success can't be measured by quantity. A sacred space is created when its members have taken ownership of their Judaism and support each other in their own Jewish experiences. When we consciously foster connections with others, we build the community.

Music

Cantor Rosalie Boxt says: Music is like a code, it has elements that are predictable for a group, and have symbolic meanings that are different from community to community. These codes reveal information about a community and the way they worship, a way to understand who we are. I believe we need to let them [our congregants] be in control as often as possible. Once they gain the trust that they can be in control, then, as leaders, we don't need to be afraid to challenge them to be open to the "new." There needs to be balance of new versus old and not every prayer or melody will satisfy everyone, but that's okay. If our congregants can accept this, they may in fact have an amazing experience at one moment, while the person sitting next to them isn't thrilled, and that's okay as well, because his moment is coming.

Cantors Alaine Katzew and Josee Wolff argue: Sacred music facilitates our prayer and our involvement in our rich and vast liturgy. It enables us to express emotions when words alone do not suffice. Even when we use no words, music establishes a sense of *kavannah*, "prayerful intention," as well as a sense of community within the congregation and of unity with God. In addition, sacred music connects us to the cycle of our Jewish lives, to our history as a Jewish people, and to the larger community of *K'lal Yisrael*.[19]

For Cantor Susan Caro, Music opens aesthetic and non-verbal channels, which are important parts of prayer. Those channels heighten different experiences and understandings of the text. They are interpretive, and you can take the same words and set them different ways and apply them to different circumstances that can convey different experiences and meanings.

Rabbi Judah ha-Hasid, *Sefer Hasidim* 1:1

Say your prayers in a melody that is most pleasant and sweet to you. Then you shall pray with proper kavannah, because the melody will draw your heart after the words that come from your mouth. Supplicate in a melody that makes the heart weep, praise in a melody that makes the heart glad.

Rabbi Sue Ann Wasserman remarks: Music changes everything; it carries the whole worship through and ties it all together. Music in worship looks like an arch – it begins out slow, calm, and subdued and then it builds in enthusiasm. When it reaches its peak, it slows down again, taking people out of that peak experience. Worship can be planned and understood similarly – you have to decide where your peak experience is, begin and end in modes that allow you to transition from one prayer to the next. If the service is artfully crafted, the music can carry you through all the feelings, modalities, and moments from the beginning to the end. That's an incredible worship experience.

Danny Maseng argues that: Liturgical music is only word- based. All liturgical music is only good if it completely stems from the words and is born of the words. Music in a service exists in order to move the congregants beyond what the words alone would have done to them. It's an emotional, intuitive spiritual vehicle. It is not there for its own sake. It's not there for the sake of cleverness. It is not there to be self-conscious about. It's there to cause people to move somewhere. When you select pieces for a service, you have to have in mind that (1) all the pieces that you pick need to have some kind of a moving quality to them; and (2) music is an art like everything else.

For Jonathan Freedmann, Through the direct pathway of human emotions, ritual music can stimulate a deep sense of unity among worshipers, and facilitate or enhance communication between humanity and the divine. Taken together, these relationships – horizontal

between individuals and vertical between the community and God – form the foundation of religious life itself, and validate the prominent role of music within it.[20]

Craig Taubman reminds us: Music is an art, not a science. It is something you cannot know but rather experience. Music resonates; it is personal, sensual, and spiritual. When I sing, I try to be honest with these feelings and encourage others to be honest with them as well.

Merri Arian asserts: The music that we use in our worship services needs to reflect the texts that it is accompanying. Surely we understand that our liturgical texts are sacred and enduring, yet sometimes we say the words, not really think about their meaning. Music is an opportunity to check in on the meaning of the text. When chosen sensitively, music can enhance and sometimes even bring new or deeper meaning to these age-old prayers.[21]

For Dan Nichols, Music can convey positive messages founded in Jewish values, teach people to live a Jewish life, and reach people in a way unlike any other mode of connection. The goal of music in prayer is to inspire people to embrace their Judaism and celebrate all that it has to offer. I try to awaken one's spirituality so they know that Judaism can be vibrant and enjoyable. Music can bring us together and touch each other in unique and powerful ways.

P.J. Schwartz suggests,
When I attended Shabbat morning services for the first time in Jerusalem at Kol Haneshema synagogue, I knew it was going to be an entirely different experience than what I was used to. The entire service was in Hebrew, the prayer book was in Hebrew, the responsive readings were in Hebrew. As lost as I found myself, it was (and still is) perhaps one of the best services I have ever attended.
I just sat in the sanctuary, listening to the music and the congregants sing every song, read every prayer, and be together in community.
When we reached Psalm 150, the rabbi began to sing this beauty melody of "Kol Haneshema." Psalm 150 transformed into the most beautiful, soulful, empowering round of music that everyone participated in. I closed my eyes, let the music soak in, and just sat there, smiling.
Music is not only a natural sound that can be pleasant to our ears, but it is a powerful language that allows people to connect with the words of prayer that they might have not been able to understand otherwise. Music has the power to communicate the meaning of the words more effectively than simply reading them. In fact, I believe music indeed speaks louder than words. Music can bring healing and can bring consolation. Music can also lead you and inspire you to be better than you are. Music brings the text to life by interweaving the *keva* and *kavannah* together. Through music, we can discover both meaning and inspiration in prayer. Music is a gateway for worship – it helps people prepare for prayer and be in prayer. Music should draw congregants in and help them be together in the moment. Music is an expression of one's faith in an environment in which everyone is emotionally invested in an experience. Music, then, also tells us something about what a community believes about God and humanity's relationship with God. It links what we believe in to the greater world.
The Hasidim of Eastern Europe in the 18th century used music as one of the most formative expressions of their Judaism. They turned the prayers into music and believed that through melody, the meaning of a prayer can be revealed. I believe that this meaning extends beyond the words themselves. When we sing, we do so with different levels of sound and feeling. Music helps guide how we pray and how we want to express what we are

saying. It can change the moment instantaneously and can even be representative of what is important to the community. If music speaks louder than words, perhaps God can hear our voices more when we sing than when we just simply read the prayers.

Music has a pedagogical element to it as well. It can elevate the values of our tradition and encourage identity development. Music allows us to appreciate Judaism in a different light – it can be inclusive and enduring. It can connect us to our past and also be relevant in the present. We pray because we want to be enriched – prayer is an art form and music is like the paintbrushes that express that art form.

Music interprets the prayers in a way that is meaningful to the congregation; the prayer modes of music are the interpretations it provides. The goal of music is not to just use popular melodies to entertain or impress the congregation. We can't use music just because it is catchy – it needs to elevate the importance of prayer and help us understand why praying is an essential aspect of being Jewish.

Use of Liturgy and Language 8a

For Rabbi Shira Milgrom, As a whole, our services are very predictable in terms of structure. We'll sometimes emphasize a different theme or a choice of a prayer melody, but as a whole the elements are totally recognizable. What's different is how we weave the themes or melodies into the service structure so that our congregants are able to remember, record, and talk about what they experienced.

According to Rabbi Jonathan Blake, I think that an organizing principle is that we have to get congregants either out of the prayer book, or to connect beyond the words on the page. For me, the least inspirational parts of the worship are the parts where we are just reading something that's in the prayer book. I think I would rather do my own *kavanot*, my own thought pieces. You can't set up every reading in the prayer book with a thought piece, but sometimes providing simply a few words that help people understand what they are about to read and why, can make the reading of the English passages much more meaningful. The service, then, has to be integrated. Obviously, the service has an inherent drama that is an inherent cohesion, but it also can be organic. The more people know about the "why" of what they are doing when they are praying, the more engaged they will be and therefore the more kavannah can be felt by all when we're doing it.

He adds: If you envision the siddur not as a script, but as the kind of template for a ritual drama where the people in the congregation and the clergy are the actors in that drama, the participants in that drama; all the elements of a service – the music, the space, and even the words - become kind of the dramatic substrate for making the drama come to life. And the moments in the service that are supposed to be crescendos to something big, contemplative, or sensitive can be orchestrated that way.

Mishnah Berachot 3

Rabban Gamliel says: Every day a person must pray eighteen [blessings]. Rabbi Yehoshua says: A summary of the eighteen blessings. Rabbi Akiva says: If he knows his prayer fluently, he must pray eighteen, but if not – then a summary of eighteen.

In the words of Cantor Ellen Dreskin, I always ask, "How do the words that I am saying influence my relationship with the act of praying?" Sometimes the words are going to cause tension and sometimes the words will give me comfort. The words cannot be recited just for the sake of their being said. However, there are always moments when you don't hit the bull's eye - you can't always be in the moment as you want to be, both as a leader and a congregant.

Rabbi Richard Levy explains that: We need to lift our thoughts and attention away from the words of the prayer book so that we can be reminded of why we are actually praying. The prayer book can be a guide and aid for prayer, but if we allow it to dictate the prayer experience, it can also be an obstacle.

Rabbi Daniel Freelander suggests: Maybe the text doesn't matter – the text itself doesn't drive the spiritual moment. It can be a tool to create *kavannah* but it doesn't in and of itself create *kavannah*. These are tools to create and manage the desired effect. They can also be used to create dysfunction. The same melody or text can be sung or read in two different ways. In one instance, it can be highly functional, but it others, it can stop the action and break the flow of the service. Hebrew, when it is sung, is a mantra. When you read it, the language can be limiting.

In the words of Rabbi Nadia Siritsky: In each generation, we take the *keva* from the last generation and turn it back into *kavannah* if we are to be successful in making it a tree of life. Prayer tries to renew

Judaism, revitalize it, and bring it to life again in a new world and a new generation. Our prayer book can help us enter places that allow us to become fully present and connect with God. The liturgy is one spiritual truth that helps us live out an essential call to partnering with God and repairing the world.

According to Rabbi Benjamin Zeidman, One can find spirituality through intellect and rationality, or through emotion. The liturgy is never lacking in terms of spirituality, but it comes from very clearly defined statements of belief and practice. The emotion evoked when praying comes from our understanding of the text, by viewing the text as something intellectually inspiring, something that can move us or call upon us to act, because it rationally has meaning. With this in mind, we can we can let the prayer book speak for itself.

Rabbi Joel Sisenwine asserts, We should never assign a specific meaning to each prayer text, but set a sense of mindfulness to what we are about to do.

Avram Davis says, Words have power. Just as there are power "spots" on the plan, so are there power objects or especially powerful images. Words have great power and so do their building blocks, the letters. The Hebrew letters are a powerful lens of meditation. We can use them, each individual, as a meditation object to strengthen our concentration and deepen our insight, for each letter has a resonance unique to it.[22]

Yizhak Buxbaum writes, The prayer book should not get in between you and God. The prayer book should not limit one's ability to pray. The prayer book can be understood as a starting point for your prayers. The words should be real to you, filled with imagination, song, melody, and dance - creativity and innovation increases the prayer's meaning and makes it more relevant to the worshipper.[23]

In the name of Rabbi Lawrence Hoffman, Meaning comes not just from the text, but from context. The question of what a text says must be asked along with the question of how it says it. The history of what a text meant once upon a time has no necessary relationship to what it means now. And the text's context depends on the rules of the language game in which the text passes from the message sender to message receiver.[24]

He adds: The words of worship are artistic constructs. They fill the background through which we descend; they describe heroes or martyrs whose memory we hold dear as if they are our own extended family; they remind us of our story, the events of our corporate life as a people or church, without which we would not be here praying as we do.[25]

P.J. Schwartz believes: When we think of using liturgy, I really believe that it needs to excite us each time we use it. There needs to be a variety of readings and interpretations, because the liturgy should engage us, help us define our own experiences in a way that gives us a deeper, more thoughtful understanding of who we are and who we can become. We don't necessarily need to go to the same place each time we pray, and the text shouldn't challenge the prayer experience. We have the tendency to get lost in the pages of the service and forget to focus on how the text can inspire us. It should evoke our own thoughts, which are more important that what we actually are saying or doing.
When I think about worship leading, I tend to ask the following questions in regards to the prayer book: How can I use the prayer book so that it respects the culture of the congregation and enhances the values of the congregation? Is the text accessible; can one read it without difficulty? Do transliterations distract or add

to the liturgy? Are page numbers and format easy to understand; does it tell you where you are going in terms of the liturgy? Are there deliberate instructions for the worshipper, or how can those instructions be taught during the service without distracting from the prayer experience?

The text of the prayer book, then, is like a GPS for prayer. Even though a GPS provides many details about where we are going, we still have to pay attention to the map. Sometimes the map or the GPS is hard to understand, and sometimes when we use it, we still get lost. We can search for numerous destinations and routes to get to where we are going, and we make plenty of stops on the way. Those are the choices that we can make. So, too, prayer - how it's used will have much more of an influence than what is contained in it.

It's also important that the service has a balance between Hebrew and English – the Hebrew should supplement and help enhance a prayer's meaning, not prevent one from understanding. Sometimes Hebrew better expresses this meaning, but the worship leader needs to make sure he or she explains that. The Hebrew can be the emotional part of a service. You don't always have to understand all the words; you can just let it take you back from generation to generation, linking you to the past. The mysteriousness of Hebrew also can be a good thing – it can motivate a person to learn more, discover more, pray more – its presence can be impactful. The liturgy and use of Hebrew should be an entry point for people, but should not dictate the experience.

How the prayer book and the liturgy were used in the past, and even their interpretations and translations, may be a great model, but it doesn't mean that they should be considered completely authoritative. We have to make our own choices on how to use the text based our own present experiences rather than the past. In other words, what the text means today and how it is used doesn't necessarily need to be in relationship to how it was previously used. As Rabbi Hoffman noted, "The history of what a text once meant has no necessary relationship to what it means now." The words tell us numerous stories about the Jewish people, and it's our job to tell those stories in ways that we can connect with.

Quotes Cited

1. Hirsch, Richard. "Prayer and Poetry." *The Reconstructionist* 71.1 (2006): 26.

2. Comins, Mike. *Making Prayer Real: Leading Jewish Spiritual Voices on Why Prayer Is Difficult and What to Do about It.* Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Pub., 2010. Print. 45.

3. Comins, Mike. *Making Prayer Real: Leading Jewish Spiritual Voices on Why Prayer Is Difficult and What to Do about It.* Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Pub., 2010. Print. 42.

4. Hoffman, Lawrence A. *The Art of Public Prayer: Not for Clergy Only.* 2nd ed. Woodstock, VT: SkyLight Paths Pub., 1999. Print. 156.

5. Hoffman, Lawrence A. *The Way into Jewish Prayer.* Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Pub., 2000. Print. 104.

6. Heschel, Abraham Joshua. *Man's Quest for God: Studies in Prayer and Symbolism.* Santa Fe, NM: Aurora, 1996. Print. 15-17.

7. *Iv'du B'Simchah: Worship with Joy.* New York, NY: Union of Reform Judaism, 1999. Print. 23.

8. Sacks, Jonathan. *The Koren Siddur.* Jerusalem: Koren, 2009. xvii.

9. Davis, Avram. *Meditation from the Heart of Judaism: Today's Teachers Share Their Practices, Techniques, and Faith.* Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Pub., 1997. Print. 117.

10. Buxbaum, Yitzhak. *Jewish Spiritual Practices.* Northvale, NJ: J. Aronson, 1990. Print.141.

11. Schachter-Shalomi, Zalman, Shohama Wiener, and Jonathan Omer-Man. *Worlds of Jewish Prayer: A Festschrift in Honor of Rabbi Zalman M. Schachter-Shalomi.* Northvale, NJ: J. Aronson, 1993. Print. 49.

12. Comins, Mike. *Making Prayer Real: Leading Jewish Spiritual Voices on Why Prayer Is Difficult and What to Do about It.* Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Pub., 2010. Print. 47.

13. Matt, Daniel. *The Zohar: Pritzker Edition.* Vol. 4. Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2007. Print. 343.

14. Vosko, Richard S. *Designing Future Worship Spaces: The Mystery of a Common Vision.* Chicago, IL: Liturgy Training Publications, 1996. Print. 8.

15. *Rejoice in Your Handiwork: Sacred Space and Synagogue Architecture, Part Two.* New York, NY: Union of Reform Judaism, 2005. Print. 9

16. Hoffman, Lawrence A. *The Art of Public Prayer: Not for Clergy Only*. 2nd ed. Woodstock, VT: SkyLight Paths Pub., 1999. Print. 244.

17. Rosenfeld, Erika, "The New Intimate Sanctuary," *Reform Judaism Magazine*, Fall 1994, pp. 38. Print.

18. *Rejoice in Your Handiwork: Sacred Space and Synagogue Architecture, Part Two*. New York, NY: Union of Reform Judaism, 2005. Print. 6.

19. *Iv'du B'Simchah: Worship with Joy*. New York, NY: Union of Reform Judaism, 1999. Print. 86.

20. Friedmann, Jonathan L. *Synagogue Song: An Introduction to Concepts, Theories and Customs*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2012. Print. 17.

21. Arian, Merri. "Music, Prayer, and Sacred Community," *Teaching Tefilah*. Denver, CO: 2004. Print. 161.

22. Davis, Avram. *Meditation from the Heart of Judaism: Today's Teachers Share Their Practices, Techniques, and Faith*. Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Pub., 1997. Print. 226-227.

23. Buxbaum, Yitzhak. *Jewish Spiritual Practices*. Northvale, NJ: J. Aronson, 1990. Print. 146-150.

24. Hoffman, Lawrence A. *The Art of Public Prayer: Not for Clergy Only*. 2nd ed. Woodstock, VT: SkyLight Paths Pub., 1999. Print. 148-149.

25. Hoffman, Lawrence A. *The Art of Public Prayer: Not for Clergy Only*. 2nd ed. Woodstock, VT: SkyLight Paths Pub., 1999. Print. 155.

For Inspiration, Reflection, and Contemplation

The following bibliography includes various books, articles, and websites that have served as inspiration for worship leaders in developing their own prayer practice as well as in planning worship experiences for their congregants. Some of these materials were suggested to me through my interviews, and influenced my own reflections about prayer and *kavannah* as presented in *Moreh L'Kavannah Ba-T'filah – A Worship Guide*.

Books

Aron, Isa, Steven Martin. Cohen, Lawrence A. Hoffman, and Ari Y. Kelman. *Sacred Strategies: Transforming Synagogues from Functional to Visionary*. Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2010. Print.

Block, Peter. *Community: The Structure of Belonging*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2008. Print.

Boorstein, Sylvia. *Don't Just Do Something, Sit There: A Mindfulness Retreat with Sylvia Boorstein.* San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996. Print.

Brown, Erica. *Spiritual Boredom: Rediscovering the Wonder of Judaism*. Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Pub., 2009. Print.

Buber, Martin. *I and Thou*. New York: Scribner, 1958. Print.

Buxbaum, Yitzhak. *Jewish Spiritual Practices*. Northvale, NJ: J. Aronson, 1990. Print.

Cardin, Nina Beth. *Visions of Holiness in the Everyday*. New York: United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, Department of Youth Activities, 1997. Print.

Comins, Mike. *Making Prayer Real: Leading Jewish Spiritual Voices on Why Prayer Is Difficult and What to Do about It*. Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Pub., 2010. Print.

Dan, Joseph. *The Teachings of Hasidism*. New York, NY: Behrman House, 1983. Print.

Davis, Avram. *Meditation from the Heart of Judaism: Today's Teachers Share Their Practices, Techniques, and Faith*. Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Pub., 1997. Print.

De Waal Malefyt, Norma, and Howard Vanderwell. *Designing Worship Together: Models and Strategies for Worship Planning*. Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2004. Print.

Fine, Lawrence, Eitan P. Fishbane, and Or N. Rose. *Jewish Mysticism and the Spiritual Life: Classical Texts, Contemporary Reflections*. Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Pub., 2011. Print.

Freedman, Robert. *Lens, Mirror, Spark, and Lamp: A Manual for Leading Effective and Engaging Jewish Worship Services*. Princeton, NJ: n.p., 2011. Print.

Friedmann, Jonathan L., Brad Stetson, and William Sharlin. *Jewish Sacred Music and Jewish Identity: Continuity and Fragmentation*. St. Paul, MN: Paragon House, 2008. Print.

Friedmann, Jonathan L. *Emotions in Jewish Music: Personal and Scholarly Reflections*. Lanham, MD: University of of America, 2012. Print.

Friedmann, Jonathan L. *Synagogue Song: An Introduction to Concepts, Theories and Customs*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2012. Print.

Glazer, Miriyam, and David L. Lieber. *Psalms of the Jewish Liturgy: A Guide to Their Beauty, Power, and Meaning : A New Translation & Commentary in Memory of David L. Lieber*. New York: Aviv, 2009. Print.

Green, Arthur, and Barry W. Holtz. *Your Word Is Fire: The Hasidic Masters on Contemplative Prayer*. New York: Paulist, 1977. Print.

HaLevi, Baruch, and Ellen Frankel. *Revolution of Jewish Spirit: How to Revive Ruakh in Your Spiritual Life, Transform Your Synagogue & Inspire Your Jewish Community*. Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Pub., 2012. Print.

Harlow, Jules, Tamara Cohen, Claudia Chernov, and Carol Diament. *Pray Tell: A Hadassah Guide to Jewish Prayer*. Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Pub., 2003. Print.

Heller, Zachary I. *Re-envisioning the Synagogue*. [Newton Center, Newton, Mass.]: National Center for Jewish Policy Studies at Hebrew College, 2005. Print.

Heschel, Abraham Joshua, and Samuel H. Dresner. *I Asked for Wonder: A Spiritual Anthology*. New York: Crossroad, 1983. Print.

Heschel, Abraham Joshua. *God in Search of Man: A Philosophy of Judaism.* New York: Farrar, Straus & Cudahy, 1955. Print.

Heschel, Abraham Joshua. *The Insecurity of Freedom: Essays on Human Existence.* New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1966. Print.

Heschel, Abraham Joshua. *Man Is Not Alone: A Philosophy of Religion.* New York: Farrar, Straus & Young, 1951. Print.

Heschel, Abraham Joshua. *Man's Quest for God: Studies in Prayer and Symbolism.* New York: Scribner, 1954. Print.

Hoffman, Lawrence A. *The Art of Public Prayer: Not for Clergy Only*. Washington, D.C.: Pastoral, 1988. Print.

Hoffman, Lawrence A. *The Way into Jewish Prayer*. Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Pub., 2000. Print.

Jacobs, Louis. *Hasidic Prayer.* New York: Schocken, 1973. Print.

Kaunfer, Elie. *Empowered Judaism: What Independent Minyanim Can Teach Us about Building Vibrant Jewish Communities*. Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Pub., 2010. Print.

Kedar, Karyn D. *The Dance of the Dolphin: Finding Prayer, Perspective, and Meaning in the Stories of Our Lives*. Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Pub., 2001. Print.

Kedar, Karyn D. *God Whispers: Stories of the Soul, Lessons of the Heart*. Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Pub., 1999. Print.

Kramer, Kenneth. *Martin Buber's Spirituality: Hasidic Wisdom for Everyday Life*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2012. Print.

Kushner, Lawrence, and Nehemia Polin. *Filling Words with Light: Hasidic and Mystical Reflections on Jewish Prayer*. Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Pub., 2004. Print.

Kushner, Lawrence. *Eyes Remade for Wonder: A Lawrence Kushner Reader*. Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Pub., 1998. Print.

Kushner, Lawrence. *I'm God, You're Not: Observations on Organized Religion & Other Disguises of the Ego*. Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Pub., 2010. Print.

Kushner, Lawrence. *Invisible Lines of Connection: Sacred Stories of the Ordinary*. Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Pub., 1996. Print.

Levine, Lisa, and Carol Krucoff. *Yoga Shalom*. New York, NY: URJ, 2012. Print.

Levy, Naomi. *Talking to God: Personal Prayers for Times of Joy, Sadness, Struggle, and Celebration*. New York: A.A. Knopf, 2002. Print.

Michaelson, Jay. *God in Your Body: Kabbalah, Mindfulness and Embodied Spiritual Practice*. Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Pub., 2007. Print.

Ochs, Carol. *Reaching Godward: Voices from Jewish Spiritual Guidance*. New York, NY: URJ, 2004. Print.

Polish, Daniel F. *Talking about God: Exploring the Meaning of Religious Life with Kierkegaard, Buber, Tillich and Heschel*. Woodstock, VT: SkyLight Paths Pub., 2007. Print.

Rosenberg, Arnold S. *Jewish Liturgy as a Spiritual System: A Prayer-by-Prayer Explanation of the Nature and Meaning of Jewish Worship*. Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1997. Print.

Ross, Dennis S. *God in Our Relationships: Spirituality between People from the Teachings of Martin Buber*. Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Pub., 2003. Print.

Roth, Jeff. *Jewish Meditation Practices for Everyday Life: Awakening Your Heart, Connecting with God.* Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Pub., 2009. Print.

Schachter-Shalomi, Zalman, and Joel Segel. *Davening: A Guide to Meaningful Jewish Prayer.* Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Pub., 2012. Print.

Schachter-Shalomi, Zalman, Shohama Wiener, and Jonathan Omer-Man. *Worlds of Jewish Prayer: A Festschrift in Honor of Rabbi Zalman M. Schachter-Shalomi.* Northvale, NJ: J. Aronson, 1993. Print.

Schwarz, Sid. *Finding a Spiritual Home: How a New Generation of Jews Can Transform the American Synagogue.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000. Print.

Shapiro, Rami M. *Amazing Chesed: Living a Grace-Filled Judaism.* Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Pub., 2013. Print.

Shapiro, Rami M. *The Sacred Art of Lovingkindness: Preparing to Practice.* Woodstock, VT: SkyLight Paths Pub., 2006. Print.

Slater, Jonathan P. *Mindful Jewish Living: Compassionate Practice.* New York: Aviv, 2004. Print.

Sonsino, Rifat. *Six Jewish Spiritual Paths: A Rationalist Looks at Spirituality.* Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Pub., 2000. Print.

Summit, Jeffrey A. *The Lord's Song in a Strange Land: Music and Identity in Contemporary Jewish Worship.* New York: Oxford UP, 2000. Print.

Teutsch, David A. *Spiritual Community: The Power to Restore Hope, Commitment, and Joy.* Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Pub., 2005. Print.

Vennard, Jane E. *A Praying Congregation: The Art of Teaching Spiritual Practice.* Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2005. Print.

Weisenberg, Joey, Julie Meslin, Sarah Schmerler, and Nancy Ettenheim. *Building Singing Communities: A Practical Guide to Unlocking the Power of Music in Jewish Prayer*. [New York]: Mechon Hadar, 2011. Print.

Wiggins, Grant P., and Jay McTighe. *Understanding by Design*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1998. Print.

Wolfson, Ron. *The Spirituality of Welcoming: How to Transform Your Congregation into a Sacred Community*. Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Pub., 2006. Print.

Articles

Freelander Daniel, "Why Temples Look the Way They Do," *Reform Judaism Magazine*, Fall 1994, pp. 35–37. Print.

Held Mencher, Edythe. "Beyond Membership to True Belonging." *CCAR Journal: The Reform Jewish Quarterly* (Summer 2012): 81-94. Print.

Hoffman, Lawrence, "*Halakhic Appendix: What is the Status of Hebrew or of English in a Service?*" Synagogue 2000, 1996, pp. 50–51. Print

Hoffman, Lawrence, "Imagine: A Synagogue for the 21st Century," *Reform Judaism Magazine*, Fall 1996. Print

Hoffman, Lawrence. "Re-Imagining Jewish Worship." *CCAR Journal: The Reform Jewish Quarterly* (Winter 2002): 69-87. Print.

Isaacson, Michael. "Symposium: Synagogue Music - A Paradigm Reconsidered." *CCAR Journal: The Reform Jewish Quarterly* (Winter 2002): 5-18. Web.

Knobel, Peter S., and Daniel S. Schechter. "What Congregants Want in Worship: Perceptions from a CCAR Study." *CCAR Journal: The Reform Jewish Quarterly* (Winter 2006): 35-48. Print.

Kushner, Lawrence, "The Tent-Peg Business: Some Truths About Congregations," *New Traditions: Explorations in Judaism*, Spring 1988. Print.

Medwin, Dan. *Visual T'filah: Historical Antecedents and Guide to Best Practices*. Los Angeles, CA: Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, 2010. Print

Marder, Janet, "Worship That Works," *Reform Judaism Magazine*, Spring 1997, pp. 13–18. Print.

Schiller, Benjie-Ellen, "Some Notes on the Future of Jewish Sacred Music," *Koleinu B'yachad, Our Voices As One: Envisioning Jewish Music for the 21st Century*, American Conference of Cantors and the Guild of Temple Musicians, 1999. Print.

Websites, Organizations, and Programs

Awakened Heart Project for Contemplative Judaism

http://www.awakenedheartproject.org/

Dan Nichols

http://jewishrock.com/

Divrei Shir: Words of Song – A Curriculum for the Study of Synagogue Music, Union of Reform Judaism and American Conference of Cantors

http://urj.org/professional/musicians/divreishir/

Elat Chayyim Center for Jewish Spirituality

http://isabellafreedman.org/jewish-retreats/elatchayyim

Hava Nashira

http://osrui.urjcamps.org/yearround/programs/havanashira/

Institute of Jewish Spirituality

http://www.jewishspirituality.org/

Josh Nelson Project

http://www.joshnelsonproject.com/

Kesher Shir

http://www.keshershir.org/

Liz Lerman Dance Exchange

http://danceexchange.org/

Mifgash Musicale

http://urj.org/professional/musicians/training/

Synagogue 3000: Leadership for Synagogue Transformation

http://www.synagogue3000.org

Craig Taubman

http://www.craignco.com

Joey Weisenberg

http://joeyweisenberg.com/

Works Cited

Arian, Ramie. "On the Influence of Camp." *EJewish Philanthropy*. 27 Jan. 2012. Web.

Aron, Isa, Steven Martin. Cohen, Lawrence A. Hoffman, and Ari Y. Kelman. *Sacred Strategies: Transforming Synagogues from Functional to Visionary*. Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2010. Print.

Batnitzky, Leora Faye. *How Judaism Became a Religion: An Introduction to Modern Jewish Thought*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2011. Print.

Bennett, Alan D. *Journey through Judaism: The Best of Keeping Posted*. New York, NY: UAHC, 1991. Print.

Bradshaw, Paul F., and Lawrence A. Hoffman. *The Changing Face of Jewish and Christian Worship in North America*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 1991. Print.

Cohen, Jack J. *Major Philosophers of Jewish Prayer in the Twentieth Century*. New York: Fordham UP, 2000. Print.

Cohn, Gabriel H., and Harold Fisch. *Prayer in Judaism: Continuity and Change*. Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1996. Print.

Dan, Joseph. *The Heart and the Fountain: An Anthology of Jewish Mystical Experiences*. New York: Oxford UP, 2002. Print.

Dan, Joseph. *Jewish Mysticism: The Middle Ages*. Vol. 2. Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1998. Print.

Dan, Joseph. *The Teachings of Hasidism*. New York, NY: Behrman House, 1983. Print.

Ellenson, David. *Between Tradition and Culture: The Dialectics of Modern Jewish Religion and Identity*. Atlanta, GA: Scholars, 1994. Print.

Fine, Lawrence. *Essential Papers on Kabbalah*. New York: New York UP, 1995. Print.

Fine, Lawrence. *Physician of the Soul, Healer of the Cosmos: Isaac Luria and His Kabbalistic Fellowship*. Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2003. Print.

Green, Arthur, and Barry W. Holtz. *Your Word Is Fire: The Hasidic Masters on Contemplative Prayer*. New York: Paulist, 1977. Print.

Green, Arthur. *Jewish Spirituality: From the Bible through the Middle Ages*. New York, NY: Crossroad, 1986. Print.

Green, William Scott, ed. *Approaches to Ancient Judaism*. Chico CA: Scholars, 1983. Print.

Greenberg, Yudit Kornberg. *Better than Wine: Love, Poetry, and Prayer in the Thought of Franz Rosenzweig*. Atlanta, GA: Scholars, 1996. Print.

Hoffman, Lawrence A., and Janet Roland Walton. *Sacred Sound and Social Change: Liturgical Music in Jewish and Christian Experience*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1992. Print.

Hoffman, Lawrence A., Chaim Stern, and A. Stanley Dreyfus. *Gates of Understanding : A Companion Volume to Shaarei Tefillah, Gates of Prayer*. New York: Published for the Conference of American Rabbis by the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1977. Print.

Holtz, Barry W. *Back to the Sources: Reading the Classic Jewish Texts*. New York: Summit, 1984. Print.

Horowitz, Rivka. "Abraham Joshua Heschel on Prayer and His Hasidic Sources." *Modern Judaism* 19 (1999): 293-310. Print.

Jacob, Walter. "The Law of the Lord Is Perfect: Halakhah and Antinomisim in Reform Judaism." *CCAR Journal: The Reform Jewish Quarterly* 51.3 (2004): 72-84. Print.

Jacobs, Louis. *Hasidic Prayer.* New York: Schocken, 1973. Print.

Kadish, Seth. *Kavvana: Directing the Heart in Jewish Prayer*. Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1997. Print.

Kaplan, Dana Evan. *The Cambridge Companion to American Judaism*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005. Print.

Kaplan, Dana Evan. *Contemporary American Judaism: Transformation and Renewal*. New York: Columbia UP, 2009. Print.

Kaplan, Dana Evan. *Platforms and Prayer Books: Theological and Liturgical Perspectives on Reform Judaism*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002. Print.

Kramer, Kenneth. *Martin Buber's Spirituality: Hasidic Wisdom for Everyday Life*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2012. Print.

Langer, Ruth. *To Worship God Properly: Tensions between Liturgical Custom and Halakhah in Judaism*. Cincinnati, OH: Hebrew Union College, 1998. Print.

Levy, Hans, Alexander Altmann, and Isaac Heinemann. *3 Jewish Philosophers*. New Milford, CT: Toby, 2006. Print.

Maimonides, Moses, and Isadore Twersky. *A Maimonides Reader*. New York: Behrman House, 1972. Print.

Mansoor, Menahem. *The Book of Direction to the Duties of the Heart*. London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1973. Print.

Marcus, Ivan G. *Piety and Society: The Jewish Pietists of Medieval Germany*. Leiden: Brill, 1981. Print.

Medwin, Dan. "Visual T'filah: Historical Antecedants and Guide to Best Practices." Rabbinic Thesis. Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, Los Angeles, 2010. Print.

Meyer, Michael A. *Judaism within Modernity: Essays on Jewish History and Religion*. Detroit: Wayne State UP, 2001. Print.

Meyer, Michael A. *The Origins of the Modern Jew; Jewish Identity and European Culture in Germany, 1749-1824*. Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1967. Print.

Meyer, Michael A. "The Origins of the Reform Concept of Prayer: An Eighteenth Century Essay by Isaac Euchel." *CCAR Journal: The Reform Jewish Quarterly* 59.3 (2012): 238-43. Print.

"Our Mission & Vision." *Institute for Jewish Spirituality*. Web. 27 Jan. 2013.

"Our Spiritual Practices." *Institute for Jewish Spirituality*. Web. 27 Jan. 2013.

Petuchowski, Jakob Josef (edited by Elizabeth Petuchowski, and Aaron M. Petuchowski). *Studies in Modern Theology and Prayer*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1998. Print.

Prell, Riv-Ellen. "Independent Minyanism and Prayer Groups of the 1970s: Historical and Sociological Perspectives." *Zeek: A Journal of Jewish Thought and Culture* (2008): Jan. 2008. Web.

"Related Organizations." *Institute for Jewish Spirituality*. N.p., n.d. Web. 27 Jan. 2013.

Scholem, Gershom. *Kabbalah: A Definitive History of the Evolution, Ideas, Leading Figures and Extraordinary Influence of Jewish Mysticism*. New York: Penguin, 1978. Print.

Scholem, Gershom. *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism.* New York: Schocken, 1961. Print.

Sirat, Colette. *A History of Jewish Philosophy in the Middle Ages*. Cambridge [Cambridgeshire: Cambridge UP, 1985. Print.

Soloveitchik, Joseph B. "Redemption, Prayer, Talmud Torah." *Tradition: A Journal of Orthodox Thought* 17 (1983): 55-72. Web.

Tishby, Isaiah, ed. *The Wisdom of the Zohar*. Vol. 3. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Pr., 1981. Print.

Wertheimer, Jack. "The American Synagogue: Recent Issues and Trends." *American Jewish Year Book* 105 (2005): 3-86. Print.

Wertheimer, Jack. *A People Divided: Judaism in Contemporary America*. Hanover, NH: Brandeis UP, 1993. Print.

"What Is Jewish Renewal? P'nai Or Philadelphia." *What Is Jewish Renewal?* P'nai Or Philadelphia, n.d. Web. 27 Jan. 2013.