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I AM DUST AND ASHES?
PRAYERS OF SUPPLICATION AND CONTEMPORARY JEWS

by

Beth L. Schwartz

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for ordination

Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institutue of Religion

1999

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DIGEST

Martin Buber wrote, "Many true believers know how to talk to God but not about God."[1] In our day, we are sophisticated thinkers and educated, rational people, who are quite accustomed to talking about God, but who have a difficult time talking to God. As children of the Enlightenment, raised on self-esteem and the perfectibility of humanity, we are well-trained in the scientific method of analysis. We approach God more from an objective, academic, and intellectual perspective than from direct, subjective involvement with God.

This thesis is based on the idea that not only does the need for prayers of supplication still exist, even within the American Reform Jewish community, but that this need has grown stronger in recent years and is demanding a liturgical response that is not being met. These prayers began as requests for divine guidance in living in accordance with God's teachings, and they allowed people to ask God for what they needed and wanted. As Jakob Petuchowski wrote: "There is no legitimate human concern which remains outside the scope of Jewish petitionary prayer."[2]

We have achieved so much in virtually every endeavor in modernity, including very high levels of expectations and the stresses and frustrations that accompany them; human-oriented solutions, including education, leisure and material comfort, and various therapies have not brought satisfaction or peace of mind. Moreover, modernity has taken from us our traditional value system and discipline, where permissiveness and self-gratification rule. Our medieval ancestors confessed their shame and guilt and prayed for forgiveness

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[1] Buber, M. Eclipse of God. New York, Harper and Brothers, Publishers, 1952, p. 40.
[2] Petuchowski, J. Understanding Jewish Prayer. New York, KTAV, 1972, p. 35.

for whatever they might have done to deserve the persecutions they suffered, while we who have done much for which we should be ashamed and penitent - "We are arrogant, brutal, careless, destructive, egocentric, false, greedy, heartless, insolent, and joyless"[3] - are unable to humble ourselves before God.

This thesis will examine the following:

- The development of *Tachanun* and *Selichot* as liturgical rubrics for petition and supplication;
- Those aspects of petitionary prayer which are problematic for contemporary American Reform Jews; and
- Current trends in the development of Healing Services which address the concerns of contemporary American Reform Jews.

[3] Stern, Chaim, ed. Gates of Forgiveness. New York, CCAR Press, 1993, p. 35.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis reflects my own questioning and thinking about issues and trends associated with prayers of supplication. It was not, however, a solitary endeavor, and it could not have been completed without the help of others. I would like to acknowledge the support of those who were generous with their time and their thoughts, giving me the benefit of their experience and their wisdom. Thank you to Rabbis Richard Address, Donald Goor, Jonathan Katz, Peter Knobel, and Elaine Zecher, and to my professors Dr. Barry Kogan and Dr. Richard Sarason. Most of all, I would like to thank my referee and advisor, Rabbi Sheldon Zimmerman, for his vision and patience, his close attention to every draft, his understanding of the issues, and his care and concern for what I wanted to accomplish with this work. *Todah rabbah.*

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

An eighteenth century Chasidic saying reminds us that we are to keep two pieces of paper in our pockets. On one piece of paper is written, "For my sake was the world created." The other piece of paper has the message, "I am dust and ashes." In response to the first piece of paper we pray to God in praise and thanksgiving; to the second, we pray for God's compassion and mercy. There have been times in our history when one of these messages was more congruent with our experiences of the world than the other. Some would say that it has been the second case more often than the first, that too many times we have been trampled as if we were indeed dust. Others might say that the pull of modern, secular society has often encouraged us to cling too much to the first. What is clear is that the two messages create for us a tension in how we live.

We can feel exalted as the angels or less substantial than ashes because of or in spite of what is happening in our lives. The Jewish tradition is rich in writings that can articulate our experience of this world and our hopes for the world-to-come, what ever those hopes may be. Yet there are also times when it is hard to pray, hard to find the words with which to tell God how we feel, and hard to feel that God is listening. Our prayer traditions address these issues as well. But it has seemed in recent times that we have become disconnected from these traditions, and from prayer itself. It has become easier for us to talk about doubt than faith,[1] and to write new prayers that do away with both the messages of older prayers, and some of their forms as well.

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[1] Borowitz, E. The Mask Jews Wear. New York, Simon and Schuster, 1973, p. 191.

"The Jewish prayer book is unique among the rituals of all religions. Not only are the religious ideas and beliefs expressed in the Jewish prayers, but also the events, vicissitudes, and hopes of the Jewish people". . . On the one hand, the Jew praises the Creator of the world, and on the other, he prays to Him for his personal needs as well as for the needs of his people. The Jew not only exalts the Supreme Being, but he also pours out his troubled heart before his Father in heaven."[2]

Idelsohn's term, "petition," actually includes both *bakashot*, petitions, and *tachanunim*, supplications. There are many shadings within these two types of prayers; how they are distinguished from each other will be discussed below. The traditional weekday *siddur* contains both petitions and supplications, the former in the *Amidah*, the statutory prayer of the Eighteen Benedictions, and the latter in *Tahanun*, the Supplications. *Selichot* are supplications for forgiveness, and are found in High Holy Day prayer books, as well as some festival and weekday prayerbooks, and in separate prayer books devoted solely to *Selichot* services.

We will address how supplications have developed in Jewish liturgy and how they are used in contemporary American Reform liturgy. In the category of "Supplications," we include *Tahanun*, *Selichot*, and the current development of healing services. *Tahanun*, which originated as a time for private, personal prayer after the *Amidah*, no longer exists as a distinct rubric within the liturgy of American Reform Judaism as published by the

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[2] Idelsohn, A. Jewish Liturgy and Its Development. New York, Henry Holt & Co., 1932, p. xi.

Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR). There are vestiges of it to be found in the daily service, and in healing services, as we shall see. The practice of saying *Selichot* during the penitential season and on fast days had also lapsed in American Reform Judaism, but has been revived in recent years, at least for the Saturday night before Rosh Hashanah.[3] The CCAR has published a separate prayer book for this service, Gates of Forgiveness, and *selichot* prayers are included in the American Reform High Holy Day prayer book, Gates of Repentance, and they are identified as *selichot*. Healing services are a new compilation of prayers; many congregations have created their own liturgies, and the CCAR sponsored a study of them in 1996. Each of these three forms of prayers of supplication will be examined in separate chapters.

In this chapter we will present a background for these specific discussions by providing a brief discussion of the nature of Jewish prayer, a historical overview of how Jewish worship developed in general, and prayers of petition and supplication in particular, and an analysis of the differences between petitionary prayer and supplications.

The Nature of Jewish Prayer

There are a number of ways to talk about Jewish prayer. For example, one can describe the prayers, what prayer traditions exist in what communities, the order of the prayers in a given service, or the rules for saying prayers according to the occasion. One could cite the sources, i.e., biblical, talmudic, etc., for individual prayers. One might want to focus on how Jews pray as a community, and the role communal prayer plays in Jewish life. And one could explore what Jewish prayer is.

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[3] If Rosh Hashanah falls on a Monday or a Tuesday, then the *Selichot* service is said on the preceding Saturday night.

Another important consideration is the tension between the fixed structure of prayer, *keva*, and *kavvanah*, the spontaneous intent which the worshipper brings to his/her prayers. Structure is necessary in order to create community prayer, so that there is coherence and continuity to group worship, rather than a random collection of materials. The structure of Jewish prayer not only provides continuity from generation to generation, but also provides a common ground for Jews all over the world. *Keva* makes it possible for people to learn the service and to understand it. *Keva* in the sense of the regularity of worship also supports us in those moments when we do not feel like praying, so that we will be ready and able to pray when we do.

Kavvanah, on the other hand, is the free involvement of the individual in the act of praying. It would seem to be at odds with *keva*, the one interfering with the other. Rabbi Eliezer said, if one makes his Prayer [referring to the *Amidah*] a matter of fixed routine, his prayer is not an entreaty for grace."[4] Yet, as Petuchowski points out, the Rabbis must have assumed that it was possible to have both *keva* and *kavvanah*, since they did discuss them together.[5]

The practice of communal worship entails an inherent tendency to standardization. It is easy to say that spontaneity and intention are the ideals of prayer, but it is also very difficult to achieve. Even in the time of the Rabbis, their students would try to discover how their masters prayed, and what they said in their prayers, and copy them; several of them are preserved in the Talmud (See Chapter Two).[6] The eloquence and devotion of the teachers detracted from the *kavvanah* of the students. It has been the task of every

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[4] M. *Ber.* 4:4.
[5] Petuchowski, J. Understanding Jewish Prayer. New York, KTAV Publishing House, Inc., p. 8.
[6] b. *Ber.* 16b-17a.

generation to find the balance between *keva* and *kavvanah* in their own prayers. Not only does "one generation's *kavvanah* become another's *keva*," but - and this corollary is often forgotten in thinking about prayer - what is experienced as *keva*, and perhaps uncomfortably so, was an earlier generation's *kavvanah*.[7]

All of these discussions are valid and pertinent to the study of prayer in Judaism. At some point, each of these approaches leads to the others, for prayer is a complex and multi-layered human activity. Jewish prayer is a very specialized form of communication. Even though we are talking to God when we pray, prayer is not a conversation *per se*, in that we have a great deal of difficulty in describing and defining the ways in which the other party to the conversation - God - participates in it with us.[8] We can raise many questions about how God participates in prayer, since God, according to some modern understandings of God, cannot be moved or influenced by human prayer. How could God's will be changed when God is beyond change? Why could, would, or should God care about prayer? Should not God's ultimate fairness prevail in how God takes care of people and responds to their needs?[9] And yet, as Jews we pray, regularly and for many reasons: personal needs and community concerns; in praise and thanks for creation, nature, and events in our history; for the light of the morning and the light of salvation.

It should be kept in mind that in Judaism, prayer, including petitions and supplication, is not a solitary activity. The fact that the individual does not pray alone adds the dimension of interpersonal communication to prayer, i.e., Jews also communicate with

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[7] Petuchowski, op.cit., p. 11.
[8] Phillips, D. The Concept of Prayer. New York, Schocken Books, 1966, p. 55.
[9] Cohn-Sherbok, D. Jewish Petitionary Prayer. Lewiston, NY, Edwin Mellen Press, 1989, pp. 3-4.

each other when they pray.[10] Prayer provides the opportunity for Jews to give shape to their experience of the world, to reach out for answers, and to be reconciled with life; "Man wants to justify good and evil in the present; he needs to glorify his ordeal and then weep over it."[11] As a communal experience, the prayer book therefore expresses the identity of the Jews in that community of worshippers, what moves them to pray, what moves them to praise God, and what moves them to petition God.[12]

". . . Even as one prays for [one's] own private needs, [one] prays for the needs of the entire Jewish people, affirming his membership in an entity so much larger than [oneself].. . . In times of trouble, when a person seeks relief from his personal distress, prayer gives him an opportunity to feel part of a larger whole - he belongs to his people, and joining with them, he reaches out to the God of his ancestors. . . Jewish prayer is not only a conversation between the individual and God but also a conversation of man with himself and his fellowmen in the presence of God. . . [prayer is] a mode of speech for signifying the unity of the Jewish people."[13]

It has been said of Jewish prayer that "to live meant to implore, to survive - to express gratitude."[14] Heinemann points out that, in general, forms of worship developed among the people themselves rather than the Rabbis.[15] Prayer can be understood as a way to search for answers and to accept what life brings; it expresses hope and grief, faith and doubt. Jewish prayer in and of itself has great power to comfort and support, and to

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[10] Cohn, G. and Fisch, H. Prayer in Judaism. Northvale, NJ, Jason Aronson, Inc. 1996, pp. x-xi.
[11] Wiesel, E. "Prayer and Modern Man," in Cohn and Fisch, ibid, pp. 4, 6.
[12] Berkovits, E. "Jewish Prayer in Our Days: A Discussion," ibid, p. 37.
[13] ibid, p. x-xi.
[14] Wiesel, op.cit., p.4.
[15] Heinemann, J. Prayer in the Talmud. New York, DeGruyter, 1977, p. 157.

"measure what one lacks, what one is and what one wishes to be; to accept what one is and to give it back. Without this ability, man is deprived of an essential dimension. To be closed to prayer is more punishment than sin, for prayer may contain its own reward."[16]

The prayerbook as a whole is intensely personal, because it reflects the full range of emotions and experiences which the Jewish people have communicated to God throughout our history. It contains elements of all of our sacred texts, although it has never been canonized itself.[17] The *siddur* is a vital and dynamic component in the chain of tradition, part of a shared history and sacred myth.[18] It is both public and intimate, reflecting also the life events of the individual Jew[19] (who is historically male, but increasingly in recent times reflects female experience as well). All these reflections are seen through the two basic elements of Jewish prayer: praise and petition.[20]

The prayer book serves as a source of inspiration and strength in times of oppression. It is the "true companion of the Jew from the years of his early youth to the hour of his death. . . [it] reflects the daily occurrences of the Jewish people." It records the "historical intimacy with the daily life of the Jew."[21]

Prayer is an "act of recollection" of the "significance and spirituality of all creation, its necessity and its purpose" and an identification with creation, feeling a part of nature and creation, and feeling that one has "a God in the heavens above and on the earth in which he lives."[22] Prayer affirms our faith and our highest ideals. We pray to the God who heals

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[16] Wiesel, ~~ibid~~, p. 7.
[17] Cohn-Sherbok, op.cit., p. 18.
[18] Hoffman, L. Beyond the Text. Bloomington IN, Indiana University Press, 1987, p. 76.
[19] Idelsohn, op.cit., p. xiii.
[20] ibid, p. xi.
[21] ibid, pp. xii-xiii.
[22] Kon, A. Prayer. London, Soncino Press, 1971, p. 5.

the sick, lifts up the fallen, frees the captive, and so on, and even though these pleas seem not to achieve healing, uplifting or freedom, we do not give up on them, because we are convinced that they are right and proper things to pray for. We insist on praying for these things and "imputing" to God the power and authority to make them happen because, as human beings and as Jews, we will not take "no" for an answer. What we pray for - life, justice, goodness - is so important that the alternative, i.e., not to pray for them, is unacceptable.[23]

Historical Overview

The history of prayer in Judaism does not reflect a linear progression. Community practices diverged yet retained an overall uniformity of structure, but at different rates and in different ways, in response to local circumstances and pressures. In the most general sense, the history of Jewish liturgy has moved in broadly similar directions, which is to say that the uniform framework of statutory prayers was maintained as Jewish communities dispersed throughout Europe, North Africa, and the Near East. The concept of statutory prayer meant that certain rubrics had certain themes and intents, and occurred in a certain order, in every service, everywhere and at all times. However, the specific wording of the prayers was not dictated or mandated. There was enough communication between these communities and the academies to ensure that this uniformity was known and valued. One of the intentions of the early precedent of rabbinic resistance to writing down prayer texts and codifying the contents of the statutory prayers was to encourage individual *kavvanah*.[24] It also allowed for flexibility, and the development of richly varied local

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[23] Slonimsky, H. "Prayer and a Growing God" in Hoffman, L., ed. Gates of Understanding. New York, UAHC Press, 1977, p. 73.

[24] M. *Ber.* 2:13.

customs. These variations arose in response to specific local experiences, whether there were cordial or threatening relationships with local neighbors and authorities, as well as in response to internal conditions and trends within the Jewish community. Also in general terms, the development of liturgical poetry exerted a profound influence on customs of prayer and worship, over a period of many centuries, but again, in different ways in different places and times.

Biblical prayer was distinguished from the incantations of the other nations by its lack of prescribed, fixed wording; the efficacy of prayer was not dependent on any particular formula. The essence of biblical prayer lies in its content; its patterns exist in order to facilitate expression and sincerity. Greenberg sees David as a sublime figure because he continually resorts to prayer when he is in trouble.[25] As is true for Hannah, the paradigmatic figure of supplicatory prayer in the Bible, sincerity is based on the transactional nature of prayer, as a communication between two parties. This implies that the average Israelite, oriented towards God as a real and vivid presence in his/her life and world, may have prayed often. "Only the accessibility of God through prayer everywhere and at all times and to all persons ensured the permanent link of the commoner to the transcendent realm. . . .Solomon's God accepts any prayer, any supplication which any man shall have, each of whom knows his own personal affliction. . . constant, familiar intercourse with God, unmediated by priest or other ritual expert could only have strengthened the egalitarian tendency that was rooted in Israel's self-conception."[26] The effect of the possibility of intimacy with God that was available to all Israelites raised the standard of conduct for the entire people, a perspective that has important implications for

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[25] Greenberg, M. Biblical Prose Prayer. Berkeley CA, University of California Press, 1983, p. 47.
[26] ibid, pp. 50-52.

the primacy of morality over forms of worship. Worship and prayer are social transactions that require moral identification and trust between the parties.[27]

The earliest documentation of including lay people as active participants in worship occurs in Deuteronomy 26:5-11, wherein the worshiper, not the priest, is told what to say when bringing the offering of first fruits:

> The priest shall take the basket from your hand and set it down in front of the altar of the Lord your God. You shall then recite as follows before the Lord your God: 'My father was a fugitive Aramean. He went down to Egypt with meager numbers and sojourned there; but there he became a great and very populous nation. The Egyptians dealt harshly with us and oppressed us; they imposed heavy labor upon us. We cried to the Lord, the God of our fathers, and the Lord heard our plea and saw our plight, our misery, and our oppression. The Lord freed us from Egypt by a mighty hand, by an outstretched arm and awesome power, and by signs and portents. He brought us to this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. Wherefore I now bring the first fruits of the soil which You, O Lord, have given me.' You shall leave it before the Lord your God and bow low before the Lord your God. And you shall enjoy, together with the Levite and the stranger in your midst, all the bounty that the Lord your God has bestowed upon you and your household.

The Mishnah, *Ta'anit*, Chapter 2, tells us about the gathering of the people for fast-day assemblies, in which communal petitionary prayers were offered. Daily prayer itself seems to have originated during the Babylonian exile, when there would be public gatherings for prayer, confession of faith, and instruction in the Torah in order to maintain faith and identity. Precedent for regularly held prayer services also came from the *ma'amadot*, services which were held by the priests who came from areas outside of Jerusalem to "stand over" the sacrifices at the Temple as representatives of the people. These services originated in the reforms of the post-exilic period; they were held both in Jerusalem and in the local priests' home areas, and included prayers and Torah reading, and petitions.[28]

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[27] ibid.

[28] Elbogen, I. Jewish Liturgy: a Comprehensive History. Philadelphia, Jewish Publication Society, 1993, pp. 188-191.

Daily public worship became established in the Second Temple period. With the priestly cult centralized in Jerusalem, the people in outlying towns also wanted to participate in worship on a regular basis. The establishment of a regular habit of worship fostered the establishment of a standard liturgy, or at least a common framework that could satisfy people's desire for prayer and, at the same time, unite Jews across communities.[29] It is first described in detail in Mishnah, *Tamid* 5:1, which gives instructions for reciting the Ten Commandments, the *Shema*, several benedictions, and the Priestly Blessing.

According to the rabbinical tradition, the *Amidah* was added to this early framework during the period of the men of the Great Assembly[30] and formulated by Rabban Gamliel.[31] These communal petitions, preceded by praises and followed by thanksgiving, came eventually to have a set order (and to actually number nineteen), but without having the specific wording dictated. They were followed by time for personal, private petitions, whose content was also not prescribed. At first these petitions were known simply as "Words," and later as "Supplications;"[32] they were general in nature, allowing for the weaknesses of people in transgressing and their desires for their material needs. Where they included a confession of sin, it was based on straying from the right path, as well as the assurance that God would still "protect and favor" God's people.[33] In time, the prayers of respected teachers and authorities became known and their wording adopted. Some of these prayers are recorded in the Talmud (See Chapter Two).

The shift in focus from the early supplications of the talmudic period to the grim and self-abasing tenor of the *Tahanun* rubric occurred in parallel with historical circumstance. The Jewish persistence in maintaining a separate cultural and religious identity was

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[29] ibid, pp. 192-193.
[30] b. *Ber.* 33a.
[31] M. *Ber.* 4:3.
[32] Elbogen, op.cit., p. 193.
[33] ibid, pp. 193-194.

punished by both Christian and Moslem rulers, albeit for different reasons and to varying degrees in different communities.[34] In many Jewish communities around the Mediterranean Sea, local governments placed onerous restrictions on Jewish religious practices. Sermons were banned, and in some areas the reading of Scripture was forbidden as part of the worship service; communal and educational institutions were closed. As a result of the persecutions that took place in both Palestine and Babylonia at the end of the talmudic period, the creativity and productivity of the *Amoraim* and *Saboraim* was severely inhibited. They focused their attention on collecting and writing down what they had inherited, including prayers and poems that were outside of the statutory rubrics. Their activity in consolidating what had been produced in an earlier period reflected not only a different kind of creativity, but the acceptance of these earlier works as "binding and immutable."[35] During the Babylonian persecutions that occurred with the decline of the Sassanid Empire between 450 and 589, prayer was prohibited, but singing was permitted, and so liturgical songs were composed in order to express that which could not be expressed as formal prayer.[36] In the Roman Empire, Emperor Justinian's novella of 553 prohibited the Jews from reading scripture. In Palestine, at the end of the eighth century, under Byzantine rule, the Jews were forbidden to recite the *Shema* and the *Amidah*.

Aside from the restrictions placed on Jewish liturgy by the secular authorities, there was also a general creative urge to add to established forms. If, as Greenberg sees it, prayer was part of a special interaction between the people and God, then the people wanted to make that interaction a dynamic one, adding their own words in their own generations. Efforts to embellish the form and content of the major, statutory prayers (which had been established by the end of the talmudic period) with additional materials

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[34] Ben Sasson, H., ed. A History of the Jewish People. Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1994, p. 385.

[35] ibid, p. 213.

[36] Elbogen, op.cit., p. 223.

were met with resistance, often vehement, from rabbinic authorities, to be sure, but they continued nonetheless. One vehicle for embellishment was the *piyyut*, which was already established as a poetic form by the end of the *Amoraic* period.[37] *Piyyut* is the term given to the liturgical poem; which, while lacking formal, established structure or style, provided an open and flexible format for expression. *Piyyutim* were based on biblical verses, themes, and language; Raymond Scheindlin sees them as a continuation of biblical traditions of literary composition.[38] One rule bound the *piyyut*: that it be "appropriate for the contents of the prayer to which it was attached."[39] Otherwise, *piyyutim* could be inserted at many points in the service, as long as they did not disrupt the flow or meaning of the statutory prayers, and were in keeping with community preferences. The *piyyut* provided a means of adapting liturgy to circumvent restrictive laws that were aimed at prayers known to the authorities. It allowed for the sentiments of the times to be expressed, and its popularity, despite the continued and strenuous objections from rabbis and scholars, meant that *piyyutim* were added to the liturgy for all services, before, after, and eventually within all the rubrics of prayer. It may be said that within the ongoing tension between the *keva* of the statutory prayers and the *kavvanah* of the moment, that the *piyyut* satisfied the balancing need to be immediate and heartfelt.

By the eighth century, a high degree of diversity existed within Jewish worship. Widespread correspondence took place between the academies and the communities of the Diaspora, and there seems to have been no reluctance to answer questions that were sent regarding a wide variety of topics, including requests to set down in writing the prayer texts and halachah related to prayer as they were used in the academies. Thus the first written prayer book, *Seder Rav Amram*, is actually a responsum, written to a community in Spain whose leaders had asked Rav Amram, at the Babylonian academy at Sura, to tell

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[37] ibid, p. 213.
[38] ibid, p. 220.
[39] ibid, p. 225.

them what liturgy was used there. Rav Amram's responsum includes the relevant halachot pertaining to the prayers. Ginzberg assumes it was Amram's halachic commentary that was requested, particularly since he argues that local customs were well-entrenched, and that later additions and emendations to the *Seder* are found most frequently in the prayers, rather than in the commentary.[40]

Both Christian and Muslim authorities accepted the concept of corporate worship. In Muslim communities, the synagogue often emulated the mosque as a house of the people, where they congregated for many reasons in addition to worship; this circumstance mitigated in favor of more consistent, unified liturgy and worship practices. For many Jews, who were otherwise uneducated and religiously inactive, participation in daily "public worship was the main expression of their communal allegiance."[41]

Despite their overall support for a uniform liturgy, recognized authorities such as Amram, Saadia, and Maimonides also favored the opportunity for free-form, individual prayer after the *Amidah*. This may have been connected to their opposition to the Karaites, and may be reflected in the insertion of talmudic material and psalms after the *Amidah*, particularly in the case of the addition of psalms 6 and 25 to *Tahanun* in Spain and Ashkenaz.[42]

Petitionary prayers and supplications reflected how worshippers understood sin and repentance, and reward and punishment in their day. In asking God for relief from their troubles, worshippers assumed that they were responsible for them, as a consequence of their own sins. In the tenth century, Saadiah Gaon held that God "observes every single deed of ours and reserves its reward for the Future World which is the 'World of Reward'. . .Nevertheless, God by no means leaves his servants without reward for their merits, and punishment for their sins, even in this world, thus giving us a sign and a hint of

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[40] Ginzberg, L. Geonica. New York, Hermon Press, 1968, pp. 124-126.

[41] Baron, S. A Social and Religious History of the Jews, Vol. VII: Language and Letters. New York, Columbia University Press, 1958, p. 63.

[42] ibid, pp. 70-72.

all that is reserved for the time when the harvest of all human actions will be gathered in."[43] But repentance is possible, and regret and remorse for past transgressions will earn cancellation of the punishments of the Future World.[44] Yet the righteous and the innocent also suffer in this world. Saadia held that such suffering, if not the result of actual sins, was God's means of testing. The endurance of the pious was an example for everyone, and even though God does not reveal such testing, God does not test people arbitrarily, but only those with the strength to endure it. Saadia has no doubt that when the innocent suffer, they will be compensated in the Future World.[45] Nevertheless, Saadia, too, was the author of petitions and supplications, and included time for them in his prayer book.[46] As Hoffman notes,[47] Saadia was very interested in form and structure, in keeping with the "Moslem aesthetic which marked his day;" his liturgical poetry shows his concern for the poetic forms, extending the use of Hebrew as well as of rhyme schemes.[48]

Maimonides articulated a view of reward and punishment that built on the notion of the balance of merits and sins, both quantitatively and qualitatively, with repentance as a means of tipping the balance away from sin. He also laid out the means and methods of repentance in his *Hilchot Teshuvah*. These attitudes towards reward and punishment, especially punishment, informed the content of prayers of supplication, particularly the *selichot*, in an effort to give voice to the pain and grief of persecution (See Chapter 3).

The instability of Jewish communities in Europe during the Middle Ages, due to expulsions, persecutions, and book burnings, meant that it was very diffcult to maintain written sources and reliable prayer traditions. Especially after the expulsion from Spain, survivors, exiles, and refugees would unite to form a new community, or be absorbed into

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[43] Beliefs and Opinions. V:3.
[44] ibid.
[45] ibid, V:4.
[46] Elbogen, pp. 230, 250.
[47] Hoffman, L. The Canonization of the Synagogue Service. Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press, 1979, p. 9.
[48] Elbogen, op.cit. pp. 220, 250.

an existing community in a new location; there they would quickly try to establish a new order of prayer. As communities combined, were split apart and recombined, different customs of recitation, different versions of texts, and random or undisciplined abridgment of prayer texts all contributed to the corresponding instability of prayer traditions. This was especially true for *selichot*, where poems were truncated, fragments of verses were strung together, where there was no regard for preserving texts, nor even of any form of an editing process. With the advent of the printing press, printers all too often printed what texts they had, what was convenient, or what was least expensive to do. This added to the corruption of prayer texts and the difficulty of preserving customs, as well as standardizing what was printed simply because it was available.[49]

The reforms in nineteenth century Europe and North America eliminated what was considered to be obscure, repetitive, and complex poetry; mystical and Kabbalistic influences; references to sacrifices and the coming of a messiah; criticisms of non-Jews; and particularistic rituals, whether home- or synagogue-based. These were replaced with universal themes, hymns and poems written in the vernacular, and a uniform structure of restraint and decorum for public worship. Traditional Judaism, which came to be called "Orthodox," was not entirely immune to the influence of the reformers, but by and large traditional prayer books remained in use by Orthodox congregations.[50]

The physical resurrection and restoration of the Temple in Jerusalem and its sacrifices were incompatible with European rationalism. Human reason could discover the reality of God. Mysticism was at odds with modern science and rationalism. Hebrew was at odds with the vernacular of the secular culture. The accumulation and redundancy of poems and prayers around the essential rubrics of worship were held to be just so much clutter.

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[49] ibid, pp. 283-284.

[50] Reif, S. Judaism and Hebrew Prayer. Cambridge, England, Cambridge University Press, 1993, p. 292.

The varying paces and cadences of individual prayer were also not conducive to modern communal behavior.

Rather than being a passive participant in life, one to whom things happened and who had no power to influence the events of one's life, modern man could be an actor, able and entitled by the laws of nature to direct his life, to make decisions and changes. Rational, modern people had the God-given ability to understand the world around them, and to use that understanding to work towards a better life. Finally, the optimism of scientific discoveries, advances in productivity and economics, and of political emancipation all favored the adoption by the Jews of "the pristine truth of natural religion, the ultimate supremacy of reason, the stress on human happiness as the be-all and end-all of philosophizing."[51]

The Orthodox reaction to reforms in the synagogue and in the prayer book was to proclaim the sanctity of the written service, holding that nothing could be deleted or altered in any way. Innovation was deemed to be contrary to the Torah, even forbidden.[52] The nineteenth century "traditionalists made dogmas out of prayers, and. . . modernists, insisting on the literal truth of every liturgical phrase they uttered, omitted large segments of the prayerbook because they were not, in any prosaic or literal sense, true."[53] According to the Pittsburgh Platform of the American Reform Movement in 1885, Reform Judaism as practiced in America felt itself bound only to "the moral laws, and [to] maintain only such ceremonies as elevate and sanctify our lives, but reject all such as are not adapted to the views and habits of modern civilization."[54]

Yet the development of progressive, liberal Judaism has not been uniform, or lacking dissent from within. For instance, when the Columbus Platform of 1937 discussed the need for the "traditional habit of communion with God through prayer in both home and

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[51] ibid, p. 259.
[52] Heinemann, J. "The Fixed and the Fluid in Jewish Prayer" in Cohn and Fisch, op.cit., p. 51.
[53] Petuchowski, J. Theology and Poetry. London, Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1978, p. 6.
[54] Meyer, M. Response to Modernity. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1988, p. 388.

synagogue,"[55] Samuel S. Cohon, one of its guiding lights, criticized the Reform Movement's Union Prayer Book for what he saw as "apathy and skepticism towards prayer."[56]

Indeed, the spiritual needs and perspective of modern, liberal American Jews have changed over the course of the twentieth century. In 1979, the Responsa Committee of the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR) stated that discarded customs could be reinstated if "a new generation finds them meaningful and useful in its practice of Judaism."[57] In a 1986 responsum, also issued under the auspices of the CCAR, a question regarding abbreviation of the service is answered as follows: "As we review the simplification of religious services undertaken by our reform forefathers we shall see that they were primarily interested in removing archaic *piyyutim* which were no longer understood, avoiding repetition, introducing ideological changes, and substituting vernacular prayers. . . The reformers, however, did not wish to limit the service to the absolute minimum; in fact, many added prayers which they considered appropriate for their age." The responsum lists the "basic structure of Jewish service," including *Tahanun* after the *Amidah.*[58]

Petitionary Prayer

"There is no human concern that remains outside the scope of Jewish petitionary prayer."[59]

Petitionary prayer, while not statutory, follows a basic structure, both for individual prayer and for liturgical rubrics. The petitioner acknowledges his/her unworthiness to come before God, and requests God to hear his/her prayers, regardless. In the earliest stages of the development of prayer, this was not necessarily an acknowledgment of

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[55] ibid, p. 390.
[56] Reif, op.cit., p. 322.
[57] Jacob, W., ed. American Reform Responsa. New York, CCAR Press, 1983, p. 4.
[58] Jacob, W., ed. Contemporary American Reform Responsa. New York, CCAR Press, 1987, pp. 196-197.
[59] Petuchowski, Understanding Jewish Prayer, p. 35.

sinfulness, but rather an admission of the inadequacy of human effort. Later, petitionary prayer came to include confession of sin. Still later, the attitudes of sinfulness, guilt, and even shame, came to predominate in non-statutory petitions. These themes may be explored in depth, calling upon God's merciful qualities even moreso because of the human condition. Finally, the worshipper pledges to repent, expresses gratitude for God's attention, and closes with hope for eventual salvation, for him/herself, for the immediate community, and for all Israel.

Petitionary prayer carries with it several assumptions. It assumes that God exists and is active in the world. It assumes that God somehow receives, or "hears" prayer, and that God can, and sometimes does, respond to supplications. It also assumes that the act of prayer is itself of psychological benefit to the one who prays, giving strength and comfort.[60] We petition God for tangible sustenance, for physical, mental, and spiritual welfare, for a change in events or circumstances.[61]

Formal petitionary prayer can be more an expression of the strength of feelings than an expectation of a specific response, a wish for meaning or an affirmation of commitment.[62] In addition, according to Petuchowski, such prayers exist because of the human need to "rehearse" our needs before God, as an explicit assertion of our dependence upon God and an attestation of God's greatness.[63]

At the same time, petitionary prayer must be regarded as a genuine request, even though there is no expectation of any form of discernible response; that would be an incantation or magic. (Magic assumes that saying the right words or using the right formula will force the desired result.) Nor can the assumption that God hearkens to prayer be tested. It is dependent upon the "existential experience" of the worshipper. "Regardless of the number of examples of petitionary prayers that were not granted, the

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[60] Cohn-Sherbok, op.cit., pp. 1-2.
[61] ibid, p. 23.
[62] ibid, p. 33.
[63] Petuchowski, op.cit., p.42.

person who believes in the efficacy of prayer would not waiver from his conviction" that such prayers are worthwhile.[64] We understand that God's response may not be obvious or comprehensible to us.

Petitionary Prayer Versus Supplications

The terms "petition" and "supplication" are used interchangeably in many texts, but they are not synonymous in Jewish liturgy. It is important for our purposes to distinguish between them in order to understand why supplications present problems for contemporary American Reform Jews. Petitions, "*bakashot*" in Hebrew, are requests. In the daily *Amidah*, the Intermediate benedictions are *bakashot*, asking God to grant understanding, health, abundance, etc. They are brief, their language is controlled and direct, and they follow the formula for a series of *berachot*; for example, the first *bakashah*, for understanding: "You favor us with knowledge and teach humanity understanding. May You continue to favor us with knowledge, understanding, and insight. Blessed are You, God, gracious Giver of knowledge."[65] In contrast, supplications, "*tachanunim*" in Hebrew, are highly emotional and effusive in their language, extended pleadings by an undeserving person. Rooted in essential human unworthiness of God's consideration, taking all responsibility for misfortune upon the supplicant, they beg for salvation from current troubles and suffering. For example,

O compassionate and gracious God, have mercy on us and on all Your works, for there is none like You. Please, God, forgive our willful sins. Our Father, our King, our Rock and Redeemer, living and enduring God, Who is mighty in strength, generous and good to all Your works; for You are our God. O God Who is slow to anger and full of mercy, treat us according to Your abundant mercy and save us for Your Name's sake. Hear our prayer, our King, and rescue us from our foes; hear our prayer, our King, and rescue us from every distress and woe. You are our Father, our King, and Your Name is proclaimed upon us - do not set us aside. Do not abandon us, our Father, do not cast us

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[64] Cohn-Sherbok, op.cit., pp. 69-74.

[65] Stern, C., ed. Gates of Prayer. New York, CCAR Press, 1977, p. 62.

away, our Creator; do not forget us, our Molder; for You are God, the gracious and compassionate King.[66]

While these two examples are distinct, they are not unrelated. Mishnah Ta'anit provides the range of expression that connects the ordinary petition with the supplication. This comes in the form of the order of prayers for rain. Beginning minimally, with the mention that God "causes the wind to blow and the rain to fall," the most modest petition for rain is included in the second benediction of the *Amidah*, between Shemini Atzeret and the first day of Passover. This coincides with the months of the year when rain is expected in Israel.[67]

If it has not rained within the next month, then it is appropriate to pray directly for rain, saying, "and grant dew and rain," in the ninth benediction.[68] If, after two more weeks, there has still been no rain, then individuals may begin to fast, three separate fasts during daylight hours, but not on successive days, as well as to pray.[69] The next step, if it has not rained by the first of Kislev, would be for the community to fast in the same manner.[70] The longer the drought lasts, the more stringent the afflictions would become, on a personal level and then on a communal level.

During these fasts, the community was to behave as if in mourning, with people throwing ashes on themselves and on the Ark;[71] having a very experienced and devoted man recite the prayers;[72] recalling the words of the prophets and calling upon God as the One Who answered the Patriarchs to answer these prayers and send rain.[73] In the progression from the first mention of God as the Maker of rain to the afflictions of the entire community in the case of a prolonged drought, the language of prayer is not

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[66] Scherman, N., ed. The Complete Artscroll *Siddur*. Brooklyn, Mesorah Publications, Ltd., 1988, p. 131.

[67] M. *Ta.* 1:1-2.

[68] M. *Ta.* 1:3.

[69] M. *Ta.* 1:4.

[70] M. *Ta.* 1:5.

[71] M. *Ta.* 2:1.

[72] M. *Ta.* 2:2.

[73] M. *Ta.* 2:3-4.

specified at first by the Mishnah, but the tone of prayers is simple and straightforward. The focus on God as Provider and as Answerer of prayer is constant, even as it escalates. There is, however, little evidence of the self-blame and self-abasement that appears in later prayers in these early texts. Rather, the behavior associated with mourning seems more directed at the dire consequences of drought than at a sinful community as the cause of the drought.

It would appear that expressions of such attitudes took the form of self-denial in a physical sense, as fasts, abstentions from bathing and annointing, wearing leather shoes, and marital relations (these are the self-afflictions practiced on Yom Kippur). Fasting and other forms of self-affliction as accompaniments to prayer were common in the ancient Near East. On one level, they served to focus attention away from the self and onto the purpose of the prayers and rituals, as, in this case of ending the drought. The priests, the Ark, and even the Torah itself could be included in the putting on of sackcloth and ashes in times of calamity.[74] Fasting was also deemed to be a way, not of influencing God, as in other ancient cultures, but of humbling oneself and repenting.[75]

One is reminded of the words of Hillel: "If I am only for myself, what am I?"[76] Hillel acknowledges that human energy, effort, and ability are not sufficient to master the world. A person cannot achieve his/her goals completely, alone.[77] It is not that humanity is inherently flawed, but only inherently limited. One can extend this view to encompass the need for God's help, and the understanding that because of the limitations of being human, no one is worthy or able to achieve complete success without God. And if we are unworthy by ourselves, then we are dependent upon God's grace. Both Moses and David, whose merits, according to a *midrash*, "could have sustained the whole world," asked

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[74] Encyclopedia Judaica, Vol. 6. Jerusalem, Keter Publishing House, 1972, c. 1192.
[75] Joel 2:13, Jonah 3:8.
[76] M. *Avot* 1:14.
[77] Albeck on M. *Avot* 1:14. Albeck, H. *Shisha Sidrei Mishnah: Seder Nezikin*. Tel Aviv, D'vir Publishing House, 1988, p. 356.

God only for a favor; how much the moreso should an ordinary person beseech God.[78] "We beseech God to grant our petitions freely, whether we deserve it or not, because of His quality of mercy (*chinam*)."[79]

In supplications, we call upon God and God's love for us and for our ancestors. M. *Ta'anit* 2:3-4 gives us in invocation of forefathers who were answered by God, from Abraham to Joshua to Samuel to Elijah to Jonah to David and Solomon. The "Chapters of Ben Baboi," a post-talmudic work, added to the list of ancestors to be invoked,[80] as did the composers of *selicha* literature. The attitude that people need God to succeed would evolve into a sense that human beings are not just inherently limited, but also inherently unworthy.

The practice of fasting as an aspect of supplication grew after the destruction of the Temple, and eventually the Rabbis began to discourage it, whether it was done for supplication or asceticism. While underscoring the reasons for fasting, halachic authorities held that it was preferable not to sin in the first place. In the medieval period, Jewish mystics still practiced fasting. In modern times, however, physical self-affliction in general is not practiced as part of religious supplication or repentance.[81]

It is not clear when self-affliction of a more verbal form began to overtake fasting as an aspect of supplication, distinguishing it even more from more ordinary petitions. The connection may be tenuous, but it may have been that the direction of focus on God as hearing words of prayer occurred in parallel to the decrease in fasting and other forms of self-denying behavior. Sa'adia, who wrote an opinion disapproving of fasting, also used a similar eulogy in his own prayer of supplication. The standard form of eulogy, while not

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[78] *Sifre* to Deuteronomy 26.
[79] Hammer, R. Entering Jewish Prayer. New York, Schocken Books, 1994, p. 199.
[80] Freehof, S. "The Origin of the *Tahanun*" in Hebrew Union College Annual, vol. II (1925), p. 345.
[81] Encyclopedia Judaica, Vol. 6. Op.cit, c. 1194-1195.

intended for non-statutory prayer, seems to have had the function of endowing such prayers with a legitimacy that people wanted.[82]

One practice that seems to have taken hold very early was the addition of the *chatimah*, "Blessed are You, O God, who hears prayer." In the tannaitic period, the Rabbis were of the opinion that one's personal petitions should be added in the *Amidah* after this benediction.[83] To say that God hears prayer is a powerful statement of God's acceptance of prayer as a valid means of approach, regardless of how limited or unworthy a person might be. A God who hears prayer is a God who is paying attention, as it were. Yet why should God attend to people and their prayers? It is an act of grace, unearned by human deeds, resulting from God's love and compassion. In the *Amidah*, not only is there a benediction for God, "Who hearkens to prayer," but also one of thanksgiving, to God in Whose hands are our lives, in Whose care are our souls; "You are good, with everlasting mercy; You are compassionate, with enduring lovingkindness." These blessings are part of how we react to being alive, of recognizing God's grace in maintaining us and attending to our prayers.[84]

The personal prayers of the Sages, which were the forerunners of the *Tahanun* service, typically asked for God's guidance in right behavior and attitude. By the time of Seder Rav Amram, the language of supplication had become part of the prayers. His *Tachanun* rubric begins: "Lord of all worlds and Lord of all lords, God, great, mighty, and fearful, have mercy upon us for we are Your servants, the work of Your hands, flesh, dust, and worms we are."[85] The *bakashah* for understanding, cited above, is the same in Amram as in Gates of Prayer.

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[82] ibid.

[83] b. *Avoda Zara* 8a. In the Amoraic period, the Rabbis debated where was the appropriate place to recite personal petitions, i.e., after each pertinent benediction according the nature of the petition or at the end of the *Amidah* as a whole, with the latter opinion prevailing.

[84] Harlow, J. "Old and New Sources of Prayer," paper presented at the Institute for Spirituality, St. John's University, Collegeville, MN, 1979, p. 3.

[85] Hedegard, D. *Seder Rav Amram Gaon*, Part I: Hebrew Text with Critical Apparatus. Lund, A.-B. Ph. Lindstedts Universtets-Bokhandel, 1951, p. 127.

Confession as part of prayers of supplication is, like fasting, an outgrowth of the notion of humbling oneself before asking God for anything. The Talmud teaches that "God can be assuaged with words."[86] It is in this connection that Isaac Aboav wrote, "Indeed, it is as if the penitent has built an altar by pleading and has offered a sacrifice."[87] The ordinary *bakashot* of the daily Intermediate Benedictions include only one statement of confession, in the sixth benediction: "Forgive us, our Father for we have sinned; pardon us, our King, for we have transgressed; for You forgive and pardon. Blessed are You, gracious and forgiving God." The *Tachanun* service includes a *vidui*, which was added in the sixteenth century. The confessions of classical supplications, both *techinot* and *selichot*, are broad statements of human sinfulness, rather than specific admissions of sins committed. Occupying something of a middle ground between the petitions and the supplications is the idea that in one's personal prayers, one confesses one's own sins before asking God for one's needs. Maimonides takes the biblical injunction, "they shall confess their sins,"[88] to be a positive precept.[89] However, confession is part of a process of change, in both inner and outward behavior and attitude. Petitions and supplications can focus on either personal needs or communal needs, and confession is consistent with whichever is the focus of the appeal to God.

Petitions and supplications exist in Jewish worship in a hierarchy of expression. If all prayer, whether communal or individual, began with the raw emotion that we have in supplications, then in times of crisis there would be no higher plane of expression and need on which to approach God. *Tachanun* cannot be sustained as daily prayer, day in and day out (See Chapter Two), and petitions express our ongoing hopes for God's support of the community. Each allows for the existence of the other, according to occasion and need.[90]

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[86] b. *Yoma* 86b.

[87] *Menorat* Hamo'ar, V. Kravitz, L. And Olitzky, K. Journey of the Soul. Northvale, NJ, Jason Aronson, 1995, p. 24.

[88] Numbers 5:7.

[89] *Hilchot Teshuvah* 1:1.

[90] Dr. Richard Sarason, personal conversation, 11/19/98.

Prayers of supplication are becoming heard again in Reform congregations in recent years; *Selichot* is now considered to be a standard part of preparation for the High Holy Days.[91] Moreover, the innovation of healing services has also raised the emotional tenor of personal prayer above that of the standard petitions. These new services may eventually find their way into a formal prayer book, as part of the pattern of movement of prayer from the free and new expression of the needs of the community of worshippers into the realm of accepted, established liturgy, whose *kavvanah* has struck a resonant chord within that community. This is an element of Jewish identity that is necessary for continuity over time. It represents the "continuum of the worshipping, faith-community" which listens to previous generations and speaks to the next generation of those who pray.[92]

Contemporary Issues in Petitions and Prayers of Supplication

In the nineteenth century, the modernists rejected the authority of earlier generations as binding, and relied instead on their own judgment to create new prayers and delete old ones. Very often they looked to the tradition to validate the changes they were making.[93] However, these were the same liturgical rituals that referred to the ultimate source of truth and to the "authority of earlier generations." In so doing, they guarded against "the liturgical vacuum that we abhor, [which] is the theoretical possibility that what we are doing is the mere creation of our own devices."[94] Hoffman describes here a contradiction between the stated respect for inherited forms and the presumption of the freedom and authority to select which ones to keep and which to discard. While orthodox liturgies rejected the modernist approach by refusing to change at all, modern liberal liturgies retained the basic framework and the statutory prayers, reinterpreting in the vernacular

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[91] Rabbi Peter Knobel, personal conversation, 1/12/99.

[92] Petuchowski, J. "The *Siddur* - A Closed Book?" in Cohn and Fisch, op.cit., p. 27.

[93] see, for example, David Friedlander leaflet of 1812, cited in Petuchowski, Prayerbook Reform in Europe. New York, World Union for Progressive Judaism, Ltd., 1968, p. 131.

[94] Hoffman, L. Beyond the Text. op.cit., p. 76.

through alternative translations and additional material. The outcome for some has been a choice between stagnation and old melodies with no words left or "many words but few melodies."[95]

One particular issue concerns the concept of sin. In earlier times, suffering was understood as a consequence of sin, and the process of *teshuvah*, of turning away from sin, was an important topic in study and in prayer. With modernity, the connection between sin and suffering was broken. Indeed, the idea of sin, and what was a sin, was overtaken by the understandings gained from the social sciences. The intellectual and aloof God of modernity was not involved with the sins and transgressions of individual men and women, and ultimate salvation did not depend upon their repentance. An example of how this was reflected in Jewish liturgy is the shift in the Torah reading for Yom Kippur afternoon, from Leviticus 18, with its focus on incest and other sexual improprieties, to Leviticus 19, in the Reform liturgy, with its focus on holiness in areas other than sexual morality. Reading Leviticus 18, one could say that if you could control sexual urges, then you could control all the other urges.[96] "Who is the *Baal teshuvah*? R. Judah said, the man who, when the same opportunity for sin occurs once or twice, refrains from sinning. He added, 'the same woman, the same season, the same place.'"[97] The accent in Leviticus 19 is on the positive, on holiness. Furthermore, understanding *chet* as "missing the mark" is not as bad as seeing it as a sin, and has been used to counter what modern psychology has characterized as guilt rather than transgression It is a more therapeutic and nonjudgmental view of behavior.[98] We can seek God as a partner in our actions, investing them with "direction, worth, hope, and in failure, the possibility of repair."[99]

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[95] Sadan, D. "Some Thoughts on the Subject of Prayer," in Cohn & Fisch, op.cit., p. 21-22.
[96] Rabbi Knobel, loc.cit., 1/12/99.
[97] b. *Yoma* 86b.
[98] Borowitz, E. Renewing the Covenant. Philadelphia, Jewish Publication Society, 1991, p. 161.
[99] ibid, p. 169.

At the same time, the events of the twentieth century have not been adequately addressed in Jewish prayer, supplicatory or otherwise. Our forms of worship have been "helpless" in relation to the Holocaust;[100] our post-Enlightenment rejection of the *piyyut* as a form of prayer has undermined the ability to even attempt the kind of supplications that captured the grief and anguish of the medieval pogroms. The insistence on clinging to a closed canon of liturgy has meant that worshippers are still mourning the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem and the degradation of Israel when, 1,900 years later, Israel is once again a sovereign state.[101]

The promises of the Enlightenment - that reason and science could solve society's problems, and that material wealth would improve life - have not been fulfilled. Nor have the ideals of the 1960's been realized; racial and economic justice have not been achieved, the world is not a more peaceful place, and the quest for self-actualization has not resulted in wholeness. In the rationalist model of the Enlightenment, modern Jews did not ask for divine help and guidance. While that position was a major theological shift in its time, the contemporary concern is to feel cared for, and to feel cared for by God. Prayer, both public and private, should be efficacious. "Postmodern Jews" are recognizing that there is a dimension to reality other than the rational, and that dimension is God.[102]

Many Jews in the late twentieth century are by now unfamiliar with prayer as a mode of religious expression. The contemporary spiritual struggle is the difficulty of praying at all.[103] One factor that has contributed to this difficulty, specifically in terms of prayer itself, is the de-emphasis on personal prayer. Prayer books rarely note that the individual is free to add personal prayers and petitions to what is presented in the *siddur*. It is not the fault of the tradition that congregants miss this point.[104] Not only is what is offered

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[100] Wiesel, op.cit., p. 8.
[101] Sadan, op.cit., p. 23.
[102] Rabbi Peter Knobel, loc.cit., 1/12/99.
[103] Silman, Y. "Jewish Prayer in Our Days: A Discussion," in Cohn & Fisch, op.cit., p. 36.
[104] Harlow, op.cit., p. 12.

often unsatisfying or inadequate, but the opportunity and means to compensate have been lost.

As we shall see, an attempt to recover the traditions of petitionary prayer and supplications can been seen in healing services. Supplications are not an intellectual exercise or a cognitive process, but rather they are an affective mode of behavior. In Chapter 2, we shall turn to the classical formulation of supplications, *Tahanun*, and examine both their development and their decline. Chapter 3 will focus on *Selichot*. The use of *selichot* literature also declined as they were perceived to be medieval *piyyutim*, outdated and lacking in meaning. They have made a comeback of sorts in contemporary liturgy, and even a resurgence, although much altered. Finally, we will look at contemporary healing services and how prayers of supplication are being heard in a new context.

CHAPTER TWO

TAHANUN

Tahanun, or *Seder Tahanun*, is the order of the service of supplicatory prayers, *tahanunim*, which follows the *Amidah*, the so-called Eighteen Benedictions (the actual number is nineteen), in the weekday *Shacharit* and *Mincha* services. These prayers originated in the desire to allow for personal, private devotion within the context of the communal prayer service. According to the Talmud, it is one's duty to add something new to regular daily prayer, something original and personal, in order to transform the fixed order of prayer into a true supplication.[1] This indicates that the desire for individual prayer, even within public worship, is not only very old, but a basic and essential element of synagogue worship.

The appropriate place in the service for individual prayer was generally agreed by the Rabbis to be associated with the *Amidah*, but there were two differing opinions within this agreement. The *Tannaim* held that a person could add his private prayers where they were appropriate within the silent *Amidah*, which was for them, after the blessing *Sh'ma koleinu.*[2] However, the opinion that prevailed was that held by the later *Amoraim*, that specific prayers, such as for one who is sick, may be said at the proper places within the *Amidah*, but that one's personal prayers should be said after the completion of the *Amidah.*[3] The prayers of the Sages themselves echo some of the blessings of the *Shemoneh Esrai*, as well as *Birchot HaShachar*, in their petitions for deliverance from bad luck, bad neighbors, evil impulses, etc., and in their pleas for forgiveness and peace, worthy students, good companions, and good impulses. Regardless of whether the

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[1] j. *Ber.* IV 8a.
[2] b. *Avoda Zara* 7b-8a.
[3] b. *Avoda Zara* 8a.

personal prayers were influenced by the *Amidah*, or vice versa, at this early stage of our liturgy, it is clear that the association of the two was significant and intentional.

The *tahanunim* were originally described as "words" - "one says 'words' after the *Amida*."[4] They were prayers that expressed a sense of humility, at times exaggerated, of insignificance before God's greatness. The wording of these prayers was not dictated by the Rabbis, but left to the individual to express what was in his/her heart.[5] The examples of such prayers that are preserved in the Talmud[6] come down to us from the Amoraim of the third century, including R. Zera's simple, "May it be Thy will, O Lord our God, that we sin not nor bring upon ourselves shame or disgrace before our fathers," and R. Johanan's most humble prayer: "May it be Thy will, O Lord our God, to look upon our shame, and behold our evil plight, and clothe Thyself in Thy mercies, and cover Thyself in Thy strength, and wrap Thyself in Thy lovingkindness, and gird Thyself with Thy graciousness, and may the attribute of Thy kindness and gentleness come before Thee."

Talmudic examples of *tahanunim* also include prayers such as the one by R. Eleazar, which express personal humility and petitions in more positive forms, asking for God's help in finding contentment in life, good fortune for the individual, his family and community, and pleasure in the study of Torah. And Rav, in his petition, asks, "May it be Thy will, O Lord our God, to grant us a long life, a life of peace, a life of sustenance, a life of bodily vigor, a life in which there is fear of sin, a life free from shame and confusion, a life of riches and honor, a life in which we may be filled with the love of Torah and the fear of Heaven, a life in which Thou shalt fulfill all the desires of our heart for good!"[7] Thus we see in the early forms of these petitions, before the codification of the *Tahanun* liturgy, an expression of a range of emotions and motivations. They requested God's assistance in the daily tasks and challenges of life. (Rav's petition has been retained to this

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[4] T. *Ber.* 3:6.
[5] Elbogen, op.cit., p. 67.
[6] b. *Ber.* 16b-17a.
[7] b. *Ber.* 16b-17a.

day, in the blessing of the new month, which is recited on the Sabbath preceding *Rosh Chodesh.*[8])

Structure

The original intent of the *tahanunim*, as individual, free-form prayers, meant simply to petition God, humbly, to attend to our personal needs, was overshadowed by later experience, each generation adding the specific phrases and references that spoke most eloquently for it. While the form of *Tahanun* that is most prevalent today became standardized around the sixteenth century, there have been additions since then. The need to appeal to God has provided a continuing opportunity to add confessions of sin and prayers for pardon, and compilers of prayer books have consistently added psalms and petitions of this nature down to the nineteenth century.[9]

While the texts of the statutory prayers became standardized during the time of the Talmud, they were generally not written down. There was among the Rabbinic authorities of the academies a strong resistance to creating written records of their discussions and decisions, let alone actual texts and commentaries. That there was a wish to do so is indicated by the evidence that has survived. For instance, in the eighth century, Rabbi Yehudai Gaon of Sura said that the service reader may use a prayer book, but on fast days only. By the time of Rabbi Netronai, a hundred years later, it was not unusual for the reader to use a prayer book, as is evident from Natronai's ruling regarding the fitness of a blind man to lead the service.[10] However, as regards the contents of a written text, there seems to have been no explicit concern for codification.

By the time Rav Amram compiled the first complete order of prayer in the late ninth century, there was a definite structure to this part of the service, which was not yet designated as a distinct rubric. Amram began with selections from the Bible: "Though our

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[8] Birnbaum, P., ed. Daily Prayer Book. New York, Hebrew Publishing Co., 1949, pp. 381-382.
[9] Elbogen, op.cit., p. 68.
[10] Ginzberg, op.cit., pp. 119-121.

iniquities testify against us, Act, O Lord, for the sake of Your name; though our rebellions are many and we have sinned against You." [11] "If You keep account of sins, O Lord, Lord, who will survive? Yours is the power to forgive so that you may be feared."[12] "Oh, spare Your people, Lord! Let not Your possession become a mockery, to be taunted by nations! Let not the peoples say, 'Where is their God?'"[13] "Turn from Your fierce wrath, and repent of this evil against Your people."[14] There follows the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy and a confession of sins, which are also central elements of the *Selichot* service (see Chapter Three). Then "they fall down on their faces and make petitions for their needs; this prayer invokes Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, asking God to remember God's covenant with them and deal with the worshippers with mercy and compassion. The petitions end with "*Avinu Malkeinu.*"[15].

A century later, Saadia's *siddur* has a shorter section for petitions, without the verses from the bible or the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy. He begins directly with a confession of sin, citing Daniel 9:4-5: "Great, mighty, and awesome God. . . We have sinned; and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled." And *Machzor Vitry* begins with verses from Psalm 25 and Psalm 3: "Remember, O God, Your tender mercies and Your truth; for they have been from of old."[16]

As these prayers entered the formal liturgy, they not only acquired standardized texts, but their motivation became more complex as well. The juxtaposition of individual humility in relation to God's omnipotence, in a moment of personal petition, was extended to encompass the powerlessness of the Jews as a group, in relation to their experiences of suffering in the world. This suffering was attributed to the sinfulness and guilt of the Jews themselves. Pleas for mercy found in the psalms are more indicative of the mood of the

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[11] Jer. 14:7.
[12] Ps. 130:3-4.
[13] Joel 2:17.
[14] Ex. 32:12.
[15] S.R.A. 97-98.
[16] Hurwitz, S., ed. Machzor Vitry. Nuremburg, J. Bulka, 1923, p. 69.

Tahanun service than the petitions of the Rabbis of the talmudic period. Petitions have become supplications.

The petition of Mar bar Ravina,[17] written in the fifth century, is included at the end of the *Amidah*, before the formal beginning of *seder Tahanun*. It expresses both the plea of the individual for God's influence and protection ("keep my tongue from evil and my lips from speaking guile") as well as a petition for God's intercession and deliverance "from all that desire evil against me" and "from all the evils that threaten to come upon the world." Mar's use of the words from Psalm 19:15, "may the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable before Thee, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer," expresses the idea of personal humility. Its balance of a plea for God's help and faith in God as Helper maintains the sense of God as the source of support for human limitations. It sets the stage, as it were, for the shift from personal contrition ("may my soul be as the dust to all") to the request for redemption, calling on God as Redeemer. It introduces the concept of redemption to this part of the service and serves as a transition from the earlier forms of petition to the evolving liturgy of supplication.

In the development of *Tahanun*, additional material was drawn from biblical sources that could reflect people's experiences and perceptions and validate their prayers through the lives and words of their ancestors. These sources provided additional connotations of supplication as they extended the messages of unworthiness into sinfulness, guilt, and shame. They show the development of the service from petition to supplication, wherein the human being becomes limited not only by his humanity and vulnerable to his evil inclination, but deserving of punishment. He is more passive and powerless to affect his behavior and the course of his life, and more dependent upon God as source of salvation and of hope. These texts include:

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[17] Heinemann, J. and Petuchowski, J. Literature of the Synagogue. New York, Behrman House, 1975, p.51.

- Exodus 32:12: "Turn from Your blazing anger and renounce the plan to punish Your people."
- Daniel 9:7: "With You, Lord, is the right, and the shame is on us to this very day."
- Jer. 14:7: " Though our iniquities testify against us, act, O Lord, for the sake of Your name."
- Psalm 106:47: "Deliver us, O Lord our God, and gather us from among the nations."
- Ps. 130:3-4: "If You keep account of sins, O Lord, Lord who will survive? Yours is the power to forgive so that You may be held in awe."
- II Chron. 20:12: "O our God, surely You will punish them, for we are powerless before this great multitude that has come against us, and do not know what to do, but our eyes are on You."

Ezra 9:6: "O my God, I am too ashamed and mortified to lift my face to You, O my God for our iniquities are overwhelming and our guilt has grown high as heaven."[18]

These texts emphasize the idea that Israel suffers because Israel has sinned, by not faithfully observing the commandments. If we recognize our sinfulness, God will respond with pardon, compassion, and forgiveness. This perception of what is meant by sinfulness was rooted in the biblical accounts of turning away from God and being punished, and then turning back to God and being forgiven. The medieval understanding of the need to confess and repent in order to be forgiven links redemption from suffering with repentance from sin. The *vidui*, the formal confession of sins, was added by Isaac Luria as an introduction to *Tahanun*, emphasizing an attitude of sinfulness.[19]

Vehu rahum is a significant portion of the long *Tahanun*. Legend has it that *Vehu rahum* was composed by a group of Jews who were set adrift in the Mediterranean Sea by the Emperor Vespasian; after landing safely and being treated well initially, perhaps in

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[18] Idelsohn, op.cit., p. 112-3.
[19] ibid, p. 111.

France, they were robbed and persecuted. It was in response to this persecution that they composed this prayer. The details vary somewhat across different versions of the story, but its acceptance by many communities attests to the fact that it gave voice to the thoughts and feelings of a great number of medieval Jews. The story is said to date from the time of the destruction of the Second Temple. However, it is missing from Hedegard's critical edition of *Seder Rav Amram*. Elbogen's analysis of the text of *Vehu rahum* leads him to conclude that it is a later addition to *Amram*, and was first mentioned in the eleventh century. Elbogen refutes Zunz's conclusion that the prayer refers to seventh century persecutions, because of the simplicity of the poetic form and the preponderance of biblical language, despite the fact that these characteristics indicate an early origin.[20]

In his edition of the Daily Prayer Book, Birnbaum includes the following footnote: It has been said that whoever can read this long prayer without emotion has lost all feeling for what is great and noble. The soul of an entire people utters these elegies and supplications, and gives voice to its woe of a thousand years."[21] Here is the first paragraph of this eloquent composition, as translated by Birnbaum:

He, being merciful, forgives iniquity, and does not destroy; frequently he turns his anger away, and does not stir up all his wrath. Thou, O Lord, wilt not hold back thy mercy from us; thy kindness and thy truth will always protect us. Save us, Lord our God, and gather us from among the nations, that we may give thanks to thy holy name, that we may glory in thy praise. If thou, O Lord, shouldst record iniquities - Lord, who could live on? But with thee there is forgiveness, that thou mayst be revered. Deal not with us according to our sins; requite us not according to our iniquities. If our sins, O Lord, testify against us, act for thy name's sake. Remember, O Lord, thy mercy and thy kindness, for they are eternal. May the Lord answer us on the day of trouble; may the name of the God of Jacob protect us. O Lord, save us; may the king answer us when we call.[22]

Vehu rahum includes references to Abraham's covenant with God and to the *Akedah* to remind God of the earliest and most basic of God's promises to Abraham and his

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[20] Elbogen, op.cit., p. 69.
[21] Birnbaum, P. op.cit., p. 106-108n.
[22] ibid.

descendants: "O gracious and merciful King, remember thy covenant with Abraham; let the binding of his only son appear before thee for Israel's sake." These references invoke *zechut avot*, by which, according to midrash, Abraham demanded that God promise that when future generations were in trouble, they could call upon God to rescue them for the sake of the *Akedah*. Abrahams[23] identifies *Vehu rahum* as a *selicha*. If so, then it is in the form of a litany of biblical verses that serves as an introduction to the *Selichot* service (See Chapter Three).

Vehu rahum seems to have appeared first in an eleventh century work called *Sefer HaPardes*, from the school of Rashi. *Machzor Vitry*, which was produced by the same school, cites this work as its source.[24] *Vitry* gives instructions for including *Vehu rahum* on Mondays and Thursdays. The text in *Vitry* is virtually the same as that for the long *Tahanun* which is included in the Ashkenazic rite of today.

The short form of *Tahanun* begins with the biblical verse, "*Vayomer David el-Gad, tzar-li meod; niplah-na b'yad Adonai ki rabim rachamav uv'yad-adam al-epolah.*"[25] King David has sinned by conducting a census, and the prophet Gad is sent to rebuke him. David prefers that his punishment come from God rather than from men: "David said to Gad, 'I am in great distress; let us now fall into the hand of the Lord, for His mercies are great; and let me not fall into the hand of man.'" The use of the verb, "fall," carries an additional connotation of falling in prostration. This verse also expresses the situation of the medieval Jews, who felt that if they deserved to be punished, they did not want it to be at the hands of their Christian tormentors.[26]

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[23] Abrahams, I. A Companion to the Authorized Daily Prayerbook. New York, Hermon Press, 1966, p. 75.

[24] Hurwitz, S., op.cit., p. 70.

[25] 2 Sam. 24:14.

[26] Milgrom, A. Jewish Worship. Philadelphia, Jewish Publication Society, 1971, p. 462.

The example of David as the paradigmatic articulator of contrition[27] is carried through in the use of Psalm 6, in the Ashkenazic ritual, immediately following *Vayomer David*. It is full of distress and self-abasement; David begs for God's compassion and healing. According to Idelsohn, this psalm only came into use at the beginning of the eighteenth century, replacing Psalm 25, which remained in the Sephardic tradition.[28] Psalm 25 is also a psalm of David. It is an entreaty for God's guidance as well as for mercy and forgiveness.

The *Tahanun* that appears in *Seder Rav Amram* is shorter than that which appears in later prayer books. Each individual is given the opportunity for private prayer at the beginning of the rubric, for as long as he wishes, or as long as the confession on *Yom Kippur*, before the congregation joins together for communal supplications. As this public portion became a fixed service, it acquired a structure that was similar to that of *Selichot*: beginning with verses from Daniel, Ezra, and Nehemiah, continuing with a confession of sinfulness and unworthiness, and closing with a plea for God's mercy and forgiveness (see Chapter Three). The similarity of this structure to that of the liturgy for fast days led Elbogen to surmise that it was, indeed, borrowed from the *Selichot* service.[29] Fast days coincided with the days on which the Torah was read, i.e., Monday and Thursday, which, in turn, were set to coincide with market days, when the greatest number of people would be able to attend. According to Soferim 21:3, ". . .Our Sages decreed they should fast on Mondays and Thursdays for three reasons: because of the destruction of the Temple, because the Torah was burnt, and because of the disgrace of God's name." Furthermore, according to a very old text, *Seder 'olam*, Moses broke the tablets[30] on a Thursday, the seventeenth of Tammuz, and the Israelites were forgiven for the sin of the Golden Calf on

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[27] The *Amidah* is also prefaced with David's words, from Ps. 51:19, acknowledging God's supremacy over humanity: *Adonai sefatai tiftach u'fi yagid tehilateha.*

[28] Idelsohn, op.cit., p. 111.

[29] Elbogen, op.cit., pp. 67-68.

[30] Ex. 32:19.

a Monday; this happened to fall on the tenth of Tishri, the day the Thirteen Attributes are recited, which is at the heart of the fast day liturgy.[31]

Historical Influences

The evolution of *Tahanun* from the context of *Seder Rav Amram* to that of *Machzor Vitry* reflects the very different circumstances of the Jewish worshipper. Even taking into account the fact that *Amram* is essentially a responsum, which reflects the learned opinion of Rav Amram Gaon, his understanding of the purpose of this rubric is nevertheless indicative of the perspective of his academy. Amram's responsum was written within the context of the ninth century Muslim world, where the Jews lived relatively undisturbed, despite a high level of taxation as a protected religious minority. Civil restrictions and degradations were not the norm for most Jews, most of the time, and the academies of Babylonia, at Sura, Nahardea, and Pumbedita developed into renowned centers of Jewish learning and authority.[32] Rav Amram did not intend that his work be used as an authoritative prayer text, and it was not received as such, in part because written texts were not in common use at that time and in part because neither he nor his questioner assumed that local custom could, should, or would be supplanted by this responsum. The request to Amram reflected the concern of a distant community in Spain to maintain its ties with the established communities in the east, from one end of the Moslem world to the other.

Machzor Vitry, on the other hand, while also written to provide *halakhic* commentary and guidance, was written in the community in which it was to be used. That community was increasingly beleaguered by its Christian neighbors, who bore great animosity toward the Jews. They were in constant danger, continually negotiating with the Christian authorities for protection and privileges. Two hundred years after Amram, maintaining Jewish life in France was becoming an act of bravery, soon to include martyrdom. The

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[31] Elbogen, op.cit., p. 68-69.
[32] Ben Sasson, op.cit., p. 404-406.

French Jews did not so much expect the massacres that were shortly to occur, but they lived among people who were increasingly intolerant of Jews and Judaism and who were increasingly more willing and likely to act out their hatred. By the time and place of *Vitry*, there have been the massacres of the first crusade in Europe, as well as the decline of Babylonia.

The sufferings that the Jews endured during the Middle Ages provided the most significant influence on *Tahanun*, and the service has changed little since then. With God as the ultimate judge, God must be responsible for both punishment and the alleviation of suffering, and only God can change the way of the world and redeem the Jewish people. Thus the supplications took on greater meaning and purpose, enabling the individual to pour out his heart to God personally, and to express his pain, acknowledge his guilt, and plead for God's mercy; he could also plead for personal and communal forgiveness and for redemption.

The experiences of Jewish suffering over the centuries reinforced the posture of asking God for mercy despite our guilt, focusing on ourselves rather than on our oppressors. Suffering was, in the powerless, medieval Jewish mind, the result of sinful behavior, either on a personal or communal scale. For example, an account of the massacre and suicides of the Jews of Meyence, which occurred in May of 1096, includes this statement: "They fought each other up to the very gate, but the sins of the Jews brought it about that the enemy overcame them and took the gate. The hand of the Lord was heavy against His people."[33] The report of the massacre from which this statement is taken acknowledges that the Jews were weakened from fasting, and vastly outnumbered, yet there is still an attribution of the catastrophe to the sins of the Jews themselves.

Custom and Usage

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[33] Marcus, J., ed. The Jew in the Medieval World. Cincinnati, Hebrew Union College Press, 1990, p. 116.

Tahanun carries with it a specific physical posture of supplication. The prayers of supplication were originally said while prostrated on the ground, since Moses, Aaron, and Joshua fell on their faces when they prayed to God at moments of urgent need.[34] According to the Mishnah, in the days of the Temple, the worshippers would prostrate themselves after the daily sacrifice had been completed (*Tam.* 7:3).[35] However, because of the association of full prostration with pagan worship, as Idelsohn notes, this posture did not survive as a literal instruction.[36] The standard position for prayer during *Tahanun* is to prostrate oneself only partially, leaning with one's head down, supported by one arm. The self-effacement and image of weeping implied by sitting in this way emphasizes that it is a different posture than what is assumed for other forms of prayer, i.e., sitting during the recitation of the *Shema*, and standing during the *Amidah*. Having sat, and then stood, what other physical form of prayer is left for supplication?[37]

The Talmud uses the term, "falling on one's face," to describe *Tahanun.*[38] Ben Sira[39] describes this posture as one of reverence. It seems, however, that the practice of falling to the ground, fully and literally, was abandoned in the time of the Geonim. Saadia described the posture for supplications as putting one knee on the ground, so as to be half kneeling and half sitting.[40]

The *Tahanun* service in *Seder Rav Amram* begins immediately following the *Amidah* with the instruction that "the congregation fall on their faces and pray for mercy, every one asking his own petition."[41] That this is a time for personal prayer is evident in that the *shaliach tsibbur*, the prayer leader, sits down at this point.[42] According to Hedegard, in

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[34] Num. 16:22, Deut. 9:18, Josh. 7:6.
[35] Elbogen, op.cit., p. 66.
[36] Idelsohn, op.cit., p. 111.
[37] Donin, H. To Pray as a Jew. New York, Basic Books, 1980, p. 205.
[38] b. *Meg.* 22b.
[39] 50:16-21.
[40] Elbogen, op.cit., p. 24.
[41] Hedegard, op.cit., p. 53.
[42] Elbogen, op.cit., p. 67.

his critical notes to *Amram*, this instruction to fall on one's face tells us several things about *Tahanun*. First, prostration is a posture of prayer that dates back to Temple times. It is a physical attitude that breaks the order of communal prayer, emphasizing the insertion of personal, private petitions into public worship by dividing public space into private space. Prostration also evokes the confession of sin on *Yom Kippur*: "They do not utter any word after 'True and firm' but they say words [petitions] after the *Tefila*, even the confession of sin on the Day of Atonement."[43] Thus, the mood of sinfulness and the appropriateness of confession have had a recognized place in Jewish liturgy from the earliest times, even though there was no set text for these prayers.

Such intense self-abasement, however, is very difficult to maintain on a daily basis. One is required to reflect on painful emotions, to identify both personally and on behalf of the Jewish people with shame and guilt, to take responsibility for the hardships of centuries. This difficulty may be exacerbated by the fact that *Tahanun* is encountered in a place in the service where the worshipper comes to find respite from the trials of his life. The liturgical response was to find exceptions to the order of the service, occasions when *Tahanun* would not be said. Saadia mentions exceptions for Shabbat, Rosh Hodesh, Chanukah, and a festival.[44] These times are also identified in the *Shulhan Arukh*:[45]

- *Shabbat* and the festivals;
- *Rosh Hodesh*;
- the presence of a bridegroom from the day of his wedding through the seven-day period of celebrations;
- the day of a *brit milah* in the synagogue or the presence in the synagogue of a person who is participating in a *brit milah* that day;
- the entire month of Nisan;

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[43] Hedegard, op.cit., p. 127.

[44] Davidson, I., Assaf, S., and Joel, B., eds. Siddur R. Saadja Gaon. Jerusalem, Mekize Nrdamim, 1941, p. 24.

[45] *O.H.* 131:4

- at *mincha* on days preceding days when *Tahanun* is not said;
- as a separate rubric in the morning service on the day before Rosh Hashanah (*Tahanun* is included in the *selichot* on the day before Rosh Hashanah);
- *Tisha B'Av*;
- between *Yom Kippur* and *Sukkot*;
- *Purim*, *Chanukah*, and *Tu B'Shevat*; *Lag B'Omer*;
- in a house of mourning during the period of *shivah*.

In other words, the sentiments of *Tahanun* are superseded by times of celebrations of life, and in the presence of celebrants, whose joy would be diminished by the mood of *Tahanun*, and by times of mourning which do not need additional lamentations to mark their observance.

The deepest, fullest, most anguished form of *Tahanun* is therefore said twice a week at most, and the shorter form (Psalm 6 or 25, the hymn, *"Shomer Yisrael,"* with introductory and closing verses from scripture) is said by itself at most four days a week. Thus while the principles, intents, and liturgical rules and order of *Tahanun* were set, ways were found to ameliorate the emotional and psychological burdens of actually praying *Tahanun* every day.

In addition to these specific exceptions, two forms of *Tahanun* developed, a short form and a long form. The longer form, which is an expansion of the short form, is said on Mondays and Thursdays, days when the Torah is read. These days were also court and market days in ancient times, and so were considered to be appropriate for adding additional supplications, since worshippers are already approaching God for judgment and mercy.

Another explanation for the long *Tahanun* on Mondays and Thursdays is as follows:

Since then these two days have always been considered days of benevolence, *y'mei ratson.*[46] On the other hand, they are *y'mei hadin*, days of judgment, the days on which, according to the decree of Ezra, the law courts were in session. At that time man's transgressions would be remembered before the heavenly throne.[47] This dualism in the nature of these two days expresses the idea that it is just the severity of judgment which ultimately offers salvation, i.e., if a man is able to pass through it cleansed and purified. Each Monday and Thursday, therefore, calls the Jewish people to renewed *teshuvah*. Hence these days were designated as days for the public reading of Torah, and special *tahanunim* were included in the service.[48]

Here we may also note the connection between heaven and earth, as market days are also court days, according to the "decree of Ezra." A person's outward behavior could be brought before the earthly judges on the same day that God in God's heavenly dwelling place was sitting in judgment. Heaven and earth are seen as being interconnected, almost mirror images of each other, with the implication that what happens in either one can affect the other. While Munk notes that the benefit of passing through such dual judgment, as it were, is commensurate with its challenge, it is indeed an anxious time. The reading of Torah and additional supplications seem intended to ensure God's greater accessibility to pleas for forgiveness and mercy. To have this occur twice a week indicates both the importance of *teshuvah* and the need for God's continuing grace in hearing prayer and being merciful.

The Voice of Supplication

The petitioning voice in *Amram* acknowledges his essential unworthiness as a person, yet moves rather quickly to address God and request God's care and guidance. The worshipper acknowledges that humans are vain and empty in comparison to God, yet they know enough to know that if there were a high priest and an altar, they should be offering sacrifices and prayers at the Temple. This prayer recalls that of R. Sheshet,[49] in which he prays that his fasting may serve as his offering in the absence of the Temple.[50] Without

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[46] b. *B.K.* 82a.
[47] b. *Shabbat* 129a.
[48] Munk, E. The World of Prayer. New York, Philip Feldheim, 1963, p. 165.
[49] b. *Ber.* 17a.
[50] Freehof, S. The Small Sanctuary. Cincinnati, UAHC Press, 1942, p. 347.

these means of approach to God, the offerings of their prayers are as much as they can do. Human weakness is due to the presence of the evil inclination, the "yeast in the dough," which causes a person to "stumble." Yet it can be subdued, with God's help. The inspiration that God can give to study Torah is a source of strength, and the daily gift of God's grace is a source of joy. God's grace is unmerited, and it is a precious gift to one who cannot deserve it, because he is only human. To be only human is not an excuse, but a perspective on the difference between God and humanity. It does not necessarily imply distance, for the form of address here assumes that God knows all these truths. Finally, the worshipper asks for God's speedy forgiveness and continuing care, for all of God's people. The address is both personal and direct, and the appeal to God is a matter of daily devotion. The voice of petition here is much closer to the petitions of the Rabbis which are preserved in the Talmud:

Master of all worlds and Lord of all lords, God, great, mighty, and fearful, have mercy upon us for we are thy servants, the work of thy hands, flesh, dust, and worms we are. What are we? What is our life? What is our piety? What is our righteousness? What shall we say before thee, Adonai, our God and God of our fathers? Are not all mighty men as nought before thee, the men of renown as though they had not been, and the wise as without knowledge, and the men of understanding as without discernment. For all our works are void and emptiness, and the days of our life are vanity before thee. What can we say before thee, Adonai, our God, for we have sinned and transgressed and we have no strength to do our duties, and we have no high priest to atone for our sins, and no altar wherein to offer sacrifice, and no Holy of Holies wherein to pray but may it be thy will that our prayer which we pray be acceptable, and let it be reckoned before thee as bullocks and sheep, as if we sacrificed them on the altar, and pardon us.

Master of all worlds, it is revealed and known to thee that it is my will to do thy will but the yeast which is in the dough prevents it. May it be thy will, Adonai our God, to destroy and humble and keep distant from me the evil inclination, to humble it and subdue it and keep it far from my two hundred and forty-eight limbs, and do not cause me to stumble from thy good ways, but put in my heart the good inclination, and [give me] a good companion, to keep thy commandments and to serve thee and to do thy will with all my heart.

Master of all worlds, may it be thy will that thy Torah be my occupation and my work for every day and that I may not err in it, and cause me not to need a gift of mortal man, for their gift is small but the shame they bring us is great. Satisfy us in the morning with

thy grace that we may rejoice and be glad all our days, and show us thy mercy, Adonai, and give us salvation.

Master of all worlds and Lord of lords, help me, support me, aid me, strengthen me by providing for me and by providing for those in my house. Let me not be put to shame or disgrace before thee and before mortal men. Adonai hear, Adonai forgive, Adonai, listen and tarry not, for thy sake, my God, for thy name is called upon thy city and upon thy people.[51]

The voice of prayer in the *Tahanun* in *Vitry* is far more abject in its supplications (and includes more of them), and the context is more communal; the petitions are almost entirely for forgiveness and salvation, rather than for guidance in ordinary, daily life which is characteristic of *Amram*. *Vitry* reflects the internalization by the suffering Jews of their oppression , and their powerlessness to alleviate their travails. *Vehu rahum*, translated above, p. 40, speaks of God's anger and asks for God's mercy in redeeming the Jewish people from the nations. Sin and exile are linked, and the worshipper here is asking for God to break that connection and gather in the exiles in spite of their sins. The abject posture of this prayer and its repeated references to sin and suffering elevate this prayer from the realm of petition into supplication.

It is important to keep in mind that these works which are considered to be early forms of the order of Jewish prayer, and are generally regarded as prayer books, that is, as active, usable *siddurim*, had another purpose. This was to document and communicate the principles and *halacha* of worship. The texts of the prayers served as examples and illustrations, but the state of Jewish liturgy was fluid enough that the prayers, aside from statutory rubrics, were continually adapted, both in form and in content, while adhering to the *halachic* principles. *Tahanun* can be seen to be very different in these works, yet the principle is clear: that we turn from public worship in the synagogue to private prayer, in order to ask God to address our most immediate needs, doing so by acknowledging our inherent imperfection and humble status as we plead for God's mercy and salvation. The extent to which we go into the depths of personal unworthiness and guilt, even shame,

[51] Hedegard, op.cit., pp. 127-128.

may be very different, but these feelings are addressed in both liturgies. The differences are in degree, and in the focus on the immediate need, but there is no question that the need exists. Both liturgies appeal to God for mercy and compassion, and both assume implicitly that God will listen and hear these prayers.

Modernity

At the time of the emancipations of Jews in the countries of western Europe, at the end of the eighteenth century and into the nineteenth, Jews were either anticipating or experiencing a lessening of animosity and restriction by the governments of the countries in which they lived. As opportunities and conditions improved, and as access and communication between Jews and Christians increased, there was great concern that many Jews would become estranged from Judaism in this more open society, the experiences of which were nowhere reflected in Jewish worship.[52] Liturgy which reflected the victimization of Jews by gentile persecutors seemed inappropriate to many, out of place and out of step. Changes were needed in order for Jewish worship to conform to the contemporary norms of the new culture. This meant a more uniform and dignified service, and "reformulation of the prayers" to emphasize that "philosophical rationalism and ethical duties were the heart of religion."[53]

The reformers in Berlin articulated what they had in mind in 1844:

Our inner faith, the religion of our hearts, is no longer in harmony with the external forms of Judaism. We want a positive religion; we want Judaism. We hold fast to the spirit of the Holy Writ, which we acknowledge as a witness of divine revelation. We hold fast to everything by which God is truly honored in ways rooted in the spirit of our religion. We hold fast to the conviction that Judaism's teaching of God is eternally true; we hold fast to the promise that this teaching will someday become the possession of all mankind. But we want to understand the Sacred Scriptures according to the divine spirit, not according to the letter. We can no longer pray honestly for a Messianic kingdom on earth which shall bring us back to the homeland of our forefathers, pretending that we would return to it from a strange land - the very fatherland to which we are tied with all

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[52] Seltzer, R. Jewish People, Jewish Thought. Upper Sadddle River, NJ, Prentice Hall, 1980, p. 580.
[53] ibid, p. 582.

bonds of love! We can no longer recognize a code as an unchangeable law-book which maintains with unbending insistence that Judaism's task is expressed by forms which originated in a time which is forever past and which will never return. We who are deeply committed to the sacred content of our religion cannot hope to sustain it in its inherited form, and even less can we hope to hand it on to our descendants. Thus, placed between the graves of our fathers and the cradles of our children, we are stirred by the trumpet sound of our time. It calls us to be the last of a great inheritance in its old form, and at the same time, the first who, with unswerving courage and bound together as brothers in word and deed, shall lay the cornerstone of a new edifice for us and for the generations to come.[54]

Those who have attempted to reform Jewish liturgy over the last two centuries have articulated a number of common goals, ideas, and themes. If *Tahanun* may be said to express the spiritual needs and mindset of the medieval Jew, then modern liturgy must also reflect the spiritual needs and mindset of the modern Jew, accommodating the profound social, economic, and political changes wrought by the emancipation of Jews in Europe. Those goals, ideas, and themes were intended to address such newly defined liturgical issues as aesthetics and nationalism, neither of which had been perceived in this context before. The rational, scientific perspective of the new, modern Jew required a worship service that was:

- calm and orderly;
- accessible to those whose education was now more likely to be secular;
- inclusive of those who were now more likely to be more educated in general, i.e., women and other non-Hebrew speakers (and less educated Jewishly);
- and focused on the underlying, universal concepts of Judaism rather than on the outward behavior that was deemed to be mere ritual.

There were parts of the service that were no longer pertinent to contemporary religious sensibilities, and aspects of worship that were no longer held to express the hopes of the modern, emancipated Jew.[55] If a person could not recite a prayer and be

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[54] Plaut, G., ed. The Rise of Reform Judaism. New York, World Union for Progressive Judaism, Ltd., 1963, p. 57.

[55] Petuchowski, Understanding Jewish Prayer, p. 39.

convinced of its historical, objective truth, and be in agreement with its beliefs as formulated, then one ought not to pray such a prayer.[56]

The traditional *Seder Tahanun* fit the reformers' criteria for excision from modern Jewish liturgy because it was individual and private, repetitive in structure, and reliant on outdated ideas of powerlessness before God and self-abasing expressions of sin and guilt, humiliation and shame. In addition, it was a later addition to the daily liturgy, and had originally been optional.[57] However, it should also be noted that since the practice of daily synagogue prayer was itself devalued, the reformers did not place a high priority on revising the weekday service. Further, the prayer book reforms undertaken by the Orthodox and Conservative movements during the twentieth century have also eliminated some of the redundant and obscure portions of classical liturgy.[58]

Mar bar Ravina's supplication, discussed above, appears in a slightly adapted form in its traditional place at the end of the *Amidah* in the Union Prayer Book[59] and in several of the services, both weekday and Shabbat, in Gates of Prayer, which was published in 1977. In addition, several of the "Meditations" which appear in English at the end of the *Amidah* include themes and ideas which are similar in content to Mar's prayer and to those of the Sages, as described above, albeit with a rational, humanistic tone.[60]

The prayer book of the Israel Movement for Progressive Judaism, *HaAvodah ShebaLev*, includes several of the Talmudic *tahanunim* after the *Amidah* in its services. They are identified as intended for individual use after the *Amidah*.[61] The inclusion of these early personal supplications after the *Amidah* in *HaAvodah ShebaLev* indicates that

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[56] Petuchowski, Theology and Poetry, p. 6.

[57] Milgrom, op.cit., p. 587.

[58] Reif, op.cit., pp. 317-18.

[59] Central Conference of American Rabbis, The Union Prayerbook for Jewish Worship, Part I. New York, CCAR, 1940, p. 326.

[60] Stern, C., op.cit.

[61] Mazor, Y., ed. *HaAvodah SheBaLev*. Jerusalem, *HaTenuah L'Yahadut Mitkademet B'Yisrael*, 5751.

there is a place for personal supplications in the liturgy of the modern, Progressive Israeli Jew.

The late Joseph Heinemann, in his essay, "Jewish Prayer in Our Days," noted that prayer is a sociological concern. He claimed that to pray as our grandparents did is a false nostalgia because we do not remember their prayers. Moreover, we live in a time where we are a generation "who knew not Joseph," and can no longer respond to the "suffocating accumulation" of prayers which seek God's help and understanding for a world which no longer exists. The problem is most serious in the daily morning liturgy. To illustrate his point, Heinemann cites *Rinat Yisrael*, which claimed to meet the needs of the first generation of worshippers in an independent State of Israel. Its failure to do so is most evident in *Vehu rahum* for Mondays and Thursdays, in which Heinemann sees the same, old image, so inappropriate for modern Israel, of degradation, "like an unclean woman. . . if this is the answer, then the battle is lost from the beginning."[62]

In contrast to Heinemann's criticism, Gabriel Cohn points out a number of ways in which the "service," in the sense of being a *seder tefilah*, has been adapted to contemporary sensibilities, even in Israel. There are many variations in how prayers are said and by whom and innovations in music. Moreover, the introduction of explanatory remarks into the service functions as a form of study, which has always been a part of Jewish worship services, but now has taken on a new and different aspect, suited to the needs and interests of the worshippers.[63]

Heinemann and Cohn have different views of Jewish prayer, and perhaps even different goals. Cohn's interest in how the prayer book is actually used does not really address Heinemann's concern with its content. Although the adherence to medieval experiences and values makes him feel "unclean," perhaps what is still needed is some kind of recognition of the experiences which have shaped us as a people. However, such

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[62] Cohn and Fisch, op.cit, p. 32.
[63] ibid, p. 41.

prayer texts are rare. One example comes from a *selicha* which recalls the murder of the six million in the Holocaust. It is in the form of a *gezerah*, a lament, similar to those written after the massacres in France and Germany at the time of the Crusades. Its tone is no less anguished than that of the medieval *selichot*. The power of such language, which seems so difficult for a modern mind to comprehend across the centuries, is fully felt when it is employed to describe an event of our own time. Although many Jews, today, do not feel degraded in regard to the Holocaust, we still struggle with how to express our pain (see Chapter Three, examples of *selichot*, for the full text).

The renewed interest in Jewish spirituality in recent years suggests that prayers of supplication may have renewed value for contemporary Jews. For example, in the third draft of the proposed "Ten Principles for Reform Judaism," to be presented for a vote by the Central Conference of American Rabbis, the first principle is that Reform Jews are "seekers after God," pledged "to create texts and worship environments that will enable us as individuals and communities to drink deeply from the Fountain from which our lives spring, and regularly to praise, thank, celebrate, petition, sing to, argue with and cry out to the *Ribono shel Olam*, the Great One who presides over all time and all space."[64] This "pledge" clearly suggests a willingness to admit to God that all is not well, all the time, and that prayer is an appropriate vehicle for the full range of our emotions and experiences.

The issue is also one of public versus private worship. The time set aside for personal prayer at the end of the *Amidah*, as noted by Elbogen, above, was intended to provide a balance of individual and communal needs within the service. Harlow thinks that many congregants in our day do not understand that they are free to add their own prayers, in "first person singular," at the end of the *Amidah*. Prayer books do not tell worshippers that this is a specific time in the service when they may pray on their own behalf.[65] While the American Reform Movement has always officially supported the idea of private prayer

[64] CCAR Bulletin, 9/98.
[65] Harlow, op.cit., p. 12.

in its platforms, the focus of its "liturgical energy," as it were, has been on public worship. Borowitz observes that "the insistence on an orderly service has nearly eliminated the active role of the individual worshipper. . .People are expected to be 'self-contained.'"[66] The formality of the service, with professional prayer leaders in control, has undermined the participation of the individual by supplanting his/her investment of thought and feeling.[67] As one congregant has noted, it is as if there is a fear of silence in the synagogue, regardless of how active that silence can be for those who are praying.[68]

The decorum of a modern liberal service respects the *kavvanah* that individual worshippers bring to it, but this personal intention is for the benefit of the group, rather than for the individual. In an age of individual achievement and self-fulfillment, this singular aspect of ourselves is subordinated in our congregational religious practice. As Borowitz describes it, the focus on oneself as a "pray-er" is not compatible with the synergy achieved through communal prayer. One aspect of the emphasis that the Reform Judaism places on the universalistic concepts within Judaism is that God is the God of all humanity, always, and the assumption follows that the habit of communal prayer is transferable from public space to private space.[69]

Praying as a congregation places us not only in the wider community of Jews in the world, as members of the Jewish people, but also places us within that membership in the context of history: "Through this great Jewish 'we' the individual 'I' has found an incomparable dignity and immeasurable worth. This is the boon which worship as a member of the Covenant people freely bestows." Yet Borowitz also acknowledges the loss of the opportunity to pray as an individual.[70] This overriding concern for dignity and decorum in the service has repressed emotional expression and discouraged spontaneity,

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[66] Borowitz, E. "The Individual and the Community in Jewish Prayer" in Hoffman, Gates of Understanding. op.cit., p. 57.

[67] ibid.

[68] Ms. R. Golmant; author's personal correspondence 1/4/99.

[69] Borowitz in Hoffman, op.cit., p. 61.

[70] Borowitz in Hoffman, op.cit., pp. 56-65.

so that people do not feel free to linger over their prayers.[71] Moreover, the de-emphasis in the Reform Movement of the daily worship service also mitigates against individual prayer, in favor of those services, i.e., Shabbat and festivals, where opportunities for personal supplications are limited.

The attitude of the traditional *Tachanun* prayers themselves also presents a barrier for the contemporary American Reform Jew, in which the worshipper's attitude is that of self-abasement, guilt, and sinfulness, accepting responsibility for all the suffering which has befallen not only him/herself, but the entire Jewish people. The level of emotional expression, which was appropriate for earlier times, now seems melodramatic and overdone to our calmer, rational ears. Modern Reform Jews no longer identify with the mood of suffering portrayed in the traditional *Tachanun* nor, with the establishment of the State of Israel, does living outside of Israel carry the same connotations of exile as before. Although not writing from a liberal perspective, Haim Halevy Donin justifies continuing to say *Tahanun* today based on the enduring concept of Jewish peoplehood, on behalf of those Jews who are still oppressed, and for whom the petitions for redemption are still valid. In emphasizing our kinship with all Jews, and focusing on those aspects of *Tachanun* that are prayers for God's compassion, Donin places personal supplications in a collective context, not entirely incompatible with a more progressive outlook.[72]

Two hundred years after prayer book reform began in Europe, the optimism of modernity is not always what it was expected to be, nor are our experiences as modern people and modern Jews always as enlightened, successful, or fulfilling as we would like. Perhaps setting aside a few moments in the service, as our Sages did, in the synagogue, where we believe we have the support of our community, for people to express their private concerns and doubts to God might still be a good thing. As Harlow has said, the opportunity has always been there, but our awareness of it has been lost in recent times.

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[71] Borowitz, The Mask Jews Wear, p. 177.
[72] Donin, op.cit., p. 207.

We tend not to believe that God's rewards and punishments are tied so directly to our own individual transgressions, nor that the anguished and continual confessions of our sins will help to bring about redemption. Rather, redemption is dependent, at least in addition to if not instead of personal repentance and atonement, on intentional action in the world. This is a wholly modern concept, a basic attitude of modernity - the ability to control and influence one's environment and circumstances for the better. This is a perspective that questions the need for supplications in principle; if we can improve our lives by ourselves, for what can and should we petition God?

Deuteronomy 8, a text which is also seen as the basis for *birkat hamazon*, points out that it is hard to be thankful and humble when the land is fat and times are good. It reminds us to do exactly that, to thank God, humbly, especially when we are satisfied materially. In an analysis of Psalm 23, Harold Kushner points out that when things are good, when we are in "green pastures," God is addressed in the third person; i.e., God is abstract. But when we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, God becomes real, God becomes "Thou."[73] For some, it is not until they are truly, deeply frightened that people will call upon God. Moreover, God is not rational on a battlefield or in an operating room or at a funeral home.[74] Yet, it is also true that it can be very hard to admit such fear, to allow that it can exist even in times of plenty. As Reuven Hammer notes, ". . . there is something to be said for reminding ourselves of the need for humility and the fact that while human beings may be the peak of creation, we were, as the Talmud says, created after the ant. . . considering the catastrophes human pride has caused. . . it may not be a bad idea for us to admit our shortcomings from time to time and even to bow our heads in shame."[75]

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[73] Kushner, H. Who Needs God. New York, Summit Books, 1989, p. 166.
[74] Rabbi Mark Goldman, personal conversation, 9/23/98.
[75] Hammer, op.cit., p. 201.

Today there is increasing recognition that the rationality and religious naturalism that inspired optimism and reform in Judaism (and other religions) over the past two centuries may not represent the entire spectrum of religious and spiritual needs in a postmodern world. Empathy does not equate to compassion, or to guilt in its proper place. To understand that one has sinned, and admit it, and take steps to correct oneself is not necessarily the same as understanding why one has transgressed and that one is responsible for one's transgressions. Explaining does not lead to action, and understanding is neither passionate nor compassionate.[76]

The classical *Tahanun* is associated today with outdated and inappropriate approaches to God for contemporary Jews. Yet, the idea of supplication, of intense personal prayer within a synagogal setting (especially as synagogues seek to provide more services - in several meanings of the word - and programs and expressions of Judaism) is not completely antagonistic to contemporary needs. As we talk more about God, and bring God into the realm of personal feeling, that is, a more immanent and less transcendent God, God is more approachable.

As Rabbi Sheldon Zimmerman put it in 1994, the ethos of modern culture does not support the traditional values of Judaism in providing connectedness and meaning in our lives, personally or communally. There is a need to experience Judaism on a deeper level, socially, intellectually, emotionally, spiritually. Zimmerman called upon rabbis to be leaders in a more traditional Jewish sense, finding in Jewish tradition and values opportunities for deeper, richer, more meaningful lives, both outwardly and inwardly.[77]

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[76] Rabbi Peter Knobel, telephone conversation, 1/12/99.

[77] Zimmerman, S. Presidential Address to the CCAR. 105th Annual Convention, Chicago, IL, May 30, 1994, p. 10-11.

CHAPTER THREE

SELICHOT

Selichot is the term for a form of penitential prayers as well as the term for the order of prayer for a service of repentance that is added to a daily worship service, on a public fast-day or in the days preceding and during the High Holy Days. *Selichot* were originally a form of *piyyutim*, which was the term, derived from Greek, for any and all sacred poetry. Eventually, *piyyutim* came to be recognized as primarily poems of praise and thanksgiving, and *selichot*, which include elegies, lamentations, confessions, petitions, and expressions of hope, became recognized as a genre in its own right.[1]

Selichot are requests for God's forgiveness. These poems were independent of the statutory prayers, but attached to them thematically. They express the ideas, separate but linked, that God can be addressed in petition and that God will respond: "Save, *Adonai*; O King, who answers when we call."[2] "When You hear the supplication (*techinato*) of Your servant and of Your people Israel when they pray towards this place, may You in Your heavenly abode hear, give heed and forgive (*v'salachta*)."[3] The term, *selicha*, as the name for this type of sacred address, can be traced to *Tana de bei Eliyahu Zuta*, 22-end, wherein David foresees the eventual destruction of the Temple and the sacrificial system. God consoles David by telling him that when Israel is in trouble, they can come before God, confess their sins and recite the order of *Selichot*, and God will answer them. "In

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[1] Elbogen, op.cit., 167, 177.
[2] Ps. 20:10.
[3] I Kings 8:30.

particular, the Thirteen Attributes revealed to Moses when he received the second set of tablets[4] are called *seder selicha*, the 'rite of forgiveness.'"[5]

Confession

The composition of *selichot*, both as prayer and as an order of liturgy, is rooted in the belief that God forgives transgression, but that God requires repentance before forgiveness can be bestowed, and that repentance itself requires admission of guilt and confession of sin. Confession itself did not enter the structure of formal worship until at least the Geonic period. Most sources date the first appearance of *Ashamnu* (the short confession) to *Seder Rav Amram* in the ninth century. However, Rav Amram was describing what was the accepted practice in his academy; formal, liturgical confession could well be earlier. Encyclopedia Judaica notes that *Al chet* (the long confession) is mentioned in the *she'iltot* of Achai Gaon in the eighth century.[6]

The Torah prescribed sin offerings and guilt offerings, in the form of sacrifices, in order to obtain God's forgiveness through acts of atonement performed by the priest.[7] The prophets Daniel, Nehemiah, and Joel, writing after the destruction of the First Temple, when the principle and practice of sacrifice in Jerusalem had been interrupted, offer prayer as an alternative means of asking for God's pardon. For example, Nehemiah confesses "the sins of the children of Israel which we have sinned against You. . . Remember, I pray Thee, the word which You commanded Your servant Moses, saying, If you transgress, I will scatter you among the nations, but if you turn to Me, . . . though

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[4] Ex. 34:6-7.
[5] Encyclopedia Judaica, op.cit., vol.14, c. 1133-34.
[6] Encyclopedia Judaica, op.cit., vol.2, c. 630.
[7] Lev. 5:17-26.

your outcasts be at the utmost parts of heaven, from there I will gather them. . . O God, I pray Thee, let now Your ear be attentive to the prayer of Your servant, and to the prayer of Your servants, . . . and grant him mercy. . ."[8] Daniel, too, turned to God, "to seek by prayer and supplications. . . I prayed to Adonai my God, and made my confession, and said, O God, great and awesome God, keeping the covenant in grace with those who love God and observe God's commandments, we have sinned and committed iniquity; we have done wickedly and rebelled; we have turned away from Your precepts and judgments. . . Now, therefore, O our God, hear the prayer of Your servant, and his supplications, and cause Your face to shine upon Your sanctuary that is desolate, for God's sake. O my God, incline Your ear and hear; open Your eyes and behold our desolations. . . for we do not present our supplications before You because of our righteousness, but because of Your great mercies. O God, hear, O God, forgive, O God, hearken and act.[9]

The connection between confession and repentance is made clear by the prophet Joel: "Even now, says God, turn to Me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, with mourning. Rend your heart, not your garments, and return to Adonai your God; for God is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, great in compassion, repenting evil."[10] That both are required for forgiveness is also articulated in Proverbs. "One who covers up his sins shall not prosper: but whoever confesses and forsakes them shall have mercy."[11]

The Torah teaches that humans are created in the image of God.[12] But humans have the ability to choose how to live, and the responsibility to do so. The Torah

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[8] Neh. 1:6-11.
[9] Dan. 9:4-5, 17-19.
[10] Joel 2:12-13.
[11] Prov. 28:13.
[12] Gen 1:27.

commands us to choose correctly,[13] but it is all too easy shirk this responsibility and to stray from what we have been taught. This is sin. The Bible uses three words to describe improper behavior. The first is *chet*, which literally means, "missing the mark." *Chet* refers to deviations from the path of Torah and *mitzvot*. Secondly, *avon* describes actions that pervert the laws of Torah. Finally, *pesha* refers to actions that defy God's will.[14] These terms would be amplified and their meanings shaded as the Rabbis studied and expounded upon them. It is important to note that these are words that refer to choice, attitude, and behavior, and not to any essential aspect of human nature. Change is thus possible, and within human capacity to effect; this is repentance and atonement.

The biblical precedents for prayer, including both confession and petition, provided the basis for the Rabbis to elaborate on human repentance and God's forgiveness. "When the wicked man turns away from his wickedness that he has done and does that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive. Because he considers, and turns away from all his transgressions that he has done, he shall surely live, and not die. . .Cast away from you all your transgressions, in which you have transgressed; and make for yourselves a new heart and a new spirit. . . for I have no pleasure in the death of the one who dies, says the Lord God; therefore turn, and live.[15]

Rabbis, commentators, and interpreters have explored not only the many meanings of what it is to sin, but the mechanisms and processes of repentance, of change, as well. When the Temple stood in Jerusalem, it was clear that sacrifice was required in order to obtain God's pardon, even if one confessed one's sins and repented. After the destruction

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[13] Deut. 11:27, 30:15-20.
[14] Kohler, K. Jewish Theology. New York, The Macmillan Co. 1918, p. 238.
[15] Ezek. 18:27-28, 31.

of the Temple, confession and repentance were still possible, but sacrifice was not. Therefore, the Rabbis had to determine what was necessary and what was sufficient in *teshuvah.* If one of the three previously necessary components had become impossible, the remaining two must compensate; both confession and repentance. "R. Adda b. Ahaba said: One who has sinned and confesses his sin but does not repent may be compared to a man holding a dead reptile in his hand, for although he may immerse himself in all the waters of the world his immersion is of no avail unto him; but if he throws it away from his hand then as soon as he immerses himself in forty se'ahs of water (the minimum requirement for ritual immersion), immediately his immersion becomes effective, as it is said, But whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall obtain mercy.[16] And it is further said, 'Let us lift up our heart with our hands unto God in the heavens.'[17]

"R. Isaac said: In the West [Palestine] they said in the name of Rabbah b. Mari: Come and see how different from the character of one of flesh and blood is the action of the Holy One, blessed be He. As to the character of one of flesh and blood, if one angers his fellow, it is doubtful whether he [the latter] will be pacified or not by him. And even if you would say, he can be pacified, it is doubtful whether he will be pacified by mere words. But with the Holy One, blessed be He, if a man commits a sin in secret, He is pacified by mere words, as it is said: Take with you words, and return unto the Lord. Still more: He even accounts it to him as a good deed, as it is said: And accept that which is good. Still more: Scripture accounts it to him as if he had offered up bullocks, as it is said: So will we render for bullocks the offerings of our lips.'[18],,[19]

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[16] Prov. 28:13.
[17] Lam. III, 41.
[18] Hos. 14:3.

The Rabbis deemed that confession without repentance was insufficient, and that repentance without confession was also insufficient, but that, taken together, they were accepted as if there had also been a sacrifice.

Pesikta de Rav Kahana (fifth century CE) comments on the verse, "The one who covers his transgressions will not prosper; but whoever confesses and forsakes them will receive mercy."[20] R. Sima and R. Levi compare this verse to the case of a bandit who is being questioned before a magistrate. As long as he is recalcitrant, he is beaten. But when he confesses, he is doomed. Not so the Holy One. As long as a sinner is recalcitrant, he is doomed. As soon as he confesses, he is pardoned.[21] Here it is clear that confession is a necessary condition for forgiveness.

The Talmud tells us that the simple statement, "Truly, we have sinned," is sufficient for confession.[22] Leviticus Rabbah 3:3 provides a statement of confession for *erev Yom Kippur*: "I confess all the evil that I have done before You: I stood in the way of evil; and as for all the evil I have done, I shall no more do the like; may it be Your will, O Lord my God, that You should pardon me for all my iniquities, and forgive me for all my transgressions, and grant me atonement for all my sins." This statement includes not only admission of sin, although the specific sins are explicitly spoken, as the Talmud says (see above), but also a statement of repentance, and a request for pardon. These are the major elements of the developing *selicha* literature.

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[19] b. *Taanit* 16a.
[20] Prov. 28:13.
[21] Mandelbaum, B., ed. Pesikta de Rav Kahana, Vol. II. New York, Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1987, *piska* 23.
[22] b. *Yoma*, 87b.

Sa'adia Gaon also addressed the issue of confession, in his *Emunot V'Dei'ot* ("Beliefs and Opinions"). In the fifth treatise, he says that repentance includes: the abandonment of the sin; remorse; petition for forgiveness, which includes confession; and giving assurances not to repeat the sin. Additionally, one may "eradicate the tendency" to sin again by writing "poems: - i.e., *selichot.*[23] Later medieval writers would also define many levels and aspects of repentance, but in terms of one's internal focus and attitude, towards the self, others, and God, and in terms of one's outward behavior. Confession is always included in these expositions.

In Bahya ibn Paquda's *Chovot Halevavot* ("Duties of the Heart"), written in eleventh century Muslim Spain, the seventh gate is that of repentance. Bahya defines four elements of true repentance: to feel remorse; to turn away from sin; to confess and ask forgiveness; and to pledge not to sin again.[24] Bahya notes that human beings are by nature imperfect and negligent in their duties towards God, and that most righteous people are penitents. He accepts that people must work at overcoming the inclination to sin, but credits the Sages for including prayers for repentance and forgiveness in liturgy, so that we can be responsible and try to change. Bahya's attitude is not judgmental; rather, he seeks to lay out the conditions for and components of repentance "by means of logic and Torah," and so to show how they may be incorporated into the pattern of human action and choice.[25]

For Bahya, the key to repentance, and therefore to forgiveness, is self-knowledge. A person must understand not only his or her behavior and its implications, but also the

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[23] *Emunot V'Dei'ot* V:2.
[24] Ibn Pakuda, B. Duties of the Heart. tr. Feldman, Northvale, NJ, Jason Aronson, 1996, pp. 322-323.
[25] ibid., p. 312.

motivations and attitudes behind it. Only then is true repentance possible. Such self-knowledge can be achieved because that, too, is part of the potential of human existence that comes from being created in God's image.

We come now to Maimonides, who codified *hilchot teshuvah*, the laws of repentance in the last chapter of *Sefer haMadda* ("The Book of Knowledge"). Maimonides was influenced by the logical and systematic thinking of both Sa'adia and Bahya, both of whom sought to understand both the internal and external aspects of repentance and forgiveness and to articulate the necessary and sufficient conditions for them. Maimonides distinguished between confession as described in the Talmud, *kaparat devarim*, and oral confession as he defines and describes it, *vidui devarim*. According to Maimonides, the talmudic term suggests that confession equals total repentance, since *kapara* means "atonement" or "ransom," where, in truth, it is only one component of *teshuvah*.

Hilchot Teshuvah

Maimonides says that the "essence of confession" is contained in the statement: "I beseech Thee, O Lord, I have sinned, I have acted perversely; I have transgressed before Thee, and have done thus and thus, and lo, I repent and am ashamed of my deed, and I will never do this again."[26] Maimonides bases his teaching on Numbers 5:6-7: "they shall confess their sins," which he interprets to be a positive precept. Moreover, confession and repentance are required in order to obtain God's pardon, apart from any physical punishment or material restitution resulting from the transgression. He also cites the

[26] *Hilchot Teshuvah*, 1:2. Hyamson, M., ed. *Mishneh Torah*: The Book of Knowledge. Jerusalem, Boys Town Jerusalem Publishers, 1965.

Talmud, B. Yoma 66a, which tells that, without the Temple in Jerusalem, and therefore without the possibility of sacrifices, there can only be repentance as a means of true atonement.[27]

Repentance is the abandonment of the sin, removing it from the heart as well as from one's thoughts. "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the man of iniquity his thoughts."[28] Perfect repentance is when a transgressor has the opportunity to commit the sin again, but refrains from doing so out of penitence, not out of fear. One must admit to the specific sin of which he wishes to repent. It is both preferable and praiseworthy to confess sins against one's fellows in public, and most efficacious to do so during the Days of Awe, because all of the activities of the penitential season lead up to Yom Kippur.[29]

However, as God is the Judge of true repentance, only God can weigh a person's merits and deficiencies and determine whether forgiveness is warranted. Maimonides tells us that anyone who tries to estimate the value of fulfilling *mitzvot* will forfeit the credit for having done them.[30] God, Who knows everything, does not decree whether a person will be good or not. For if God had decreed whether a person's life was good or bad, how then would God say, through the prophets, that we should behave a certain way, change our behavior, resist evil, etc.? "What room would there be for the whole of the Torah? By what right or justice could God punish the wicked or reward the righteous?" It is not appropriate to wonder how God can know everything and yet human beings can have free will, because it is God's will that we have choice and discretion, without being compelled

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[27] ibid, 1:8.
[28] Is. 55:7.
[29] *Hilchot Teshuvah*, Ch. 2.
[30] *Hilchot Teshuvah*, Ch.3.

by God.[31] This is demonstrated by the content of *selicha* prayers, which portray an awareness of what is sinful and what is wrong.

When *Selichot* are Said

In the Ashkenazic tradition, *selichot* are said for at least four days before Rosh Hashanah. This is based on the principal that an animal intended for sacrifice is examined for four days before it is offered, to ensure that it is without flaws; we should examine ourselves no less thoroughly before we offer our repentant hearts to God on Rosh Hashanah. These four days may not be interrupted by Shabbat, so that if Rosh Hashanah falls on a Monday or a Tuesday, *selichot* are said beginning at midnight on the previous *motzei shabbat.*[32] (This means that Shabbat would come between the four days of saying *selichot* and Rosh Hashanah; however, with the minimum requirement those four days completed, one can begin Rosh Hashanah in attitude of joy that lingers after Shabbat.[33])

In the Sephardic tradition, *selichot* are said for the entire month of Elul, through Yom Kippur. This time period corresponds to the second period of forty days which Moses spent on Mount Sinai after the episode of the Golden Calf. During that time, the Israelites strove to be worthy of receiving the tablets again; we, too, should strive to be worthy of them, spending the same time in preparation, by confessing transgressions and asking for God's pardon, to be worthy again, ourselves.

The Thirteen Attributes of Mercy

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[31] *Hilchot Teshuvah,* Ch.5.
[32] *Ba'er Heitiv*, 5.
[33] Scherman, N., ed. The Complete Artscroll *Selichos, Minhag Lita*. Brooklyn, Mesorah Publications. Ltd., 1992, p. xxi.

The episode of the Golden Calf is central to the concept and service of *selichot* because of the interaction of Moses and God at that time. Moses asked God to give him knowledge of God's ways, to help him lead the people, and God responded by proclaiming the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy.[34] Moses then prayed to God for forgiveness - *v'salachta* - and for God to return Israel to their role as God's inheritance.[35]

Rabbi Yochanan taught[36] that at that time, God not only taught, but demonstrated, how to pray for forgiveness: God appeared to Moses, wrapped in a tallit, and gave Moses the order of the *Selichot* service. This talmudic passage indicates the early dating of the liturgical use of *selichot.* According to the Maharal, Rabbi Yochanan could infer this directly from the text, as Moses said to God, "Show me Your glory."[37] Since prayer is the enduring way of elevating Israel to approach God, God must have appeared to Moses in such a posture.[38] "It is as if God had told Moses and the Children of Israel that [God] had given them a special service for repentance when they needed it most, when they had lost the greatest gift God had ever given man - the Torah - and longed to get it back. The destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem constituted loss of such magnitude that the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy should be called upon again, to invoke God's compassion and pardon. Repentance and Torah went hand in hand, then and now, for the Sages teach that Yom Kippur is a festival, because it is the day that God gave the Torah to Israel for a second time.[39] This is why Yom Kippur is called the "white fast," as opposed to Tisha

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[34] Ex. 34:6-7.
[35] Ex. 34:9.
[36] b. *RH* 17b.
[37] Ex. 33:18.
[38] Scherman, op.cit., pp. xxiii-xxiv.
[39] b. *Ta'anit* 30b.

B'Av, which is called the "black fast;" Yom Kippur is a day of confidence in God's forgiveness, rather than a day of mourning, as on Tisha B'Av.

The message of the Thirteen Attributes, as part of the order of *Selichot*, is that "God rewards even our remotest descendants for our good deeds by forgiving them their sins, and [God] rewards us for the good deeds of our remotest ancestors, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, by forgiving us our sins.[40] The Thirteen Attributes can thus function in a way similar to that of *zechut avot*, the invocation of the merit of the Patriarchs, which Abraham demanded from God after the near-sacrifice of Isaac. Indeed, the *Akedah* is an important theme in *selicha* literature. Particularly in the pogroms of the First Crusade, and in the expulsions that occurred throughout Europe in the Middle Ages, the specter of self-sacrifice and martyrdom inspired a proliferation of *selichot*. In memoirs of that period, the image of Isaac bound on the altar is often invoked, citing *midrashim* in which Abraham had actually slaughtered his son, and was only prevented from a second cutting by a second call from the angel:

> Bind for me my hands and my feet
> Lest I be found wanting and profane the sacrifice.
> I am afraid of panic, I am concerned to honor you,
> My will is to honor you greatly.
>
> When the one whose life was bound up in the lad's
> Heard this, he bound him hand and foot like the perpetual offering.
> In their right order he prepared fire and wood,
> And offered upon them the burnt offering.
>
> Then did the father and son embrace,
> Mercy and Truth met and kissed each other.
> Oh, my father, fill your mouth with praise,
> For He doth bless the sacrifice. . .

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[40] Rosenberg, A. Jewish Liturgy as a Spiritual System. Northvale, NJ, Jason Aronson. Inc., 1997, p. 105.

Down upon him fell the resurrecting dew, and he revived.
(The father) seized him (then) to slaughter him once more.
Scripture, bear witness! Well grounded is the fact:
And the Lord called Abraham, even a second time from Heaven. . .

So he offered the ram, as he desired to do,
Rather than his son, as a burnt offering.
Rejoicing, he beheld the ransom of his only one
Which God delivered into his hand. . .

Thus prayed the binder and the bound,
That when their descendants commit a wrong
This act be recalled to save them from disaster,
From all their transgressions and sins."[41]

These writings found in the near-sacrifice of Isaac a vivid metaphor for the deaths, by murder, suicide, and torture, of so many Jews. The violence and murder perpetrated by the Crusaders are expressed in *selichot* and *kinot* of that time. The theme of the *Akedah* as a foreshadowing of Jesus is also answered by such writings, in terms of Jewish resistance to conversion, even to the point of self-sacrifice.[42] That Abraham and Isaac were both ready and willing to make this sacrifice to God, to obey God's ultimate command to them, is echoed in so many *selichot* that it became a distinct type of *selicha*.

The Efficacy of Prayer

The episode of the Golden Calf also set an important precedent for the efficacy of prayer without an accompanying sacrifice, since Moses offered only the words of his mouth, and his prayer was accepted. Idelsohn notes that Moses' prayers are always cited as standing on their own, i.e., without sacrifices, as are those of the great prophets and

[41] R. Ephraim of Bonn, "The *Akedah*," tr, S. Spiegel, in Spiegel, S. The Last Trial. Woodstock, VT, Jewish Lights Publishing, 1993, pp. 147-151.
[42] Spiegel, op.cit., p. 128-135. Chapter 10 discusses this idea particularly.

psalmists, even though the idea that prayer, and prayer alone, is "the true and only worthy sacrifice to God" did not enter Jewish worship until the Hellenistic period.[43]

The *selichot* service always includes expressions of hope and even confidence that God will hear these prayers and grant forgiveness. The practice of saying *selichot* originated as a response to drought, with the assumption that the lack of rain was caused by the sins of the people. "It shall come to pass, if you hearken diligently to my commandments, which I command you this day, to love the Lord your God, and serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul, that I will give you the rain of your land in its due season, the early rain and the late rain, that you may gather in your corn, and your wine, and your oil."[44] *Selichot* accompanied the public fasts that the Rabbis declared in times of drought, as described in the Mishnah, Tractate *Ta'anit*, Chapter 2. *Selichot* prayers are also associated with Rosh Hashanah because of the imminence of the onset of the rainy season, which begins at the time of the High Holy Days, or soon thereafter. In later times, the link between transgression and natural disaster made it possible and appropriate to expand the scope of the *Selichot* liturgy to include other hardships and oppression as a consequence of sin, and to contrast the favored times of the past with current travails.[45]

In fact, Elbogen holds that a history of the persecutions of the Jewish people could be constructed from the stories told in the *selichot* that were written to commemorate

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[43] Idelsohn, op.cit., p. 6.
[44] Deut. 11:13-14.
[45] Rosenberg, op.cit., p. 104.

such events, so powerful a tool was it to tell of tragic events and how people reacted to them, what they did to survive, and to survive as Jews.[46]

Seder Selichot

The major rubrics of Jewish liturgy were in place by the time of the redaction of the Babylonian Talmud. The structure and format of prayers having been generally accepted by that time, the "free creation" of additional prayers and benedictions continued.[47] Although specific components of Jewish worship can be traced back in time and through the customs and prayer rituals of various communities, there was a complex interplay between the development of statutory prayers, their exact content, and the development of forms of poetry to supplement and complement them. The fluidity of the evolution of liturgical literature persisted through the period of the geonim, when examples of orders of worship began to be circulated more widely among communities, as in the case of *Seder Rav Amram*, in the ninth century, down to the availability of printed texts after the fifteenth century.

The first mention of a distinct order for a *Selichot* service is given in *Tanna de-vei Eliahu Zuta*, which Encyclopedia Judaica[48] dates having been written before the ninth century of the common era. King David is depicted as being distraught over the vision he has seen of the eventual destruction of both the Temple in Jerusalem and the whole sacrificial system. God consoles David by telling him that Israel will be able to come before God, confess their sins, and recite the order of *selichot*, and God will forgive them (23-end). Since this episode predates the Temple in Jerusalem, and indeed all formal

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[46] Elbogen, op.cit., p. 180.
[47] Idelsohn, op.cit., p. 31.
[48] Encyclopedia Judaica, op.cit., vol. 14, c. 1134.

sacrifices (God responded to Moses, even though Moses never offered a sacrifice with his prayers), the independence of prayer and repentance, on the one hand, from sacrifice, on the other, is clear. "By falling and rising, our ancestors in the wilderness taught us that hope is never lost, even when the protection of God's mercy is absent. God is merciful when we fall short of [God's] expectations, but only if we emulate [God] by being merciful to those who fall short of our expectations of them."[49]

The recitation of *selichot* is a form of *tzidduk ha-Din*, a justification of God and God's judgment of human actions. Since God is just, evil is a consequence of human error and failure; the consequences of evil can be averted through confession and prayer.[50] This is in line with the message of Deuteronomy, as interpreted by the Rabbis of the Mishnah.

This order of *selichot* appears for the first time (insofar as documents have survived) in *Seder Rav Amram*, in the ninth century, which includes the core structure of the liturgy, which common to all *Selichot* services ever since. The *Selichot* service follows that same general format as that for the daily *shacharit* service, as follows:

Shacharit	*Selichot*
Pesukei d'zimra (including *Ashrei*)	*Ashrei*
Reader's *Kaddish*	Reader's *Kaddish*
Shema and its blessings	*Selichot*
Shemonah Esrei	Thirteen Attributes
Vidui	*Vidui*
Tahanun	*Tahanun*

[49] Scherman, op.cit., p. xviii.
[50] Encyclopedia Judaica, op.cit., vol. 14, c. 1134.

Kaddish Shalem *Kaddish Shalem*

Just as in the morning service, *Selichot* begins with *Ashrei* and Psalm 145, in order to praise God. Having recited verses from the Bible, the reader then recites the Reader's *Kaddish*. The first *selicha* is preceded by a selection of Biblical verses, mostly from Psalms, but recast into the first person plural. In acknowledging God's sovereignty over the whole world and God's ability to bring about salvation, the change of person echoes the talmudic dictum, "*Kulan arevim zeh bazeh*," all are held responsible for one another."[51]

The first *selicha* is usually an acrostic, the focus of which is the admission of sin, taking responsibility for faults and failings, as well as for the troubles that have befallen the Jewish people. The middle verses disparage the nations that have conquered the Jewish people. The poem finishes with an appeal to God for mercy.

As discussed above, the Thirteen Attributes are a central theme of the *Selichot* service, because they represent God's willingness to be called upon in a spirit of contrition and confession. The biblical verses which precede and follow the Thirteen Attributes appeal to God, based on God's previous (i.e., biblical) acts of kindness and mercy and ask that the divine anger towards the Jewish people be turned back. When examined in relation to a regular daily service, as seen above, the placement of the Thirteen Attributes, which parallels the *Shemoneh Esrei*, indicates its position as the central focus of the service. The Rabbis taught that the Thirteen Attributes could be recited as a plea for God's mercy, which is the goal of this service, and so they must be included in a place of

[51] b. *San.* 27b. The apparent disagreement of gender in this citation appears in the Hebrew text in the Soncino edition.

prominence. In addition, the Thirteen Attributes, which both praise God's qualities of compassion and imply petition for forgiveness, are therefore the equivalent of the praises and petitions of the *Shemoneh Esrei*. Finally, recognition and confession of sin, along with regret and repentance, must precede hope for forgiveness, so that the *selichot* themselves must be recited before the Thirteen Attributes.

In the Selichot service, there may be one or more iterations of a *selicha* followed by the Thirteen Attributes, bracketed by Biblical verses. For example, the Polish ritual, as published by Artscroll, had a total of four such iterations before moving into the concluding section, while the Ashkenazic ritual compiled in England by Rabbi Abraham Rosenfeld has three. The last *selicha* is a *pizmon*, with a refrain that is read responsively by the congregation. No individual *selicha* is repeated in any given service, nor across all the *selichot* services in a single penitential season. There is no rule regarding this practice, but the availability of so many prayers from which to choose has made this a standard practice. Indeed, there are no rules regarding what *selicha* to choose for any particular service or any point in a service, nor in what order to place them in the service, although some rites have standardized these choices in recent times.[52]

The concluding section of the service begins with pleas for God to remember God's people, and the covenant which God made with them and with their forefathers, and for God to hearken to their voices. This is followed by several paragraphs of confession, including the short confession, *Ashamnu*, and then by poems whose theme is

[52] Elbogen, op.cit., p. 182.

the God will answer the *selichot*, as God answered the patriarchs and prophets. Finally, the service concludes with *Tahanun*.

Selicha Literature

The genre takes its name from Psalm 130:4: *Ki imcha selicha* - "for forgiveness is with You." In Exodus 34:9, we find justification for such prayer: *V'salachta la'avoneinu* - "[may You] pardon our iniquity." The Exodus verse is a central text in the *Selichot* liturgy, because in it, Moses pleads for God's forgiveness of the Israelites, using words only, without an animal sacrifice, and his prayer is accepted. This image of Moses praying became the paradigm for the efficacy of prayer.

The themes of *selicha* literature are: confession, both personal and communal; pleas for forgiveness, also both personal and communal; relief from trouble and oppression; and faith in God who hears prayer and forgives consistently. They reflect the sense and ethos of human responsibility for events.

Selichot are characterized by their use of biblical imagery, language, and meter. There are a number of forms in which *selichot* are written, and the general structure of any given *Selichot* service includes several of them. *Selichot* prayers are characterized by both poetic form and content. For example, the *pizmon* is a *selicha* with a refrain. It usually appears at or near the end of the *Selicha* service, regardless if its content. Another form of *selicha* is the *chatanu*, which is characterized by the phrase, *chatanu tzureinu*; like the *tochechah* (see below), it deals with persecution, but its contents are determined by its distinctive phrase. Other forms are characterized specifically by the length of their

verses.[53] The final section of this chapter includes examples of the various types and genres of *selichot*.

In regard to content, the *tochechah* is a poem of self-rebuke; following the pattern of confessing one's sins before asking God for forgiveness, the *tochechah* is often the first *selicha* in the service. Other thematic types of *selichot* are the *bakashah*, which is a petition, the *gezerah*, in which persecution and suffering are described, and the *akedah*, whose theme is the binding of Isaac and Abraham's faith.[54]

Selicha literature is rooted in biblical poetry, in its use of language, meter, and form. The pattern of alphabetical acrostics as a poetic form, which is characteristic of many *selichot*, can be found in a number of instances in the Bible, such as I Kings 8:30-38 and II Chronicles 6:21-39.[55] *Selichot* came into prominence in worship with the rise of religious persecution against the Jews in both Palestine and Babylonia, after the talmudic period. The Amoraim and Saboraim focused their energies on collecting and preserving the prayers that they inherited, at a time when worship practices were being restricted by local authorities. At the same time, already existing forms of poetry were being adapted to synagogue use, with their content being devoted to laws and customs that could no longer be taught openly. It could always be said that these were merely congregational songs or laments, rather than lessons in Torah. Moreover, early *piyyutim* derived their forms from the language, structures, and themes of biblical texts, and so could preserve familiarity with the Bible in form as well as in content.[56] Rabbi Judah ben Barzilai of

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[53] ibid.
[54] ibid, pp. 182-183.
[55] Idelsohn, op.cit., p. 43.
[56] ibid, p. 220.

Barcelona specifically mentioned the use of poetry as an alternative to the forbidden sermon.[57]

The authors of the earliest *selichot* are unknown to us, with the possible exception of *Avinu Malkeinu*, which was a prayer for rain, attributed in the Talmud[58] to Rabbi Akiva. Later writers, some of whom were prolific poets, often incorporated their names into the acrostic forms of their *selichot*. They include Rabbi Binyamin ben Zerach (8th century Germany); Rabbi Shelomo bar Yehudah, ("haBavli," ninth or tenth century); Rav Amram Gaon (9th century); and Elijah ben Shemayah (12th century) *Selicha* literature was written through the mid-17th century, when Sabbatai Cohen wrote commemorations of the Chmielnicki pogroms of 1648-9.[59]

The *selicha* developed out of the more general *piyyut* in order to give voice to the suffering of Israel. The earliest *selichot* employed themes, on a collective level, of sin and atonement, human weakness and God's mercy, and exile and redemption. As communities came under the oppressive rule of successions of external authorities, however, the focus of the *selichot* became more immediate and personal. The ease of adapting the poetic forms to those that could be recited and remembered in the synagogue, as well as the flexibility of the form to address the concerns of the day meant that *piyyutim* in general, and *selichot* in particular, became very popular very quickly. Even as form and content became more sophisticated and complex, the genre had become so entrenched that no amount of criticism could eliminate it from worship, regardless of the source or stature of the critic.

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[57] ibid, p. 222.
[58] b. *Ta'anit* 25b.
[59] Idelsohn, op.cit., p. 37.

The instability of Jewish communities in Europe through the Middle Ages, due to expulsions, persecutions and massacres, and book burnings meant that it was very difficult to maintain written sources and reliable prayer traditions. Variations in customs of recitation and in versions of prayer texts were the norm. Prayers and poems, especially *selichot*, were abridged and recombined almost at random. Particularly after the expulsions from Spain, refugees from several places would unite to form a new community and face the challenge of creating a new liturgy out of surviving fragments.[60]

Many communities and their leaders were reluctant to change what little had survived in the way of prayers and poems, whether written or oral, adding to the lack of structure and coherence outside of the statutory prayers, so precious was this material. In addition, while the advent of the printing press made preservation of texts more likely, printers "were no scholars,"[61] and they were not editors, either. They tended to print what was given to them, often with more concern for cost than accuracy. (Even so, there are enough surviving *selichot* that the edition prepared by Abraham Rosenfeld from material held in the British Museum library in the 1950's contains no repetitions of *selichot* for the seven days before Rosh Hashanah, the days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, the major fast days of the liturgical calendar.)[62]

Thus, there were valid reasons for the state of the liturgy that the reformers of the nineteenth century inherited. They cast their newly rational and critical eyes on a very unsystematic liturgy, particularly in regard to poetry. They eliminated what they deemed

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[60] Elbogen, op.cit., p. 283-4.
[61] ibid.
[62] Rosenfeld, A. *Selichot:* Authorised Hebrew and English Edition for the Whole Year. New York, Judaica Press, 1978.

to be long, overdone, and meaningless, including the *selichot*. Their modern, rationalist and more humanistic sensibilities objected to the outpouring of raw emotion, the ornate and elevated language of mourning and lamentation, of pleading and supplication. In America, it would not be until the 1970's that *selichot* would reenter the liturgy of the American Reform Movement.[63]

In keeping with the traditional immediacy of *selichot*, voicing contemporary concerns, the poetry of Gates of Forgiveness[64] the *selichot* service published by the CCAR is also contemporary and spare in its expression of feeling. The first *selicha* poem is an acrostic, expressing contrition and asking for God's response. The theme of repentance is addressed from the perspective of the individual, and then from the perspective of all Israel. It has only one iteration of the Thirteen Attributes. The service includes the traditional prayers, *El Melech yoshev* and *Shema koleinu*, as well as both the short and the long confession. Since it is intended for Saturday evening only, it begins with *Havdallah* and does not include *Tahanun*. Thus it is a departure from traditional *Selichot* services in its timing as well as in its brevity and restraint, yet it includes traditional elements.

The *machzor* of the Reform movement in Great Britain, which is not identical to the Reform Movement in America, is Forms of Prayer, vol. III.[65] It includes a number of classical *selichot* with contemporary renderings in English, as well as at least one modern poem, in the form of a series of blessings, yet with a refrain, included in the *Selichot* service for the afternoon of Yom Kippur. Appearing at the end of the service, it functions,

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[63] Meyer, op.cit., p. 373.
[64] Stern, C., ed. Gates of Forgiveness. New York, CCAR Press, 1993.
[65] Assembly of Rabbis of the Reform Synagogues of Great Britain. Forms of Prayer for Jewish Worship III: Prayers for the High Holydays. (Eighth ed.) Reform Synagogues of Great Britain, 1985.

in structure and in placement, as a *pizmon*. The *Selichot* prayer book edited in England by A. Rosenfeld, includes, in the *Selichot* service for the fast of Tevet, a "Memorial Prayer for Our Six Million Martyrs Who Perished During the Nazi Regime."[66] This poem is written in three-line units, like a *shelishiyah*, and is thematically reminiscent of a *gezerah*, a *selicha* which describes the persecutions of Jewish communities of France and Germany in the Middle Ages. Both of these poems are included in the final section of this chapter.

As discussed above, the *selicha* presupposes the act of confession of sin. The short confession, *Ashamnu*, is known from *Seder Rav Amram*; however, Idelsohn claims that it dates back to the third or fourth century of the common era, and was recited in conjunction with *selichot* as the standard confession, or *vidui*. The content of a *selicha* poem expresses the following themes: the individual seeks forgiveness for his own sins; he also begs forgiveness on behalf of the community; and God is asked to relieve the distresses and sufferings of the community which have been imposed by powers external to the community.[67] Among modern prayer books, Gates of Repentance and *Machzor Chadash* both contain updated versions of the confessions, relating to failures of concern for our families and communities, for peace and justice; neglect of the environment and of personal health and integrity; and sins of indifference.[68]

The biblical and talmudic conceptions of suffering held that disasters befell the people because of their own sins. They declared fast days in order to implore God to revoke the punishment. These days would be spent in prayer and confession, in the hope

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[66] Rosenfeld, op.cit., pp. 349-350.
[67] Idelsohn, op.cit., p. 43-44.
[68] Stern, C., ed. Gates of Repentance. New York, CCAR Press, 1984, p. 327-329,404; Greenberg, S. And Levine, J., eds. The New *Machzor* for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Bridgeport, CT, The Prayer Book Press, 1995, p. 468.

of relieving suffering and renewing God's care and mercy. In the Mishnah, Tractate Ta'anit, chapter two, deals with the declaration of fast days in times of drought, and specifies the prayers to be said on these days, as well as who was qualified to say them. The Mishnah mentions, and the Talmud elaborates,[69] six benedictions to be inserted in the *Amidah*, between the seventh and eighth benedictions, for redemption and for healing, respectively.

Some *selichot* appeal directly to God, and some appeal to angels and other heavenly beings. There was significant controversy over whether it was appropriate to pray to angels, as well as over the genre itself. Among those who opposed *selichot* were Nahshon Gaon, Juda of Barcelona, and Maimonides. Their position was that *piyyutim* interrupted to continuity of the service, were full of "ignorance and exaggerations," and contained obscure and dangerous ideas. In any case, it was inappropriate to add to what the Great Assembly had composed.[70] Those who supported the addition of *piyyutim* to the service included Rabbi Gershom, Rashi, and Rabbenu Tam. Their position was that these poems, especially *selichot* and *kinot*, were divinely inspired, not only permissible, but meritorious, particularly when they were inserted into the first three benedictions of the *Amidah*.[71]

One can see in the proponents and opponents of this literature a distinction between Ashkenazic and Sephardic experiences in the Medieval period, and perhaps their roots in Palestine and Babylonia, respectively. *Selichot* literature was both more elaborate and more sophisticated in its expressions in times and communities where oppression and

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[69] b. *Tan.* 16b.
[70] Idelsohn, op.cit., p. 45.
[71] ibid, p. 46.

persecution were greater. The persecutions and murders of the Crusades, in Ashkenaz, may be reflected in the greater support for *selichot* in that area from rabbis like Rashi, Rabbi Gershom, and Rabbenu Tam. *Selichot* were a way for them to lament over these events, to voice their grief and pain directly to God, and to remind God not to forget the suffering of the divinely chosen people, as in the *shniyah* included in the last section of this chapter.

Levenson and the God Who Preserves Order in the World

There is an additional way to understand the power of *selicha* literature. Jon Levenson, in Creation and the Persistence of Evil,[72] suggests that the idea of creation as making order out of chaos be carried further. He writes that in the role of Creator, God opposes forces of "disorder, injustice, affliction, and chaos, which are, in the Israelite worldview, one."[73] Creation is positive because through it God asserts control and creates order and stability. In reading the Bible critically, in light of other ancient Near Eastern creation stories, Levenson shows how the stability and safety of our world are dependent upon God's continuing control over chaos. The language of the Bible, particularly in the psalms, which portrays God as a mighty and victorious king, rejoices in God's triumph, not simply as an affirmation of faith, but rather a celebration that God has retaken control of the world and will redeem God's people.[74]

In this view, there is never any question that God has the power to take and maintain this control, to ensure that goodness, justice, and mercy will prevail over evil, darkness, and death. However, we need God to actively assert this power, and this God

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[72] Levenson, J. Creation and the Persistence of Evil. Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1994.
[73] ibid, p. xix.
[74] ibid, p. xxiii.

has not consistently done in our history. Evil persists, though "the enemy is now human and historical, but the challenge to God is not new or different in essence" from the challenge of previous times. It is just as necessary now to ensure God's sovereignty as a reality.[75]

God triumphed in the past, and although the present may be bereft of signs of God's control, the faithful do not accept the absence of God in the present as final. God is called upon to make God's presence and power known again, to redeem God's people by redeeming the world from chaos.[76] Levenson uses Isaiah, chapters 24-27, as his proof text. God's past victories are recalled, and God's attributes - "a strength to the poor...a refuge from the storm, a shadow from the heat"[77] are related. Isaiah's vision of the future depicts God as once more active in the world, destroying Israel's enemies and restoring the world order of the worshipping community. "He will destroy death forever; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces; and the insult of his people shall He take away from off all the earth."[78] Isaiah's perspective is the "disjunction between the ideal world of liturgy and the real world of innocent suffering," where the prophetic message also serves as a prayer, comforting the people with the hope of God's return.[79]

Levenson goes on to discuss his thesis on the level of individual behavior, i.e., the evil inclination, the *yetzer hara*, which is evil in "the mind and will of the doer," as close as the heart and the mouth. That it can be overcome is evidence of the redemptive nature of Judaism. Repentance addresses the fragility of the good impulse, the *yetzer hatov*, which

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[75] ibid, pp. 19-20.
[76] ibid, p. 24.
[77] Is. 25:4.
[78] Is. 25:8.
[79] Levenson, op.cit., pp. 28-32.

can win out over evil through steadfast repentance, good deeds, and God's grace. After all, the Torah was given to real human beings, with all their faults, and it is within the grasp of everyone who will reach for it: "For this commandment which I command you this day, it is not hidden from you, neither is it far off. . . but the word is very near to you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may do it."[80]

Levenson holds that this understanding of the evil impulse implies that it inhibits the ability to see oneself accurately and to respond morally. Yet its very existence also implies that God's rule in the world will only be complete when the evil impulse in all of us is overcome, i.e., that there is a shared responsibility for both human suffering and redemption.

More than human repentance is required. God's renewed presence and intervention must be asserted. This is consistent with the rabbinic view that human *teshuvah* is a necessary condition for forgiveness, and that God's action may follow when this condition has been met. God has acted in the past and will act again in the future, but there is no guarantee as to when. To believe that God hears prayer is to believe in a God who can be aroused to action in response to the cries of God's people, a theology that accepts the disjunction between the God of old and the contemporary crises of the Jewish people. Levenson sees this as a major component of Jewish spiritual life since the destruction of the First Temple.[81]

The significance of Levenson's thinking for *selichot* lies in the impetus for these prayers, which is what he calls the disjunction between past and present. The past is well

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[80] Deut 30:11,14; in ibid, p. 39-41.
[81] ibid, pp. 46-50.

documented in the Bible, where time and again God has both acted and promised to act to redeem the suffering of God's people. The present offers no comprehensible explanation for current suffering. Even though the people attempt to accept personal responsibility, the differences in kind and degree between their behavior and their persecutions is too great. When they confess their sins and call upon God to forgive them, they also invoke God's past actions in answering their forebears to entreat God to respond to them as well:

> May the One Who answered Abraham Avinu on Mount Moriah, answer us.
> May the One Who answered Isaac when he was bound on the altar, answer us.
> May the One Who answered Jacob in Bethel, answer us.
> May the One Who answered Joseph in prison, answer us.
> May the One Who answered our ancestors at the Red Sea, answer us.
> May the One Who answered Moses at Horeb, answer us.
> May the One Who answered Aaron with the censer, answer us.
> May the One Who answered Phineas. . .answer us.
> May the One Who answered Joshua. . . answer us.
> May the One Who answered Samuel. . . answer us.
> May the One Who answered David and Solomon. . . answer us.
> May the One Who answered Elijah. . . answer us.
> May the One Who answered Elisha. . . answer us.
> May the One Who answered Jonah. . . answer us.
> May the One Who answered Hezekiah. . . answer us.
> May the One Who answered Hannaniah, Mishael, and Azariah. . . answer us.
> May the One Who answered Daniel. . . answer us.
> May the One Who answered Mordecai and Esther. . . answer us.
> May the One Who answered Ezra. . . answer us.
> May the One who answered all the righteous and pious, the perfect and the upright, answer us.[82]

By the merit of our ancestors we entreat God for help and comfort. By their merit we are sustained, and in their worthiness to receive God's grace we find a source of hope in our own generations. These words and ideas still speak powerfully to us. Here is a contemporary version of the same prayer, by Rachel Adler:

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[82] Rosenfeld, op.cit., p. 129.

The one who answered Abraham at Moriah	will answer us.
The one who answered Sarah and made her laugh	will answer us.
The one who answered Isaac on the altar	will answer us.
The one who answered Rachel and Leah	will answer us.
The one who answered Miriam on the Nile	will answer us.
The one who answered Israel on the Red Sea	will answer us.
The one who answered Moses on Sinai	will answer us.
The one who answered Hannah at Shiloh	will answer us.
The one who answered David in Jerusalem	will answer us.
The one who answered Elijah in a still small voice	will answer us.
The one who answered Esther in Shushan	will answer us.
The one who answered those who seek	will answer us.[83]

Types of *Selichot*

Many prayer books in print today, whether they are *machzorim* or *siddurim*, identify *selichot* by either their structural genre, e.g., *shniyah* or *shelishiyah*, or by their thematic content, e.g., *chatanu* or *akedah*. However, many do not. *Selichot* are often, but not always, printed on the page according to their structure or rhyme scheme. The printed editions of both *Seder Rav Amram* and *Machzor Vitry* are entirely in running text, regardless of content. The High Holy Day Prayer Book, edited by Birnbaum, does not identify *selichot* by type, or even specifically as *selichot*; there are footnotes to provide some information about rhyme or authorship. The Artscroll prayer books, published separately for *Selichot*, identify the prayers by type, and include information about the composers in footnotes. Liberal prayer books, including those of American Reform Judaism, tend not to identify *selichot* by genre at all, whether by structure or by theme, or by author. The Authorised *Selichot* for the Whole Year, edited by Rosenfeld, identifies each prayer by author and type above the text of the prayer, which is presented as straight

[83] Adler, R. and Weisman, Y. *Selichot* Service, LA Jewish Feminist Center, 1991, p. 14.

text, rather than according to poetic form. Gates of Repentance, the High Holy Day prayer book of American Reform Judaism, simply identifies certain prayers as *selichot*.

The examples below are intended to show the variety of poetic structures of *selichot* as well as their themes. They are taken form a range of prayer books, in order to show the breadth of use of *selichot* in worship. The language is the elevated and emotional language of supplication, pressing the case of the worshippers before God. The English translations are included, as they appear in each prayer book. One selection, the *pizmon*, was written originally in English and appears in the prayer book only in English.

Peticha

(Hymn introducing the *Selichot*, by David ben Bekuda. Chanted by the Reader and the congregation) (de Sola Pool, David, ed. Prayers for the day of Atonement, According to the custom of the Spanish and Portuguese Jews. NY, Union of Sephardic Congregations, 1949. pp. 52-53)

אנא בקראנו לקול שוענו יי שמעה:
אנא ברחמיך עון בצענו יי סלחה:
דברים לקחתי שמע יי
וחטא בו יחמתי סלח יי:
אנא בקראנו לקול שוענו יי שמעה:
וממעון שמיך שמע יי
וחטאת עמך סלח יי:
אנא ברחמיך עון בצענו יי סלחה:
יום ערכי שבחה שמע יי
משובה נצחה סלח יי:
אנא בקראנו לקול שוענו יי שמעה:
דלים ואביונים שמע יי
אדמים כשנים סלח יי:
אנא ברחמיך עון בצענו יי סלחה:
חרדים נגדך שמע יי
ולי אני עבדך סלח יי:
אנא בקראנו לקול שוענו יי שמעה:
זמירות מהללי שמע יי
ורע מעללי סלח יי:
אנא ברחמיך עון בצענו יי סלחה:
קול שאריית יעקב שמע יי
עון כל-לב עקב סלח יי:
אנא בקראנו לקול שוענו יי שמעה:
אנא ברחמיך עון בצענו יי סלחה:

When we implore Thee, our voice of prayer — *hear, O Lord.*
Our selfish sinning, in Thy mercy — *forgive, O Lord.*

The words I choose — *hear, O Lord.*
My sin from birth — *forgive, O Lord.*
When we implore Thee, our voice of prayer — *hear, O Lord.*

From Thy heavenly abode — *hear, O Lord.*
The sin of Thy people — *forgive, O Lord.*
Our selfish sinning, in Thy mercy — *forgive, O Lord.*

This day when praises I chant,	*hear, O Lord.*
My constant failing	*forgive, O Lord.*
When we implore Thee, our voice of prayer	*hear, O Lord.*
The poor and needy	*hear, O Lord.*
Our sin as scarlet	*forgive, O Lord.*
Our selfish sinning	*forgive, O Lord.*
Our quivering towards Thee	*hear, O Lord.*
And me Thy servant	*forgive, O Lord.*
When we implore Thee, our voice of prayer	*hear, O Lord.*
My song of praise	*hear, O Lord.*
My evil desires	*forgive, O Lord.*
Our selfish sinning, in Thy mercy	*forgive, O Lord.*
The voice of Jacob's remnant	*hear, O Lord.*
The sin of faithless hearts	*forgive, O Lord.*
When we implore Thee, our voice of prayer	*hear, O Lord.*
Our selfish sinning, in Thy mercy	*forgive, O Lord.*

Shniyah

(This *selicha*, consisting of two-line units, is in the form of an alphabetic acrostic, followed by name of the composer, *Shlomo* the lesser, may he live. Gold, Avie, ed., The Complete Artscroll Selichos (*Minhag Polin*). Brooklyn, Mesorah Publications, Ltd., 1993, pp. 56-57.)

אם עונינו רבו להגדיל,	בנו ענו עבות כגדיל,
גמרו לנו בינתים להבדיל,	דרכי רחמיך לא תחדיל.
התנהג במדת חסד התנית,	ואתה הוא שמקדם היית,
זכר עדתך אשר קנית,	חן שירי בכור כנית.
טענתנו גפי קרת נתונים,	ישבתנו שן סלע איתנים,
כאחד דכיתנו במקום תנים,	לרויה צאת כמה מתונים.
מרב פקדות ובהלה מחלחלת,	נקטה נפשי, לעפר בוחלת,
סמכה בטן לארץ נשחלת,	עורה למה תישן תוחלת.
פקח קוח קרא אסיריך חפוץ,	צוק העתים חשבונם קפץ,
קבץ פזוריך עדר הנפץ,	ראות עולתה פיה תקפץ.
שמר שבועת חסד ותנאי,	תם וצבור ובנאי איתני,
שלומו יצוה לבלי גנאי,	הפך ושנות לטובה הפנאי.
קטן כי יעקב ודל,	ידוע חלי נבנה וחדל,
חיים וחסד מעז ומגדל,	כאשר עתה כחך יגדל.

If our iniquities have increased greatly,
and thickly plaited ropes bear witness against us,
(if our sins) have caused us to create a rift between the two [of us, God and Israel],
You will not withhold Your merciful ways.
You have promised to act with the Attribute of Kindness,
and it was you Who was from the beginning.
Remember Your flock that You have acquired for Yourself,
and be gracious to the remnants of the ones You called, [My] firstborn.
You carried us and placed us on the [Holy] City's height,
You settled us on the Patriarchs' rocky peak.
Suddenly You crushed us in the place of the serpents.
How long have we waited to go forth [from it] to liberty?
Due to the many [evil] occurrences, and the trembling panic,
my soul is in turmoil, [it is bent] to the dust it abhors.
Prop up the one whose belly sags to the ground!
Awake! Why do You [pretend to] sleep, [our] Hope?
May it be Your will to cry, 'Undo your fetters!' to Your prisoners,
[and to] cut short the reckoning for their time of suffering.
Gather up Your dispersed ones, the scattered flock;
when wickedness sees [this], it will clamp its mouth shut.
Keep the vow of kindness and the compact
of the wholesome one, the heaped one, and the builder, my mighty [Patriarchs].
May He command His peace [to us], not to [be] shamed,
turning and changing the times to good.
Although Yaakov is small and poor,
sickly, despised, and [thought] worthless,
[yet he shall have] life and kindness, a fortress and a tower [from God],
as now Your strength is [revealed in its] greatness.

Shelishiyah

(This *selicha* consists of three-line units. The composer's signature can be found in the final two triplets: "*Eliyahu bar Shemayah*, may he be strong and persevere." Gold, Avie, ed. The Complete Artscroll Selichos, *Minhag Lita*. Brooklyn, Mesorah Publications, Ltd., 1992, pp. 688-693.)

אתה חלקי וצור לבבי,
אליך יהוה אקרא בעטף לבי.
אויתיך בלילה על משכבי,

בגדנו והרבינו חמות וכעסים,
כי אין בנו מעשים.
למרמס אנו מעשים,

גברו מאד מצוקותינו,
וכבגד עדים כל צדקותינו.
ברואה שגינו פלילות פוקותינו,

דעת חסרנו פתאים מערמה,
אף כי אנוש רמה.
תהלה תשים במלאכי רומה,

הן איים תטל כדק,
ואם עולתה תחפש ותבדק,

מה נדבר ומה נצטדק.
ואבקש גודר גדר ועומד בפרץ, וישר אין פנים להרץ,
אבד חסיד מן הארץ.
זמן קצי סתום מלדע, עונותי הטו קרני להגדע,
כי פשעי אני אדע.
חמס אזעק ואין מושיע, למה צדיק מכתיר מרשיע,
ולא קצרה ידך מהושיע.
טלאיך דופקים כים הומים, אנוסים חמוסים ביד אמים,
למה לנצח תשכחנו, תעזבנו לארך ימים.
יעקב למשסה וישראל לבוזזים,
כבודה שבעת חפות חזיזים, כרחל נאלמה לפני גוזזים.
כילי ונבל כמלך במסבו, נדיב ושוע נטרד בחובו,
ככלי אין חפץ בו.
לא לעולם תטר להחריבנו,
שמאלך דחיתני ימינך תקרבני. אדני עשקה לי ערבני.
מאז תמיד לנו הדבה, הקוית שבים ברוח נדיבה,
ארפא משובתם אהבם נגבה.
נובעות (עיני) כנחל אגלי, הולל שוקט ושבתו גילי,
ואני כמעט נטיו רגלי.
שה אבד בקש עם נושע, און מצא מבטן פשע.
צדיק מט לפני רשע.
עדות ביעקב בתעודה נחתם, בארץ אויב הבטחת להחיותם,
ואף גם זאת בהיותם.
פשעים תעביר וחובות תמחק, הרחיבה שאול נפשה לדחק,
ופרעה פיה לבלי חק.
צפה נחשול קרב לחפשנו, דלנו והעלנו מטיט רפשנו,
שובה יהוה חלצה נפשנו.
קדשנו צום בתפלה לקדם, חבש וצרי למכתנו הקדם,
זכר עדתך קנית קדם.
רגז הנח כעס יחשך, אסורים בעבותות אהב והמשך,
מבית כלא יושבי חשך.
שלוח קרא לשבורה ולשמוטה, בריח גדע שבר מוטה,
רפה שבריה כי מטה.
תשובה השבתי לתנין וזוחל, תקותי הוא סולח ומוחל,
הן (אם) יקטלני לו איחל.
אלינו הטה בורא אזנך,
שמע יה דורשיך הקשיבה מחנניך,
תכון תפלתי קטרת לפניך.
חזק כושל ואמץ רפיון, מקדש יסד, ישב אפריון,
היטיבה ברצונך את ציון.

You are my portion, the Rock of my heart;
I long for You in the night on my bed.
To you, O God, I call when my heart grows faint.
We have betrayed [You], we have built up furies and angers;
now we have become for trampling,
for we have no [worthy] deeds.
Our hardships have become very overwhelming,
[for] we scorned the prophets and made justice a lie,
and all our merits are like a dirty rag.
We lacked knowledge, fools without cunning,
You regard even the angels on high as foolish,
certainly man, who is but a worm.
Behold, You will cast away the islands like dust;
and if you should examine and seek out sin,
what can we say? How can we be justified?
I have sought a righteous man to mend fences
and stand [in prayer] in the breach,
but there is no upright man to restore Your good will;
the pious man is gone from the earth.
the time of my [salvation's] end is sealed beyond knowing;
my sins have pulled down my pride, to be lopped off,
for I recognize my rebellious sins.
I shout, 'Violence!' but there is no savior.
Why is the righteous man encircled by the wicked?
Yet Your hand is not too short to save [me].
Your sheep are knocking, tumultuous as the sea,
plundered and robbed by the nations' hand.
Why have You forgotten us eternally, abandoned us for so long?
Jacob['s seed are given] to oppression; Israel to the looters.
Once dignified by seven canopies of cloud;
she has become silent as a sheep before the shearers.
The scheming, vile man is like a king on his couch,
while the generous and lordly is exiled for his guilt,
like a vessel in which there is no interest.
You will not hold resentment forever, to destroy me;
Your left hand pushed me away,
may Your right hand bring me close.
O my Lord, kidnap me [from the oppressors] and grant me surety.
Always, from the start, the blame has been on us,
yet You have encouraged penitents with a generous spirit:
[by saying:] 'I will heal their rebelliousness; I will love them freely.'
(My eyes) flow with tears like a stream,
for the scoffer is serene, while my joys are ended;
and as for me - my feet almost foundered.

Seek [Your] lost sheep, the people saved [by You],
that has found wrongdoing, sinfulness from birth.
The righteous man is abased before the wicked.
Witness of Jacob's future is set forth in the Torah.
In the enemy's land You have promised to nurture them,
'And this, too, even when they are in their enemies' land.'
Dismiss rebellious deeds, and erase guilt;
Gehinnom broadens itself to push [in more souls],
and has stretched its mouth unrestrictedly.
See the storm [upon us]; come to set us free,
pull us out, lift us up out of the mud we have made;
return, O God, release our soul!
We have sanctified a fast on which we shall come to You with prayer;
bring forward bandage and balm for our wound;
remember Your congregation, that you acquired long ago.
Put aside rage, let anger be annulled;
those bound in chains, show love and draw forth
from the prison-house, those who dwell in darkness.
Declare liberation for those broken and abandoned;
cut through the bolt, break the yoke!
Heal her fragments, for she totters.
I have answered back the serpent, the reptilian,
'My hope is in Him Who forgives and pardons;
though He slay me, I will look hopefully to Him.
Lean Your ear to us, O Creator!
Hear, O God, those who seek you,
be attentive to those who supplicate before You.
Let my prayer stand as incense before You.
Strengthen the stumbler, give vigor to the weak.
Re-found the Sanctuary; restore the Temple;
do good in your favor to Zion.

Pizmon

(This *selicha* is modern, written by the twentieth century poet, Jan Fuchs. It is a *pizmon* because of its use of a refrain and its placement at the end of a *Selichot* service. Although it expresses blessing and hope, this is not inconsistent with the end of the service; the *pizmon* is characterized as a specific type of *selicha* because of its structure rather than its content. Forms of Prayer for Jewish Worship, vol. III, Prayers for the High Holy Days. Assembly of Rabbis of the Reform Synagogues of Great Britain, eds. London, The Reform Synagogues of Great Britain, 1985, p. 589.)

Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the Worlds, who has created day and night
- and yet one unity.

The grey of dawn, the gold of day, the evening shadows, the blackness of night,

man's growing, man's being, man's doing, man's passing
- and yet one unity.

Blessed are You, Lord our God, who has created man and wife
- and yet one unity.

Blessed are You, Lord our God, who has created the inclination to good,
the desire for evil
- and yet one unity.

Blessed are You, Lord our God, who has created the six days of work,
the one day for rest
-and yet one unity.

Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of Kingships,
King of the Kingdom
- and yet one unity.

Blessed are You, Lord our God, God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob, God of Sarah, God of Rebecca, God of Rachel, God of Leah, God of Israel, God of mankind
- and yet one unity.

Blessed are You, Lord our God,
God of judgment, God of justice,
God of the miracle, God of nearness,
our King, our teacher, our father
- and yet one unity.

Blessed is the life of all worlds

Tochachah
(A *tochachah* is a *selicha* of self-rebuke, an expression of unworthiness of the worshipper and his responsibility for his transgressions; it is very much a work of self-abasement. *Seder Rav Amram*, 97; tr. Hedegard, p. 173)

אם עונינו ענו בנו ה׳ עשה למען שמך בי רבו משובותינו ולך חטאנו סלח לנו. אם עונות תשמר יה ה׳ מי יעמוד כי עמך הסליחה למען תורא. חוסה ה׳ על ישראל עמך ואל תתן נחלתך לחרפה למשל בם גוים למה יאמרו בעמים איה אלהיהם ידענו כי חטאנו ואין לנו מי יעמוד לכפר בעדנו כי אם שמך הגדול יעמוד לנו בעת צרה ידענו כי אין בנו מעשים צדקה עשה עמנו למען שמך וכרחם אב על בנים רחם עלינו והושיענו. אמנם אלהינו רבו אשמינו אין קץ ואין מספר לעונותינו. רחום רחמנו וזכור לנו ברית אבותינו זכור לעבדיך לאברהם ליצחק וליעקב אל תפן אל קשי העם הזה ואל רשעו ואל חטאתו. שוב מחרון אפך והנחם על הרעה לעמך והסר מעלינו עול הגוים כי רחום אתה כי כן דרכך פודה ומציל גואל

ומושיע בכל דור ודור.

Though our iniquities testify against us, work, Thou, O God, for Thy name's sake, for our backslidings are many, and we have sinned against Thee, forgive us. If Thou, O God, shouldst mark iniquities, God, who could stand? But with Thee there is forgiveness, that Thou mayst be feared. Spare, O God, Thy people Israel, and give not Thine inheritance over to reproach, that the nations should not make a by-word of them. Why should they say among the nations: Where is their God? We know that we have sinned, and there is none to stand up in our behalf to atone for us. But let Thy great Name stand up in our behalf in the time of trouble. We know that we have no righteous works, deal with us for Thy Name's sake. And as a father hath compassion upon his children, have compassion upon us and save us. Verily, our God, our offenses are many, there is no end and no number of our sins. O Merciful, have mercy upon us, and remember unto us the covenant of our fathers. Remember Thy servants Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; look not unto the stubbornness of this people, nor its wickedness, nor to its sin. Turn from Thy fierce wrath, and repent of this evil against Thy people. And remove from us the yoke of the nations for Thou art merciful, for such is Thy way - to liberate, to rescue, to redeem and to save throughout every generation.

Gezerah

(This poem of lament for the six million Jews who died in the Holocaust describes the horror of their deaths as well as the anguish of survivors, as did the Medieval *gezerot* which described the massacres of Jews in Ashkenazic communities. Fundaminsky, S. "Memorial Prayer for Our Six Million Martyrs Who Perished During the Nazi Regime," in Rosenfeld, A. The Authorised *Selichot* for the Whole Year. NY Judaica Press, 1978, pp. 349-350.)

אלהינו ואלהי אבותינו, בוראינו וצור ישועתנו,
הביטה ממרומיך וראה בעניינו:
אתאנו לפניך בשברון לבנו, דפקנו דלתיך בדכאון רוחנו,
האזינו לקול תחנוננו:
לבנו נשבר בקרבנו, כחלילים יהמו מעינו,
בזכרנו שש מאות רבוא חללינו:
לזאבי-אדם נמכרו אחנו, לפריצי-חיות נמסרו אחותינו,
טרף לחלאת-האדם היו עוללינו וטפנו:
מות שכל ואלמון עלו בחלונינו, הורים וטפוחיהם נשרפו לעינינו,
ובחדרי-גז גועו באחד אלהינו:
מאורות ישראל כבו במעונותינו, ארזי הלבנון שרשו מקרבנו,
באני מאמין נגדעו במקדשינו:
לשוננו דבקה לחכנו, מקור דמעה היו עינינו,
וכוס היגונים רותה נפשנו:
למה עזבתנו אלהינו, למה עמדת מרחוק בעת צרתנו,
למה החרשת עת שפכו העריצים כמים דמנו:

איפה נמצא מזור לפצעינו, מאין יבאו נחומים לאבלנו,
איככה נשכח את מחמדינו :
אבלים נותרנו בשממתנו, בודדים נשארנו ביגוננו,
אויה כי דגול כים שברנו :
ראה יי חרפתנו, הביטה על שפלותנו,
שור כי עד שאול הורד כבודנו :
רחם-נא על שרידינו, שים בנאדך דמעותינו,
נצר באוצרך שפך-דמנו :
חיי-נצח הנחל לקדושינו, בצרור החיים צרר נשמות טהורינו,
כי דמם נשפך על מזבחך אלהינו :
חמל-נא על אבלינו, הצמח נחומים לאחינו ולאחיותינו,
זכר כי הם שארית פלטתנו :
מחה ברחמיך דמעות אמלללינו, הפך בטובך לששון אבלנו,
אצל בחסדך מהודך עלינו :
מזור וטרף המצא לפצעינו, העלה ארוכה לכל מכותינו,
והרם בישועתך מעפר קרננו :
יי יי אל רחום וחנון שמע קולנו, חוס ורחם עלינו,
והשב שכינתך לציון עיר קדשנו :
יעלה לפניך זכרון קרבנותינו, יגיע לפניך קול בכיות אמותינו,
ישמע באזניך קול דמי תינוקותינו :
מבחר ברכותיך שלח בארצנו, מכל רע נצר ישראל מדינתנו,
והיתה לגאון ולתפארת כמו שהבטחת לאבותינו :
מהרה יבוא משיחנו, לעיני כל חי יופיע בתוכנו,
ויציץ ויפרח עם ישראל בימינו :

Our God and God of our fathers, our Creator and Rock of our salvation, look down from thy heights and see our affliction.

We come before thee with a broken heart, we knock at thy doors with a crushed spirit, O hearken to the voice of our supplications.

Our heart is broken within us, our bowels moan like flutes, when we recall our six million slain.

Our brothers were sold to human wolves, our sisters were delivered to ferocious beasts, our infants and babes became a prey to the dregs of mankind.

Death, bereavement and widowhood penetrated our windows, parents with their tender children were burnt before our own eyes, and with the *Shema* (on their lips) they perished in the gas chambers.

The lamps of Israel were extinguished in our dwellings, the cedars

of Lebanon were uprooted from our midst, with (the singing of) "I Believe" they were cut down in our sanctuaries.

Out tongue cleaves to our palate, our eyes are a fount of tears, and our soul has drunk in full the cup of sorrow.

Why didst thou forsake us, O our God? Why didst thou stand afar at the time of our distress? Why didst thou keep silent when the tyrants spilled our blood like water?

Where can we find a remedy for our wounds? Whence shall comfort come for our mourning? How can we forget our beloved ones?

We remain mourners in our desolation, we were left solitary with our sorrow, woe (to us)! For our calamity is as great as the sea.

See, O Lord, our disgrace, look down upon our humiliation, behold how our glory has been brought down to the grave.

Have mercy, we beseech thee, upon our remnants, place our tears in thy flask, preserve in thy storehouse our blood that has been spilled.

Cause thy martyrs to inherit eternal life, bind up the souls of our pure ones in the bond of life, for their blood was spilt on thy altar, O our God.

Have pity, we pray thee, upon our mourners, cause comfort to spring forth to our brothers and sisters, remember that they are the remnant that has escaped.

In thy mercy wipe away the tears of our unfortunate ones, in thy goodness turn our mourning into joy, in thy kindness bestow thy splendor upon us.

Bring forth balm and remedy for our wounds, grant healing to all our sores, and in thy salvation lift up our pride from the dust.

O Lord, O Lord, Merciful and Gracious, hear our voice, spare us and have compassion upon us, and restore thy divine presence to Zion, out Holy city.

Let the remembrance of our victims come before thee, let the cry of the weeping of our mothers reach thee, let thy ears hearken (to) the cry of the blood of our babes.

Send thy choicest blessings to our land, preserve the State of Israel from all evil, that it may become a pride and a glory as thou didst promise our fathers.

May our Messiah come speedily, may he appear in our midst in the sight of all lliving, and may the people of Israel blossom and flourish in our own days.

Chatanu

(This *selicha* is characterized by its use of the phrase "*chatanu tzureinu,*" "we have sinned, our Rock." De Sola Pool, David, ed. Prayers for the Day of Atonement, According to the Custom of the Spanish and Portuguese Jews. NY, Union of Sephardic Congregations, 1949, pp. 182-183.)

חטאנו צורנו. סלח לנו יוצרנו:
שמע ישראל. יי אלהינו. יי אחד:
ברוך שם כבוד מלכותו לעולם ועד:
יי הוא האלהים. יי הוא האלהים:
אראלי מעלה אומרים יי אדנינו:
בחירי סגלה עונים ואומרים
יי הוא האלהים. יי הוא האלהים.
גלגלי מעלה אומרים יי אדנינו:
דגולי סגלה עונים ואומרים
יי הוא האלהים. יי הוא האלהים.
יי מלך. יי מלך. יי ימלך לעולם ועד.
בטרם שחקים וארקים נמתחו יי מלך.
ועד לא מאורות זרחו יי מלך.
והארץ כבגד תבלה ושמים כעשן נמלחו יי ימלך לעולם ועד:
יי מלך. יי מלך. יי ימלך לעולם ועד:
ועד לא עשה ארץ וחוצות יי מלך.
ובהכינו יצורים עלי ארצות יי מלך.
ועת יקבץ נפוצים מארבע נפוצות יי ימלך לעולם ועד:
יי מלך. יי מלך. יי ימלך לעולם ועד:

Rock of our strength, we have sinned. O Creator, forgive us.
"Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is one."
Blessed be His name and glorious sovereignty for ever and ever.
"*The Lord, He is God, the Lord, He is God.*"
Angels on high proclaim "*The Lord is our Lord.*"
His treasured people give answer "*The Lord He is God, the Lord, He is God.*"
Heavenly spheres proclaim "*The Lord is our Lord.*"
His standard-bearing people give answer "*The Lord He is God, the Lord He is God.*"
The Lord is King, the Lord was King, the Lord shall be King for ever and ever.

Ere heavens and earth are meted out *the Lord is King.*
Ere heavenly lights shone forth *the Lord was King.*
When the earth shall wax old as a garment and the heavens vanish as smoke,
the Lord shall be King for ever and ever.
The Lord is King, the Lord was King, the Lord shall be King for ever and ever.
Ere yet He makes earth or sky *the Lord is King.*
When He set His creatures on earth *the Lord was King.*
What time He shall gather His people from the four corners of the earth,
the Lord shall be King for ever and ever.
The Lord is King, the Lord was King, the Lord shall be King for ever and ever.

Akedah

(This type of *selicha* recalls the binding of Isaac, emphasizing that both father and son were ready and willing for the sacrifice to take place. This theme was particularly resonant for the Jews of medieval Ashkenaz. Artscroll *Selichos, Minhag Lita*. pp. 392-397.)

מפלטי אלי צורי סתרי ומגני,
וקרן ישעי משגבי ביום צר לי ואוני,
השכמתי לחלותך מלך רב. ואני אליך יהוה שועתי בבקר.
בקר רחם תזכר חסד אברהם אב איתני,
אשר בחרתו והאמין בך ראש למאמיני,
זכר בריתו והושיעני מטמאתי, יהוה בקר תשמע קולי בקר.
בקר דברת עמו, ונסיתו לשלם לו משכרת,
וכרות עמו הברית להיות עמו הברית להיות לו למשמרת,
אהבתו ורציתו וקבלתו כקטרת סמים בבקר בבקר.
בקר כוכבו האיר, כחפצת להראות צדקתו הגדולה,
נסיתו בעשירי, טתאמר לו קח נא את בנך ואל תכלא,
על אחד ההרים והעלהו שם לעולה, את הכבש אחד תעשה בבקר.
בקר יחד שמך ושמע לקולך והראה אהבתו,
ושש בכל לב על אמרתך לעשותו
האהבה קלקלה השורה, וקים בשמחתו, וישכם אברהם בבקר.
בקר הכינו לבם שניהם לעשות רצונך, איום,
הבן לקח עצים והאב לקח מאכלת, לשחט בלי פדיום,
קרואים והולכים לתמם, וראו כבודך ביום השלישי בהיות הבקר.
בקר אזר כגבור חלציו ולעקד בנו קדם,
ויקח מאכלת לשחטו ולא חשב אדם,
ויאמר היום אקריב עולתי ואזרק דם זבחי לא ילין עד בקר.
בקר רחמיך נכמרו על בן יחיד ועליו זרחו,
ויקרא אליו מלאך יהוה, אל הנער ידים אל ישלחו,
כי ביצחק יקרא לך זרע, וזכרו לדורות הניחו לכם למשמרת עד הבקר.
בקר כשרו וישרו וצדקו יליץ בעד עם אליך קרב,

ואפרו תמיד יראה לפניך לכבסם הרב,
תנתן להם נפשם בשאלתם, כי לך נכספה. ובערב היא באה ובבקר.
בקר קולם שמע, ותכפר עונותיהם,
וערך תפלתם תחשב כערך קרבנותיהם,
לקחו ובאו בזכרון צדקת אבותיהם, והם הביאו אליו עוד נדבה
בבקר בבקר.
בקר תפן אלינו לרחמנו, ורחמיך עלינו יכמרו,
ותשליך במצלות ים כל חטאתינו ולא יזכרו,
צור העבר עוננו מלפניך, ולא ישאירו ממנו עד בקר.

My Rescuer, my god, my Rock, my Refuge and my Shield,
my Horn of Salvation, my stronghold
on the day I am troubled and grieving -
I have risen early to pray to You, O Great King,
And I - I cry to You, O God, in the morning.
In the morning remember mercy,
[for the sake of] Abraham's kindness, my mighty father,
whom You chose, and who believed in You,
the first of my people's believers.
Remember his covenant, and save me from my sins' defilement -
O God, in the morning hear my voice, in the morning!

In the morning You spoke with him,
testing him so as to pay him reward,
and You made the covenant with him to become a guardian to him.
You loved him, and favored him, accepted him
like the incense spices, each morning, each morning.

In the morning star's light
when You desired to show his great righteousness,
You tested him the tenth time, and said to him,
'Please take your son - do not hold him back -
on one of the mountains, and offer him there as an *olah*-offering.
You shall prepare the one sheep in the morning.

In the morning he showed that Your Name is One;
he obeyed Your order and demonstrated his love.
He rejoiced whole-heartedly over Your word, to fulfill it.
Love obliterated the line, and he rose in his joy;
Abraham rose early in the morning.

In the morning the two prepared themselves to do Your will, O Awesome One.
The son took wood, and the father took a knife,
[determined] to slaughter without [even thinking of] redemption.

Summoned, they went whole-heartedly, and saw Your glory
on the third day when came the morning.

In the morning Abrham girded his loins like a warrior
and went early to bind his son.
He took up the knife to slaughter him, and he did not think a man.
He said, 'Today I will offer my *olah* and throw its blood [on the altar];
my sacrifice will not rest until the morning.

In the morning Your mercy was aroused for the only son's sake, and it shone upon him,
and the angel of God called to Abraham,
'Do not put [your] hands out towards the boy,*
for through Isaac will offspring be considered yours.
And his remembrance shall you set for all generations,
that it be unto you a safe-keeping until [Redemption's] morning.

In the morning let his [Isaac's] worth, his uprightness,
his righteousness, speak for the people that approached You,
and let his ashes always appear before You,
that You may cleanse them thoroughly [of their sins].
Let their soul be given them as their request, since it longs for You,
and in the evening it comes [to You in prayer], and in the morning.

In the morning hear their voice and atone for their iniquities;
let their ordered prayers be reckoned as the order of their sacrifices.
They have taken [words of prayer] and come,
with the remembrance of their fathers' righteousness,
And they bring another voluntary offering each morning, in the morning.

In the morning turn towards us with mercy -
let Your mercy be stirred up on our behalf;
and may You throw all our sins into the sea's depths, that they be not remembered.
O Rock, expel our iniquities from Your presence,
and let none of them remain until the morning.

*A more accurate translation of this line would be, "[Your] hands will not be put out towards the boy."
The Artscroll translator has chosen to use the imperative, "do not."

CHAPTER FOUR

HEALING SERVICES

In America in recent years there has been a significant development in liturgy among American Reform congregations. Prayers for healing have become incorporated into services on a regular basis, and entire services for healing are being created. In 1996, the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR) sponsored a project, "Lay Involvement in Liturgical Change and Renewal," in which healing services and resource materials were collected and their major components in common were distilled. In deriving the common elements of these services, project members were not attempting to assess them in relation to established liturgical forms; rather, the intent was to try to understand them on their own terms.

In her introductory essay for the project, "What Are Healing Services?" Rabbi Elaine Zecher wrote: "The emergence of healing services in our synagogues reflects a growing desire to give voice to encounters with life's difficulties. If healing services can incorporate the traditional with the modern, and reassure people that their Judaism provides a sanctuary and a source of comfort, then it is likely that these new rituals will become a stable presence and a source of new strength in synagogue life."[1] There are several ideas in this statement that bear further thought. First, there is the "desire to give voice to encounters with life's difficulties." Those difficulties include disillusionment with the ideals of the Enlightenment and the Industrial Age, that science and technology have

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[1] Diamant, A., ed. CCAR Lay Involvement in Liturgical Change and Renewal, Project Resources. CCAR Lay Involvement in Liturgical Change and Renewal Grant, 1996, p.2.

solved some problems but created other problems; that material benefits have not improved life emotionally and psychologically for many people, nor has personal autonomy; that the twentieth century has seen so much evil and brokenness; and that, we still have to face disease and death.[2] Congregants are looking to their rabbis, cantors, and congregations to help them to articulate their concerns, and then to provide acceptance, comfort, and support. Congregants see healing services as a means of validating their feelings of anxiety and their pain and grief. Healing services can help them to feel cared for, and that God, in particular, cares for them.

We shall be examining healing services in terms of how they are compiled and composed as a form of worship, how they express pain, fear, grief, and other emotions, and how they ask for God's help and compassion.. Twenty-two healing services, including but not limited to those collected as part of the "Lay Involvement in Liturgical Change and Renewal" project, were studied for this topic. They were created and compiled by congregational clergy and members. Some are designed for a specific occasion, such as prior to Yom Kippur. Others are used regularly for congregational worship, often on a monthly basis.

The Structure of Healing Services

Anita Diamant, editor of the materials of the project, calls the healing service a new form of liturgy, rarely resembling the structure of traditional services.[3] Some individual elements of traditional liturgy may be included in a healing service, such as Kaddish, but the compilers of these services question the meaning, message, and purpose

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[2] Rabbi Peter Knobel, 1/12/99; Rabbi Richard Address, personal conversation, 1/4/99.
[3] Diamant, op.cit., p. 1.

of each element they select. In other words, there are no "givens." This is, in terms of normative liturgy, a radical position to take. On the one hand, the basic, normative pattern of liturgy is broken. This is the pattern that holds that there are preliminary prayers to help the worshipper focus, followed by prayers of praise and thanksgiving, then the statutory prayers: the *Shema* and the *Amidah*, Torah reading or other particular observance, and concluding with *Aleinu* and *Kaddish*, with an appropriate closing prayer or hymn. On the other hand, there are normative practices of place and time that may not be observed in a healing service, as for instance, having a healing service on a Friday evening; in normative terms, Shabbat is deemed not to be an appropriate time for supplication. (The apparent contradiction between not including supplications in Shabbat liturgy in general, while incorporating the *mi sheberach* into the service may be understood from the perspective that that is when people are in the synagogue. Weekday synagogue worship is not a part of most people's prayer habits. The *mi sheberach* also serves as a vehicle for communicating to the congregation who is ill.)

Until about two hundred years ago, the pattern of liturgical development was almost entirely additive. Until the first attempts at prayerbook reform that were the beginnings of the progressive movements within Judaism today, it was held that the structure of the service could not be changed.[4] The addition of prayers and poems occurred according to long-established norms, and once accepted into the service, material could not be removed. Inclusion in a prayerbook granted an almost sacred status. When the early reformers determined that their prayer books should be adapted to their modern,

[4] The addition of *Kabbalat Shabbat*, under Lurianic influence, did not alter the structure of the statutory rubics. Even though it has its own structure, it is said as a preliminary service, before *Ma'ariv*.

enlightened times, criteria for excision were carefully applied. Prayers that were redundant could be removed, as could prayers and poems relating to ancient events and personages whose importance had been forgotten, or whose language was obscure, ambiguous, or rambling.

As religious reform within Judaism expanded beyond the prayer book, many long-held beliefs also changed, i.e., rebuilding the Temple and reinstituting the sacrifices, mysticism, angelology, hope for a return to Zion and belief in a personal messiah and resurrection of the dead. Modernity influenced theology, profoundly; the God of enlightened, rational Jews was not the personal or punishing God of before, but One who was the basis for ethics and morality, and for advocating universal justice. God became a "God-idea," transcendent rather than immanent. Material that evinced the old beliefs became subject to removal from the prayer book. Language became more reserved, less emotional on the whole, and prayers and even whole rubrics became more concise, in keeping with the desired dignity and decorum of the Protestant Christian services upon which it came to be modeled.

With all of these changes, the basic structure of worship, the fixed prayers and the order in which they occurred, was not disturbed. Statutory prayers, established by the Rabbis by the middle of the sixth century, CE,[5] were still accepted and were not challenged as to whether or where they belonged. Post-Enlightenment prayer books may be extremely abbreviated in comparison to their predecessors, but all statutory rubrics remained. (*Tahanun*, which was eliminated, as a rubric, for several of the reasons given

[5] Elbogen, op.cit., p. 219.

above, is not statutory.) With few exceptions, e.g., Congregation Emanu-el of New York City, the lapse of the practice of regular, daily worship also eliminated the opportunity for personal prayer within the synagogue community.

This is what makes healing services initially startling to look at, as liturgy. It also opens them to the question, "What is Jewish about this service?" In fact, these services do use prayers from established liturgy, such as *Asher yatzar* and *Elohai Neshama* from the morning service. They also, almost always, include a *mi sheberach* prayer for healing, the Priestly Benediction, psalms, and *Kaddish*. They may also include *Shema* and *V'ahavta*.[6] All of these prayers are distinctively Jewish, but they are used because of their meanings and how those meanings serve the purpose of the service. (The service itself is created for the specific purpose of "healing," which will be discussed below.) This is a service which, rather than being a part of the weekly pattern of communal worship, is offered to and for a specific constituency of the congregation, a self-selected group who are in need of or feel the need for healing. As we shall see in the prayers selected for inclusion in these services, "healing" has many meanings for contemporary worshippers. It is also a service which may add new, non-verbal elements, such as deep breathing and meditation, to more familiar non-verbal elements such as candle lighting or hand-washing, which are not traditionally synagogue-based.

However, there does appear to be a common structure of sorts, which, in the most general sense, does follow the normative pattern. The pattern is to focus on the physical world first, the body and daily life. Where prayers of praise and thanksgiving are present,

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[6] Diamant, op.cit., p. 2.

including *Asher yatzar*, *Elohai neshamah*, and *Nissim b'chol yom*, they come in this section of the service. Attention is then directed inward, with prayers, poems, and readings about the soul. If there is a *d'var Torah*, it comes next, followed by prayers for healing. Prayers for remembrance and *Kaddish* follow, and the service ends with closing prayers, often the Priestly Benediction and/or *Tefilat ha derech*. In the sense that the normative structure is one of increasing focus and intention, a center, and gradual outward focus, then healing services do seem to adhere to it, albeit with different content.

One can then ask if a service without the *Shemonah Esrei*, without the *Shema* or *Aleinu*, can technically be termed liturgy at all. From this perspective, without the structure that is familiar to those who understand it, the answer could be "no." Without the normative structure, healing services do not seem to be distinctively Jewish, and may even seem to be rootless, and invalid. However, Diamant sees the lack of predetermined structure as an advantage, freeing and challenging compilers and worshippers to invest the service as a whole, and the particular elements chosen - regardless of how traditional they may be - with new and specific meaning in the context of healing.[7]

Jules Harlow, a Conservative rabbi who is the editor of that movement's Mahzor for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur and *Siddur Sim Shalom*, views liturgy as a dynamic process. "We have an obligation to contribute to the ongoing development of that tradition for ourselves and for others," he says.[8] However, Harlow views attempts to find relevance in worship through new, creative liturgies as implying, incorrectly, in Harlow's mind, that the Rabbis were neither creative nor relevant when they developed the rubrics

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[7] ibid, pp. 1-4.
[8] Harlow, op.cit., p. ii.

of Jewish liturgy. Rather, Rabbinic and medieval liturgists were very creative in their use of mishnaic and other ancient sources in their poetry.[9] At the same time, "formal liturgical structures enable us to articulate reactions [to contemporary issues and problems] in classic formulations, which also bind the generations to each other and to God."[10] The genius of the structure that was created in the rabbinic period has been its ability to accommodate local custom and respond to local, immediate challenges while providing a stable and enduring platform for worship across space and time - even during periods of profound ambivalence and doubt. Harlow believes that the expression of ambivalence in faith is a valid element of prayer. He looks for ways in which contemporary sentiments can be heard, such as reflections of traditional rubrics in modern poetry, or using modern material to introduce traditional text, or the juxtaposition of modern themes with traditional ones.[11] Harlow also suggests looking at the ancient sources of later liturgical material, such as *piyyutim*, and bringing those texts forward into contemporary settings.[12] Harlow never suggests discarding the statutory rubrics, since he believes that they are important for our people's continuity. Discarding these forms risks cutting ourselves off from our heritage. Harlow's ideas for creating new liturgy, firmly anchored in classical modes, can be seen in the healing services that are being developed today.

From a practical standpoint, whether healing services can be defined in terms of normative liturgy may not matter. Many congregants do not distinguish between a "service" and "liturgy." They may not know enough about liturgy to be able to tell how

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[9] ibid, p. 16.
[10] ibid, p. 3.
[11] ibid, p.7.
[12] ibid, p. 16.

different a healing service is, and they may not care. For some, who find contemporary liturgy insufficient, for a variety of reasons, this may be an advantage; they just want to pray, in a group and in the synagogue, according to their needs. (One is reminded, without pushing the point too far, that the first stirrings of reform were felt when laymen attempted to change the *siddur* to address their sensibilities and their needs in early nineteenth century Germany.[13])

However, it is part of the role of rabbis, prayer-leaders, and liturgists to maintain the congregation's awareness of the structure and order of prayer as part of our Jewish heritage. They must teach the service they are leading or composing, and provide that wider context of Jewish worship that identifies prayers with those who have prayed them for generations. They can ensure that new and innovative prayer can be, and is, understood as new growth from strong and established roots. Otherwise, contemporary prayer leaders may contribute to a lack of concern for the genuine, Jewish nature of modern Jewish worship that will undermine the Jewish identity of the next generation.

To the extent that contemporary services are annotated with sources and commentaries, the prayer book itself serves to educate the worshipper; among liberal prayer books, those of the Reconstructionist movement have much to offer in this regard. An example of how this can be accomplished in a healing service is "*Shema Koleinu:* A Liturgy for Healing," compiled in 1996 by Rabbis Nancy Flam and Yoel Kahn.

According to Rabbi Mark Goldman, of Rockdale Temple, Cincinnati, OH, people need and want both to be shown and to be told that it is acceptable to feel and to pray,[14]

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[13] Petuchowski, J. "Liberal *Halakha* and Liturgy" in Petuchowski, A. and Petuchowski, E., eds., Studies in Modern Theology and Prayer. Philadelphia, Jewish Publication Society, 1998, p. 170.
[14] Personal conversation, 9/23/98.

and the healing service can demonstrate a way to approach God. Rabbi Jonathan Katz, of Congregation Ner Shalom, Woodbridge VA, observes that communal prayer itself has an inherently healing aspect to it. He notes that "we need more focused moments for healing in and of itself. God is the ultimate healer but we want seemingly quicker access to that department in the sanctuary. This makes for increased differentiation that requires services of their own."[15] Moreover, a healing service provides validation and a way to express what is difficult for many people to articulate,[16] and this function is paramount. Thus the question of whether or not healing services are "liturgy" may be irrelevant to some worshippers.

The fact that healing services function as liturgy has broader implications for the practice of Jewish worship. The structure of the service, with its rubrics in their established order, has functioned for almost 2,000 years. Whether healing services are a passing trend or a real threat to the established order remains to be seen. Rachel Adler writes, "A liturgy speaks to the heart in the languages of the heart. To it belongs, not the reasoned discourse of science or positivism, but the allusive, elusive, impassioned discourse of metaphor and narrative, and of sound for its own sake: meter, rhyme, and melody, as well as the silent languages of gesture, of ritual art and ritual objects, of the environment of prayer, of fellowship."[17] She also says of new liturgies that are created separate and apart from what has been produced in the past and handed down to us, that they are risky; they may be "throw-away liturgies, liturgies that sound dated in five or ten

[15] Personal correspondence, 1/4/99.
[16] R. Richard Address, loc.,cit., 1/4/99.
[17] Adler, R. and Weisman, Y., op.cit., p. 14.

years time, prayerbooks that must be utterly transformed every twenty years, services which are passe in a matter of months."[18]

Chava Weissler notes that "much modern ritual and liturgical innovation. . . has a more ephemeral quality" than that of the "religious classics" that have "the power to speak to those beyond the immediate environment in which the work was composed." [19] And yet, ritual and prayer must reflect the experiences of the community. The "collective experience of the melody of prayer" is created internally, within the congregation, and it is genuine if this happens, no matter what the community call themselves.[20] One key element in the staying power of innovation is whether it occurs within the traditional structure or not, i.e., whether it puts down any roots in Jewish tradition. However, even though such innovation, i.e., within tradition, may foster unity and perhaps even communal identity, it may not seem very innovative, precisely because of its fidelity to established norms. And there is always the problem of whether ignoring tradition results in new prayers that are themselves boring, and thus not much of an improvement.[21]

The integrity of the structure of the service should really be transparent to the worshipper. If the prayers and supplications are expressed through the structure, it if serves as a framework to support the needs of the worshipper, then it has done its job without being perceived as a burden or as interfering with the *kavvanah* of those who came to pray. When *keva* and *kavvanah* remain in balance, and this need for balance is

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[18] ibid.
[19] Weissler, C. "The *Tkhines* and Women's Prayer," CCAR Journal, vol. XL, no. 4, Fall, 1993, p. 84.
[20] Yehuda Nini, "Jewish Prayer in Our Days: A Discussion" op.cit., p. 34.
[21] Berkovits, E., ibid, p. 37.

respected, then the chances of a new service, like the healing service, gaining broad acceptance over time are greater.

Dov Sadan points to contemporary rabbinic reluctance to use inherited forms of prayer to express new concerns and experiences.[22] He sees the argument that these forms have become "sterile" as one "between those whose ears are opened to hear the commandment issued out of the storm of these terrible and wonderful days, and those whose ears are stopped up so that they have not heard it." Perhaps we have not yet found the words to express in prayer what has happened in our generation, or that they are words of rebellion against the old prayers and we cannot bring ourselves to say them.[23] Both Elie Wiesel and Jakob Petuchowski have said that prayer can be an appropriate venue for protest and argument, if we are willing and can find the words.[24]

The Language of Healing Services

The pre-modern voice of supplication was abject in its self-abasement. There was virtually no questioning of whether the worshipper was deserving of more fortunate circumstances; he was not. If he were to be granted any relief from his trials and tribulations, it would be if and when it was God's will that his suffering be eased. His suffering was the suffering of the community, as often because of oppression from outside forces as because of sin itself. This supplicant did have confidence that God heard his prayers and pleading, else he would not have done it so much; he had the precedents of the past to tell him that he could and should pray for God's help. He just did not know when God would answer.

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[22] Sadan, D. "Some Thoughts on the Subject of Jewish Prayer," ibid, p. 22.
[23] ibid, p.23.
[24] Wiesel, op.cit., p. 9; Petuchowski, op.cit., p. 29.

The voice of modern prayer became reserved and rational. Modern man, particularly the modern Reform Jew, did not share his feelings and his personal concerns with God, because he now felt the he was capable of dealing with them himself. Moderns prayed, but for many there was no expectation that God was involved enough in their world to respond.

The healing service is not a modern phenomenon, but rather a post-modern seeking for comfort from pains and problems that modernity did not alleviate, suffering and loss that modernity may even have exacerbated. A new voice of supplication can be heard in a healing service. The focus of prayer is very personal, but the language is not self-abasing. The need for God's comfort is admitted, and God is being sought rather than implored. In seeking God, there is an admission that the appreciation of prayer as a way of speaking, as an approach to God, has lapsed. Indeed, some of the material chosen for healing services indicates that it is the appreciation that God is approachable at all has lapsed, and that is what is being sought. Rabbi Sheldon Zimmerman's poem[25] is included in many services:

O My God
My soul's compassion
My heart's precious friend
I turn to You.
I need to close out the noise
The noise that interrupts -
The noise that separates -
The noise that isolates.
I need to hear You again.
In the silence of my innermost being,
In the fragments of my yearned-for wholeness,
I hear the whispers of Your presence -
Echoes of the past when You were with me

[25] Zimmerman, S., in Weintraub, S. Healing of Soul, Healing of Body, Woodstock, VT, Jewish Lights Publishing, 1994, p. 101-102.

When I felt Your nearness
When together we walked -
When You held me close, embraced me in Your love,
laughed with me in my joy.
I yearn to hear You again.
In Your oneness, I find healing.
In the promise of Your love, I am soothed.
In Your wholeness, I too, can become whole again.
Please listen to my call -
help me find the words
help me find the strength within
help me shape my mouth, my voice, my heart
so that I can direct my spirit and find You in prayer
In words only my heart can speak
In songs only my soul can sing
Lifting my eyes and heart to You.
Adonai S'fatai Tiftach - Open my lips, precious God,
so that I can speak with You again.

The poem is usually placed early in the service. It recognizes that the distance between the speaker and God did not always exist, that there was a time when God was nearer. It speaks to our limitations without God as an active Presence in our lives. Its plea for help is not because of the unworthiness of the speaker, but because of the speaker's desire to return to that earlier, immanent relationship with God. The use of the phrase, "*Adonai s'fatai tiftach,*"[26] links this poem to the *Shemoneh Esrai*, as it serves as an introduction to praise, thanksgiving, and petitions. In its context in the psalm, the speaker, reputedly King David, is expressing his contrition and asking God to have mercy on him and to pardon him from his sins. As used in this contemporary poem, we see humility, but not self-abasement, and a plea for comfort and support, rather than forgiveness. Yet the use of these words, even with their altered meaning in a new context, connects us to our traditional mode of prayer. They speak to the sensibility of our time,

[26] Ps. 51:17.

but this connection to tradition helps us to feel confident that this prayer will be heard. There is a sense of vulnerability in this poem, a recognition that the speaker needs to recover his/her relationship with God in order to carry on. As such it sets a tone for the service that is both seeking and open.

Asher yatzar comes from the morning service. It expresses a sense of appreciation for the daily renewal of bodily functions, as a person regains awareness of physical being as s/he regains consciousness. In a healing service, *Asher yatzar* becomes the wonder of life itself, as well as a reassurance of basic functions that many people cannot take for granted. *Elohai neshama* in this context affirms the inherent worth of the individual, and by extension, his/her being deserving of God's attention and care. Shema Koleinu: A Liturgy of Healing[27] includes *Nisim b'chol yom*, the blessings for the miracles of daily life, which provides, in its English rendering, three ways of understanding the traditional Hebrew:

Baruch Atah Adonai, Eloheinu Melech HaOlam	*Nevarech et Ayn HaChaim, Yotzeret HaOlam*	*Berucha at Yah, Chei HaOlamim*
Blessed are You, Eternal, Our God, Ruler of Creation	Let us bless the Source of Life, Creator of all	We praise the One, Source of Eternity

pokeach ivrim	. . . who open the eyes of those who would not see . . . who enables us to see . . . for insight and wisdom
malbish arumim	. . . who clothes the naked . . . whose spirit clothes our bodies . . . for clothing and shelter
matir asurim	. . . who frees the captive . . . who empowers us to free ourselves

[27] Rabbi Nancy Flam and Rabbi Yoel Kahn, 1996.

	from oppression . . . for the courage to move beyond our own and other' expectations
rokei'a ha-aretz al ha-mayim	. . . who makes the earth firm upon the waters . . . who establishes the rhythms of our bodies and our world . . . for ordering the universe
she-asa li kol tzorki	. . . who provides for all my needs . . . who enables us to meet our needs . . . for an earth blessed with abundance
ha-meichin mi-tzadei gaver	. . . who makes human steps firm . . . who guides us on our journeys . . . for paths and callings
ha-notein la'ayef ko'ach	. . . who gives strength to the weary . . . who sustains our spirits . . . for hope in the face of despair
ha-mechadesh b'chol yom tamid ma'asei bereishit	. . . who renews the work of creation every day . . . who summons us to grow each day . . . for the daily mystery of creation unfolding

Together these traditional borrowings from the morning liturgy reassure the worshipper that s/he is valuable and has merit, in our tradition, to pray. Their placement early in the service, as preliminary prayers - just as they appear in the morning service - conforms to the normative pattern of addressing God with praise and thanksgiving before one addresses God with petition. The use of components of traditional liturgy does, indeed, serve as an invocation of the past, of the heritage of prayer and petition. New prayers gain legitimacy by their association with "tried and true" modes of worship.

Psalms have been a sustained source of petition, supplication, comfort, and praise throughout much of Jewish history, going back to the days of the Temple in Jerusalem.[28] They appear in liturgy in whole, in parts, and as compilations of individual verses. Tractate Soferim[29] tells us that the presence of psalms in liturgy is because of popular demand. Almost one-third of the Psalms are petitionary in nature - 48 of 150 - and forty speak in the voice of the individual.[30] Within the statutory rubrics, there are 250 individual verses from Psalms, and there is no special or non-statutory service that does not include some material from Psalms.[31] *Sefer Tehillim* is often printed in a separate edition, in a size and format suitable for carrying in purse or pocket for personal reflection. In addition, people recited and continue to recite sets of psalms daily as part of their liturgical and healing practice.

Of the twenty-two healing services studied for this thesis, only nine of these services include at least one psalm or selection of verses from Psalms as part of the service. One modern poet, however, Debbie Perlman, is identified as a "psalmist," writing primarily, but not exclusively, for one congregation (note: two collections published). Her work often speaks to specific situations in a person's life, particularly illness and its progress and treatment. In the immediacy of her subject matter, her poems may seem more comparable to *tkhines* than to biblical psalms; these are works written primarily for a female audience, often in somewhat elevated language, that focus on the events and concerns of everyday life. But Perlman's poems are also direct in their expression of

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[28] Idelsohn, op.cit, p. 14-15.
[29] 18:1.
[30] Encyclopedia Judaica, op.cit., vol. 13, col. 1314.
[31] ibid, col. 1324.

experience and feeling, turning to God for comfort and support, speaking to God directly. Their connection to psalms is evident.

The contemporary material, prose and poetry, that have been chosen for these healing services is very personal. Much of the material evinces a need for acceptance, for belonging, for God's care and concern. To be sure, many of the prayers for healing are included on behalf of those who are, indeed, physically ill and suffering from disease and its effects on both body and spirit. However, these services also address the suffering of those who are healthy in body, but sick at heart. They assume that psychic and spiritual pain are as valid, and as much in need of healing, as physical pain. Here is one example:

We pray that we might know before whom we stand; the Power whose gift is life, who quickens those who have forgotten how to live.
We pray for winds to disperse the choking air of sadness, for cleansing rains to make parched hopes flower, and to give us all the strength to rise up towards the sun.
We pray for love to encompass us for no other reason save that we are human - the we may all blossom into persons who have gained power over our own lives.
We pray to stand upright, we fallen; to be healed, we sufferers; we pray to break the bonds that keep us from the world of beauty, we pray for opened eyes, we who are blind to our authentic selves.
We pray that we may walk in the garden of a purposeful life, our own powers in touch with the power of the world.
Praise to the God whose gift is life, whose cleansing rains let parched men and women flower toward the sun.[32]

A few healing services include a section called "*Tahanun*." They begin with the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy,[33] have two intermediate readings, oriented towards atonement and forgiveness, and end with *Avinu Malkeinu*. Those healing services that are intended for use during the High Holy Days also include a brief section on confession.

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[32] Stern, C., Gates of Prayer, op.cit., p. 255.
[33] Ex. 34: 6-7.

The sins being confessed are those of insensitivity or inaction in the face of destructive behavior or attitudes:

For the sins which we have committed by abusing our bodies: with food, with alcohol, with tobacco, with fatigue, with stress.
For the sins we have committed by taking our bodies for granted.
For the sin we have committed by failing to care for our bodies regularly.
For the sin we have committed be remaining silent while those we love hurt themselves.
For the sin we have committed by shutting out the pleas of those who love us while we hurt ourselves.
For the sin we have committed by assuming that health care is equal for everyone.
For the sin we have committed by failing to respond to our youth sufficiently when they cry in despair and fear.
For the sin we have committed by shutting our eyes to those who exist alone in the isolation of age and illness.
For the sin we have committed by our impatience with those who are depressed or whose illness is chronic.
For the sin we have committed by ignoring the blessings of our health.
For all these sins, God of forgiveness, forgive us, pardon us, grant us atonement.[34]

This particular confession combines failures of personal behavior with failures of communal behavior, including issues of social justice, *tikkun olam*, repair of the world, with what we might call *tikkun hanfesh*, repair of the soul.[35] In turning to prayers for healing, the traditional *mi sheberach* formula is used in combination with other prayers, poems, and texts. *"Mi sheberach"* begins a variety of prayers for the health and well-being of individuals or groups, on the occasion of happy events, such as a birth or *bar/bat mitzvah*, as well in cases of illness. While a *mi sheberach* is normally offered on behalf of a member of the community after an *aliyah* to the Torah is completed, in a healing service it stands on its own. It is also used to encompass a range of needs beyond physical illness, following on the rabbinic understanding that "there are multiple dimensions to the

[34] A Service of Healing for the High Holy Days, Temple Israel, Minneapolis, MN.
[35] Rabbi Jonathan Katz, loc.cit.

experience of illness and healing . . . we seek healing of the body, or cure, but we also seek healing from all of the social, emotional, and spiritual assaults to the person that often occur with serious illness"[36] *Mi sheberach* prayers have also come to include caregivers, both professional and not, and suffering that is not only physical. We can also note that more attention is being paid in recent years to the needs of caregivers for healing and spiritual sustenance.[37]

Mi sheberach avoteinu m'kor habracha l'imoteinu. . . May the One who blessed our ancestors, bless all who are touched by illness. Grant insight to those who bring healing, courage and faith to those who are sick, love and strength to us and all who love them. God, let Your spirit rest upon those who are ill and comfort them. Watch with special care over. . . . Speedily and soon may we all come to know a time of *refu'a shleima*, a complete healing, a renewal of body and spirit, and let us say: Amen.

"For Caregivers"

Show me how to offer hope.
Open Your Hand with the colors of faith
That I might begin to fill in the spaces
To strengthen another's life.

Show me how to offer comfort.
Point out Your nesting place,
Feathered against the adversities
That would keep those I love

Show me the direction
When I am lost,
Searching to help
But finding no paths.

Show me tolerance,
When I am weary of helping,
And a long dreary day
Stretched toward a restless night.

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[36] Anita Diamant. Intro to "*Mi sheberach*" section of healing services project materials.
[37] According to Rabbi Sheldon Zimmerman, there is an annual service of memory at Children's Medical Center in Dallas, attended by hospital staff, that provided a liturgical framework for grief and healing for health care professionals.

You place before us life and love;
Show us endurance.
You place before us healing and hope;
Show us persistence.

Reach deep within me, Eternal Strength,
And bring my strength to consciousness.
Pull it around us;
Let it radiate with Your Power;
Let it guide our way.
(Deborah Perlman)

(for health-care professionals)

Eternal God of compassion, I have devoted my life to heal others. Help me appreciate the intelligence and skills that You have granted me to be Your agent in bringing healing of body and soul. Let me continue to learn and discover Your truth. Help me maintain my dedication to bring healing to the world. Praised be You, divine Healer.[38]

It is common for only one or two *mi sheberach*-type prayers to be used in a single service. However, the song "*Mi Sheberach*," written by Debbie Friedman, is almost always present in a healing service. Indeed, it has been added to a great number of services in the Reform Movement in this country in recent years, as a standard component following either the *Shemoneh Esrei* or the Torah service, if there is one. (One rabbi has referred to it as the new "national anthem" of the Reform movement.) Perhaps the source of the attraction for this song, which, after all, is an abbreviated and revised version of the prayer itself, is that many people may recognize that it comes from traditional prayer, but that it is, as the same time, very accessible through its melody. While there are those congregants who find this song trivial, it has given people access to a voice of prayer with

[38] CCAR Lay Involvement in liturgy project - Healing Services, section of *Mi sheberach*, pp. 1-5.

which many had been unfamiliar, and they appreciate that there is a place in a Jewish worship service to pray for the sick.

One prayer that is often used in addition to the *mi* sheberach is the "Litany of Healing:"

When Miriam was sick her brother Moses prayed:
"O God, heal her, please!" We pray for those who are now ill:
Source of life, we pray: Heal them!
We pray for those who are affected by illness, anguish, and pain.
Source of life, we pray: Heal them!
Grant courage to those whose bodies, holy proof of Your creative goodness, are violated by illness and the pain of illness.
Source of life, we pray: Encourage them!
Grant strength and compassion to families and friends who give their loving care, support, and help to overcome despair.
Source of life, we pray: Strengthen them!
Grant wisdom to those who probe the deepest complexities of Your world as they labor in search of treatment, cures, and healing.
Source of life, we pray: Inspire them!
Grant clarity of vision and strength of purpose to the leaders of our institutions and our government. May they be moved to act with justice and compassion and find the courage to overcome fear and hatred.
Source of life, we pray: Guide them!
Grant insight to us all, that we may understand that whenever death comes, we must accept it - but that before it comes, we must resist it, by prolonging life and by making our life worthwhile as long as it is lived.
Source of life, we pray: Bless us and heal us all![39]

A litany is a prayer consisting of a series of petitions or entreaties, and this prayer is such a series. However, in the restraint of its language, as well as in the wordiness of the individual prayers that make up this litany, it does not rise above the level of petition into supplication. The prayers of the traditional *Tahanun* and *Selichot* liturgies gain much of their emotional level from the repetition of the themes of unworthiness, sinfulness, and

[39] *Tefillat Refu'at Ha-Nefesh*, Temple Emeth, Teaneck, NJ.

guilt, yet their language is as direct as it is unrestrained. The voice of supplication as it is heard in these healing services works best when it, too, is direct, when it states emotion and need clearly and simply, without qualifying phrases.

This voice is heard, still, through the psalms. Whether psalms are included as a voice of traditional supplication, in recognition and respect for their power, or whether they allow new composers and poets to avoid having to write in the style of supplication, these ancient verses add power to the healing service wherever they are included. At K.K. Bene Yeshurun/ Isaac M. Wise Temple in Cincinnati, Rabbi Lewis Kamrass and Rabbi Richard Steinberg conduct a healing service that was compiled as a *ma'ariv*, a regular evening worship, service. The English renderings and non-statutory prayers in the service focus on God as the "Shepherd of Israel," "the Hand of Guidance," and on seeking wholeness and peace. The language is eloquent, as in their rendering of the *Avot* (which is recited responsively with the Hebrew):

"*We praise You, the Source of our strength throughout the ages.*
Who knew the fortitude of Abraham, the fragility of Isaac, and the humanity of Jacob.
Who understood the yearnings of Sarah, the strength of Rebecca, the pain of Leah and the hope of Rachel.
Great is Your power to assist, to change and move us from despair to hope, for You are on high.
Great is the divine compassion in us, for it is found in You, the Place..
You remember the good deeds of all - for that is when Your Presence is felt on earth.
Through You, the One who loves the People Israel, we will find redemption for us, for our children and for our children's children.
You are the Hand of Guidance, the One who will save us and shield us in our time of need.
We praise You, Shield of our ancestors who is our help today.[40]

[40] *R'fu-at Ha-Nefesh*: Service of Strength and Healing of the Soul. K.K. B'nai Yeshurun/ Isaac M. Wise Temple.

What raises the tone of this service into supplication is the presence of psalms as a column on the left-hand margin on every page. The layout of the page is used as a device to allow and invite the worshipper to focus in his/her own needs through the presence of this alternate text on every page. For example, alongside the *Avot* is Psalm 77: "I cry aloud to God. I cry to God that He may give ear to me. In my time of distress I turn to the Lord, with my hand uplifted [my eyes] flow all night without respite; I will not be comforted. I call God to mind. . ."[41] The supplication of the psalms and the prayers for comfort that appear side by side on the page are very effective in conveying their messages in an immediate and traditional mode.

In traditional liturgy, whole psalms and verses from psalms serve to expand on the themes of the rubrics; they sometimes stand on their own within a rubric, and sometimes function as introductions or as conclusions. In healing services, psalms are also used, in whole or as excerpts, to convey their own message, whether it be one of supplication or praise. They are there for their own sake, and their own ability to express the worshippers' needs. There is, however, less reliance on the psalms in healing services than in traditional liturgy. Perhaps this betrays some discomfort with the ancient expressions, or perhaps there is simply a preference for contemporary material. In any case, the use of psalms in healing services is intended to support the worshipper's communication with God, often in direct address:

Unto You, Adonai, I call
And unto You I make supplication.
Hear, Eternal, and be gracious unto me:
Adonai, be You my Helper.
You heal the broken-hearted,

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[41] Ps.77: 1-4.

And bind up their wounds.
You, who have done great things,
O God, who is like You?
God, hear my prayers,
And let my cry come to You.
Do not hide from me in the day of my distress;
Turn to me and speedily answer my prayer.
Heal me, Adonai, and I shall be healed;
Save me and I shall be saved;
For you are my praise.[42]

Consideration of Theology in Healing Services

Rabbi Elaine Zecher points to a significant implication of healing services - that the God whose comfort is being sought represents a change in theology for many Reform Jews. "The healing service invites us to turn to God not to resolve all our pain or end our suffering, but to find comfort and solace in God's presence."[43] Rabbi Peter Knobel observes that in a rationalist model of the world, one does not ask for divine help. The desire to feel cared for, and to feel that prayer is efficacious, marks a turn away from a rationalist view of the universe and towards accepting dimensions of reality other than the rational.[44]

This is not to say that healing services are not about seeking healing from physical illness, for ourselves and for others. Medicine and technology are keeping more people alive for longer periods of time. One ramification of this is that the suffering from an illness may be greatly prolonged, for the sick person, for family, friends, and community, and for caregivers. We are much more aware of these "ripple effects" of illness, beyond the physical aspects for the patient, and beyond the patient him/herself. And we are aware

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[42] A Service of Healing, the Jewish Healing Center, San Francisco, CA.

[43] Diamant, op.cit., p.2.
[44] Rabbi Peter Knobel, loc.cit.

of the process of grief beginning long before the patient actually dies, as physical, mental, and social functions are lost. Longer life spans also mean there can be more people to care for and to worry about, as adults care for aging parents. We need God to be with us in these times of illness more than ever.

Modernity made the immanent God of its forebears into a transcendent God, turning a balance of the two into an "either/or" proposition, with transcandence overcoming immanence. The support and caring that God once provided was now supposed to come from one's neighbors, if, indeed, one could admit to needing support and caring at all. Rabbi Richard Address observes that late twentieth century Americans grew up with the assurance that any problem could be solved, and anyone could achieve and attain his/her self-determined goals.[45] The neighbors are only human, just as we are, busy with their own goals; on the other side of autonomy is loneliness. Our society and technology have not solved every problem. As Rabbi Address notes, "we're still going to die." And we miss God.

Rabbi David Wolpe writes that the advances in technology and science in our days have not made us righteous, or saved the world.[46] We are still afraid of uncertainty in our lives, and all of us are still going to die. To address God in prayer is to begin to probe those fears and find a way to live with them and in spite of them.[47] Prayer is where we develop the personal relationship with God, involving the heart as well as the intellect, through the direct experience and honest attempt to encounter God for oneself. The desire to encounter God through prayer, in the synagogue, with assurance that God hears,

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[45] Rabbi Rishard Address, loc.cit.
[46] Wolpe, D. Healer of Shattered Hearts. New York, Penguin Books, 1990, p. 11-12.
[47] ibid, pp.27-29.

is expressed in the Talmud: "Is there a God closer than this, that one can enter a synagogue, hide behind a pillar and whisper, still God hears?"[48]

Rabbi Jules Harlow suggested, in his 1979 paper, that "perhaps one definition of prayer could be to bring God back into the world, to help establish His Kingship, to let His glory prevail. Perhaps to worship God is to expand the Presence of God in our midst."[49] Healing services seem to be saying, albeit with more egalitarian images, the same thing. People are praying to reestablish God's Presence in their world, not to solve problems, but to be a Presence. Although the term "*Shechinah*" is not prominent in healing services at this time, these services ask God's Presence to dwell among God's people again. As the Kotzker Rebbe said: Where is the dwelling of God? God dwells wherever [we] let God in.[50]

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[48] b.*Ber*. 13a.
[49] Harlow, op.cit., p. 5.
[50] Buber, M. Tales of the Hasidim. New York, Schocken Books, 1991, p.277.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY

Our prayers reflect not only how we think of God, but how we think of ourselves, as human beings. Our understanding of human nature, with its potential and its failures, is the basis for approaching God. It is what we talk to God about, what we want God to know, and how we will relate to God. Our perceptions of ourselves, as humans, have changed over time, and we can see in Jewish personal prayer an evolving view of Jewish self-concept.

Personal prayer encompasses a variety of requests that can range from guidance in everyday life to extremely emotional supplications for God's help and for God's forgiveness of transgression. Transgression, in turn, may be understood as the mistakes we make because we are human, in spite of and coexisting with one's best efforts, or an irremediable flaw that results in continually doing wrong or freely choosing to do what is wrong. Jewish prayer assumes that God hears prayer, that God is always receptive to the offering of an honest heart. Repentance is always possible; God forgives those who place themselves on the path of *teshuvah*.

We have examined and analyzed the nature and the development of three ways of addressing God and asking for God's compassion, forgiveness, and grace. We have noted the importance of public, communal prayer, which benefits both the community and the individual. Yet we have also noted that the individual still needs time for personal prayer

and moments of encounter with God. The Rabbis understood these needs and attempted to balance them in their construction of the framework of prayer.

The *Tahanun* service, which began as a time, after the *Amidah*, for one's personal prayers, developed into a confession of sin and plea for God's forgiveness for the sinful nature of human beings, which brought punishment upon them, and from which they were asking God to be merciful. The *Tannaim* understood that prayer, even within the framework of statutory themes, had to come from the heart, and had to speak for the heart. In their time, they understood this to mean a time for personal "words," to ask for guidance in dealing with what challenged them in their daily lives. They did not want to succeed at anyone else's expense, they wanted to behave correctly in all their endeavors, and they wanted to sense God's presence as a source of strength and support as they tried to live up to the standards they learned from the Torah.

In the interplay between the fixed (*keva*) and the fluid (*kavvanah*) in Jewish worship, communal prayer seems fixed to the individual worshipper. This is also a tension between the past, inherited prayer traditions, and the present, responses to contemporary life. While there is tension in the interaction between *keva* and *kavvanah*, between the past and the present, there is also the potential for this interaction to become a transformative experience.[1]

In the case of *Tahanun* this potential has not been realized. Rather, throughout the medieval period, *Tahanun* increasingly reflected an internalization of the restrictions

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[1] Rosenberg, S. "Prayer and Jewish Thought: Approaches and Problems (A Survey)" in Cohn & Fisch, op.cit., pp. 86-87.

and persecution imposed on Jewish communities by secular authorities. Powerless to effect any lasting changes on the outside, Jews in many places looked inward for the causes of their suffering. In determining that they must have deserved punishment, they equated their suffering with their own sins, magnifying what the Rabbis saw as requests for God's kindness and care into pleas for mercy. They understood their oppression as divine judgment against them, and their failures to protect themselves as deriving from some inherent flaw in their human condition. If they were being punished out of all proportion to the transgressions of which they were aware, there must be something about them that they could not avoid, unintentional sins - the sins of which they themselves were unaware, but that God could see. They questioned how they, as sinners, could ask for and expect God's grace and forgiveness. The petitions and supplications of *Tahanun* show how medieval Jews appealed to God's mercy and grace, in spite of their acknowledged wrongdoings.

As we discussed in Chapter 2, *Tahanun* as a separate rubric was excised from post-Enlightenment American Reform liturgy, and the time set aside for personal prayer has become shortened and poorly used. *Tahanun* represented a daily reinforcement of sinfulness, of constant need to ask for God's pardon for moral failure; it was somehow seen as dissonant with modern experience and modern men and women. It was discarded in both form and content. In the prayer books published by the CCAR, it is replaced with a single "meditation" in each service, after the *Amidah*. This is much closer to the earliest (i.e., *tannaitic*) Rabbis' intent for personal prayer, and far from the posture of sin and

confession, of self-abasement and guilt, of the classical *Tahanun*. The development of the *Tahanun* service was influenced by the form and content of the *Selichot* service.

Selichot began as prayers for forgiveness as well. Its poetic forms are complex and varied; as a body of literature it is so large as to eliminate the need for repetition of any given *selicha* over the course of the liturgical calendar year. The difficulty of *selichot* resides not only in its formal complexity, but also in the inventiveness with which the *payyetanim* used the Hebrew language, that is, the intrinsic difficulty of following and understanding the myriad of ways language and form are used. Equally important, if not moreso for modern worshippers, is its subject matter and historical context. Many *selichot* recall suffering from hundreds of years ago, and cultures and conditions under which Jews no longer live. Many of them evoke a mindset and a theology that modernity rejected. However, as shown with the example of a *gezerah* from this century, recalling the Holocaust, the *selicha* form of poetry can be a powerful and effective way to depict events which affect the Jewish people so deeply.

As a worship service in its own right, *Selichot* was intended for fast days and as preparation for the penitential season. It provided a format that was copied in the development of the *Tahanun* service: to approach God, to confess sin, to ask for God's pardon and forgiveness, to ask God for relief from trouble, and to express faith and hope in God's continuing care. *Selichot* fell into disuse in American Reform worship, as did *Tahanun*, but has been revived in the last decade as a service prior to Rosh Hashanah. In

composing contemporary *Selichot* services, liturgusts have retained the elements of confession, including the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy, and of hope for forgiveness.[2]

Finally, the healing service is a recent development in American Reform Judaism. It represents an attempt to reestablish a personal relationship with a caring God. The healing service may borrow from established norms of Jewish liturgy, but they are often given a new context as this service develops its own structure and patterns, giving the appearance of a new form of worship. Speaking about the materials collected for the CCAR's Lay Involvement in Liturgical Innovation and Change project, Rabbi Elaine Zecher noted that the process of compiling and composing a healing service was as important as the liturgy it produced.[3] She expressed a wish not to "codify" this type of service into a *siddur*, and in her comments one can hear an echo of the *Tannaim* and their resistance to written prayer texts. An old conversation about liturgy has come alive again.

Healing services bring a change in direction and tone to American Reform Jewish worship. They are intended to appeal to a more personal God, who is caring and comforting in an immediate sense. The goals of a healing service are to gain a sense of God's nearness, as well as God's grace and compassion, to regain a relationship with God. We are moving from the older notion of sinfulness and being deserving of punishment to a desire for *keruv*, coming closer to God. The challenge is to be open to God's presence, and even more than that, to admit the limits of our own power and yield to God's power to influence our lives.

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[2] See Stern, C., ed. Gates of Forgiveness. New York, CCAR Press, 1993.
[3] Rabbi Elaine Zecher, telephone conversation, 1/5/99.

The prayers in healing services have a posture of humility but not self-abasement. Rather than a confession of sin, there are admissions of weakness and need. Instead of asking for mercy and forgiveness, these prayers often simply ask for a sense of God's presence. The requests seem modest because they are on a personal scale, but in their openness, their admission of need, some of these prayers do go beyond petition and become supplication. For example:

Adonai, Teacher of Prayer,
open your lips within me, for I cannot speak.
Send me words to help me shape your praise,
to bring peace and blessing to my days
Too often the world has stifled all words of blessing within me,
So much has threatened to break my spirit
Help me, Adonai, for I have been so very low,
and you heal the broken in spirit and joy.
In Your compassion, in Your boundless love,
give me words of prayer; then accept them from me.
May my words, Your words, be sweet and whole before You
as the words of King David, sweet singer of psalms.
I am so often weary, empty, dry,
In thirst, in hunger, I seek comfort, even joy.
Transform my sorrow, Adonai.
Help me to renew my faith, my hopes,
as I raise my soul toward You.
Open Your lips within me, Adonai,
That I may speak Your praises.[4]

Dear God,
We are bound with very tight knots.

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[4] "Regaining Balance: A Service of Healing," Temple Emanu-El, Cleveland, Ohio.

They choke off air and stop the blood from pulsating freely.
The knots make us like computers with carefully controlled circuitry.
The knots in our brains tie our creativity - our link with You.
We follow the knot around in its intricacy - but it remains a knot.
The knots in our hearts keep us from crying and dancing when we long to -
They tie us to the posts of the fences that separate us from each other.
The knots in our muscles keep our teeth clenched, our jaws locked, our legs crossed,
our chests from inhaling the full sweetness of life's breath.
O, God, help us untie all our knots![5]

The eighteenth-century Hasidic master Ya'akov Yosef Ha-Kohen taught that "man's service to God is hampered through his self-abasement. For it is on this account that he may fail to believe that it is man, who, by his prayer and his study of Torah, brings blessings to all the worlds and even sustains the angels. Once believing this. . . he would remember that the Holy One, blessed-be-He, watches over the lips of man to kiss them when he utters words of Torah and prayer with awe and love."[6] This image reminds us that our sense of unworthiness is only half the picture. We have seen how self-abasement can be carried to extremes in prayer-language, almost denying the creation of humanity "*b'tzelem elohim*." And we have noted the difficulty of maintaining such a posture, the constant reminders of unworthiness leading to depression and worse. The Chasidic "rebbes" were aware of this danger and taught that this is not appropriate. As Rebbe Nachman of Breslov wrote, "Feeling distant from God is subjective, not objective."[7] The

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[5] Weinberg, S., taken from "Renewing Life, Finding Wholeness - A Healing Service," Temple Judea, Tarzana, California.
[6] Ha-Kohen, Y. *Toldot Ya'akov Yosef*, Koretz, 1780, f. 172c.
[7] Rosenfeld, Z., ed. Rabbi Nachman's Wisdom, Breslov Research Institute, 1973, #52.

other half of the picture is the affirmation of a caring and loving God, who is close to us and who not only hears prayer, but listens for it and wants us to pray.

Jewish prayer has always included both private and communal worship, and has also undergone continuous evolution and refinement in response to the needs of communities in every age and wherever Jews have lived. In distinguishing between fixed patterns of worship and spontaneous expressions of personal devotion, we note that the latter has often found its way into fixed prayer, providing new inspiration and increasing the breadth and depth of Jewish services. At the same time, we are reminded that what appears as firmly attached through the use of generations began as new and innovative forms of prayer. At the heart of the discussion one can see the devotion to prayer, and to prayer in the synagogue. The interplay of private and communal prayer is dynamic. Judah Halevi held that individuals can only achieve true harmony in their prayers by praying as a community.[8] Yet there is no harmony without the contribution of each individual worshipper.

Rabbi David Wolpe reminds us that, according to a midrashic teaching, when the Israelites stood at Mount Sinai, God was revealed to each of them according to his/her ability to perceive; "the God who manifested Himself at Sinai was a personal God."[9] Abraham had a relationship with God before there was a covenant between them.

To return to the Rabbis' position that we need God's help because of the fact of our human-ness is difficult. It calls for a rebalancing of the equation, "The world was

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[8] Halevi, J. *Kuzari*, III:19.
[9] Wolpe, op.cit., p. 47.

created for my sake," versus "I am dust and ashes." To hold these two messages in balance is to be neither too arrogant nor too humble. This position requires in its way that we give up on modernity as an absolute promise, that we admit its failures. This would bring the equation back into balance by returning to a more appropriate sense of the limits of human power in regard to many aspects of living. If one of the factors in postmodernism is the recognition that modernity has not enabled us to solve every problem, and quickly, then perhaps we can give up feeling driven to do so. Again, our Sages teach us a perspective of balance: "Rabbi Tarfon said, 'You are not required to complete the work, but neither are you at liberty to abstain from it.'"[10]

On the wider scale, we can take responsibility for engaging in *tikkun olam* and working towards the ideals of social justice that American Reform Judaism advocates. And, we can accept the satisfaction of achieving smaller but steady successes rather than the rare and perhaps transient complete victory. The qualified language of "engaging in *tikkun olam*" and "smaller but steady successes" is deliberate; it is the "and" which links them that is important.

On a more personal level, there is the idea of *tikkun hanefesh*. The word "*tikkun*" means "repair," but it also reminds us of "*takkanah,*" which is a remedy, an improvement (or, in a legal sense, an amendment). We do not have to perfect ourselves, but we can, with God's help, strive to remedy our faults, and to improve both our shortcomings and our talents. Further, the notion that each person is all-powerful and in control sets up a crisis when that person falls ill. Personal health regimens of diet and exercise cannot

[10] M. *Avot* 2:21.

prevent every illness or guarantee complete recovery. The loss of control that comes with illness makes us angry and frustrated at our weakness and sense of failure.

Borowitz has written that the liberal religion of modernity "as good as deified the self," but the persistence of human failure has led us to reconsider at least some of our religious traditions. He continues, "Not only the grounding of traditional religion but also the warmth and habituation of its long-hallowed religious practices are necessary to nullify the pernicious effects of modern culture."[11] Without commenting on what Borowitz may mean by "religious practices" in general, it seems that in healing services there is the desire to regain some of that warmth through prayer.

To appreciate that God's care for us is an act of grace, freely given and undeserved, requires that we give up the cynicism of our age. Of course God has expectations of us. They are our Torah and our tradition. At its most basic, our covenant with God holds that "You will be to me a people, and I will be to you a God."[12] We cannot demonstrate this relationship by way of reason and argument. We can only sense God's reply inwardly. Yet to be open to this reply, to God's grace, is a vulnerable position to take, because it is so uncertain. We cannot know ahead of time what will happen. We are God's people, and in the belief that we are important to God, we offer our prayers.[13]

Levenson's work comes into play again here, in the sense that we realize that we need God to exercise control over the chaos in our world; we cannot accomplish this alone, without God. We call upon God to be present and powerful in the world again, to

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[11] Borowitz, op.cit., pp. 24, 25.
[12] Deut. 29:12.
[13] Wolpe, op.cit., p. 100-102.

help us overcome the *yetzer hara* that interferes with our moral judgment. We need God to help us to see ourselves and our world clearly, to know our strengths and our weaknesses, our tendency to disorder and our weak attempts to cultivate the *yetzer hatov*. If modernity has shown us how strong and how far our reach can be, we need God to remind and encourage us what to reach for. As Levenson says, we cannot repent without God's presence, which is the aim of repentance. We pray to God, who hears our prayers and is touched by them.[14]

In Chapter One we outlined some assumptions about petitionary prayer: that God is and that God acts in the world, that God hears prayer, and that the worshipper derives some benefit, some comfort from the act of praying. We have seen how human experience and need, particularly in times of trouble and oppression, has shaped the liturgy of petition and supplication. Modernity has seen a distancing from those assumptions in favor of a more human-centered view of religion, in no small measure because of the freedoms Jews have enjoyed in the modern world. Our view of human nature has changed from a limited one, in partnership with God, to almost complete powerlessness, to all-powerful, and is now realizing limitations and looking once again for partnership. If we are turning again to God and prayer, does that mean that we are suffering again, and if, so, from what?

As David Wolpe writes, "where anguish is greatest, the religious message is most significant. If God does not speak to suffering, to the shattered hearts of the Psalmist's plea, then He must remain peripheral to our lives. That which does not touch my pain leaves me as I was."[15] The anguish of our time, for many Jews, is the stress of daily life.

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[14] Levenson, op.cit., pp. 49-50.
[15] Wolpe, op.cit., p. 8.

To be in need of healing is not the same as being in need of treatment, nor is it the same as looking for a cure. To live with brokenness is to seek wholeness, to identify the missing and broken parts and put them together again.

The reemergence of the *Selichot* service is an indication of the search for wholeness, particularly at a time when we are reminded to take a personal accounting, in preparation for the High Holy Days. In using the synagogue as a locus for that preparation, the *Selichot* service builds on the structure and mode of prayer that is most familiar to worshippers. When healing services are looked at in a similar light, it becomes appropriate to think in terms of liturgy as a desired vehicle for doing spiritual work. That is to say, people want to approach God, they want to "pour out their troubled heart."[16] Liturgy is organized prayer that provides an ordered arrangement of prayers that helps them to do that. If prayer is not part of one's daily, or even weekly, routine, then the structure of liturgy can help a person begin. For such a person, the fact that a healing service does not adhere to the "rules" of traditional liturgy is irrelevant. Coming to the synagogue for personal prayer and supplication is also not so strange when the home is not a place where one normally prays.

It may be that the people who attend these services feel that the synagogue is the place where prayer happens for them. It may also be that they do not yet feel that they are close enough to God to pray in their own homes; they have to meet God at God's place, and they have to make an appointment. Attendance at services means that one is not

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[16] Idelsohn, op.cit., p. xi.

alone when one prays, so that there is the possibility of finding empathy and community support for one's personal struggle.

Just as cultural adaptation has always been a part of Jewish experience, so too, has the language in which Jews pray been influenced by their contemporary culture. The ancient poets of the Holy Land relied on the possibilities of language, engaging in "intricate wordplay and literary allusions;" medieval Spanish poets created elegant structures and forms and "exalted" poetic stances; in the ghettos of eastern and central Europe, poetry was "fervent and free-flowing" in its expression; and in modern, i.e., Western, European culture, Jewish poetry became dignified, reserved, quiet, and solemn.[17] Our language of poetry and our prayers of petition and supplication are still reserved enough that it can be hard to identify what is petition and what is supplication in the choice of words and images. For us, simply moving away from the words of ideas, of description and reasoned concern, and choosing words and images that speak of feeling, and to speak as sufferers, is an important step in the language of personal prayer. In other words, we are having to learn to personalize our prayers, not to have emotions, but to feel, not to be in pain, but to hurt. Not to talk about loneliness, but about being lonely. As well educated as so many of us are, as sensitive as we are to how words are used (and using a richly descriptive language, English), it is all the more difficult to pray in plain English and to express not our ideas about suffering and pain and struggle, but the existential reality of suffering and pain and struggle.

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[17] Borowitz, "The Individual and Community in Jewish Prayer" in Hoffman, op.cit., p. 57.

We return to Hillel's question. "If I am only for myself, what am I?" It is through God's gift of life and God's grace that we can become fully human, with all our potential. It is through God's grace that we are only human, and therefore limited in what we can accomplish on our own. But it is also through God's grace that we are aware of God, and can pray, and God will hear, and hearken.

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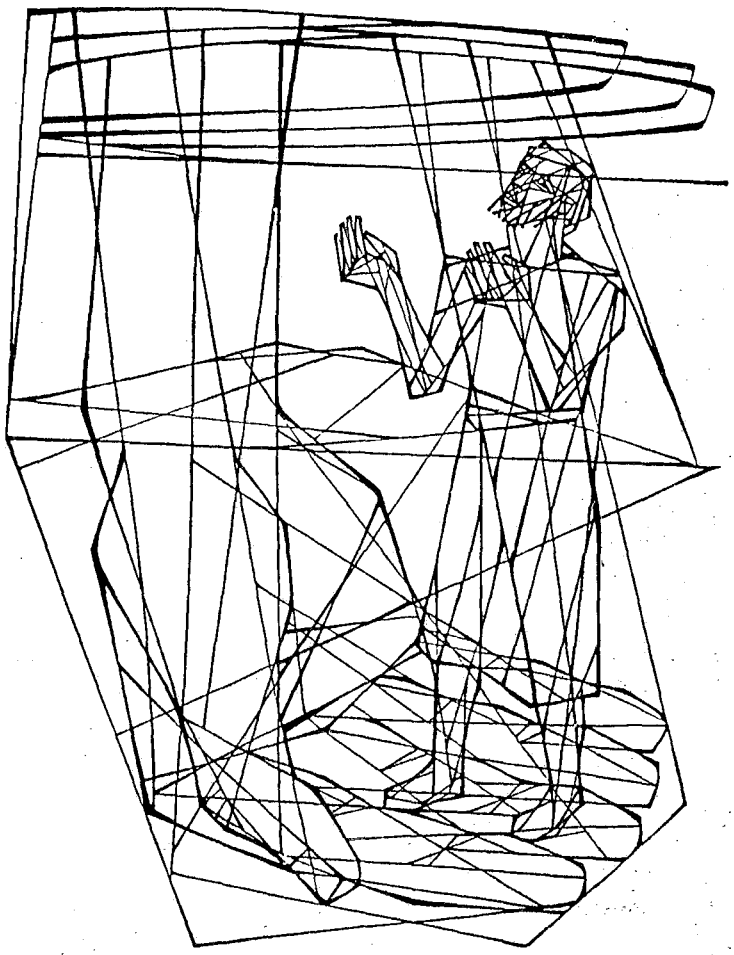
APPENDIX

SAMPLE LITURGIES

The liturgies included in this section represent some of what is being written and compiled for contemporary congregational use. They have been selected because they:

- express the themes and issues discussed in this thesis;
- appear to be grounded in the norms and traditions of Jewish liturgy; and
- flow smoothly and coherently within their rubrics.

R'FU-AT HA-NEFESH: SERVICE OF STRENGTH AND HEALING OF THE SOUL



K.K. B'NAI YESHURUN/
ISAAC M. WISE TEMPLE

INTRODUCTION

The story is told of a dinner party which a famous actor attended. Asked to offer a dramatic recitation, the actor stood and recited the 23rd Psalm. When he finished, all of the guests applauded his talent, recognizing the greatness of his art. Then an elderly guest stood and asked if he might also recite the 23rd Psalm. Gazing upward and closing his eyes, he spoke the words. There was silence in the room, as everyone's attention was focused on his words. When he was finished, there was no applause, but there were many tears, as people had been deeply moved. Later in the evening, another guest asked the actor why they were so moved beyond words or applause, by the old man's slow, halting manner, even though the actor's performance of the same words had been so masterful. The actor replied: "I know the 23rd Psalm, but the old man knows the Shepherd. That is the difference."

R'fuat Hanefesh is our attempt to know the Shepherd. This is not a service about theology; it is a moment of the spirit. It is not the time to talk about God, but to speak with God. This is the moment when we stop asking about the God in whom we believe, and approach the God with whom we share relationship. It is that intimate relationship, those conversations of the soul, that acknowledgment of God's presence, strength and comfort in OUR lives that transforms us from being actors to those who truly know the Shepherd. That is the challenge and the hope of this moment, that we may draw upon it throughout all our days, deepening our relationship of covenant with the Rock of our lives.

This service will refer to God by many names, for our tradition is rich with over a hundred names by which the Eternal is known. Even Moses' first encounter with God sought to know The Holy Ancient One's name. Yet in truth, we experience different aspects of the Creator in our multi-faceted and deep relationship with the Merciful One. We experience distance and grandeur, intimacy and presence, hidden and revealed, and so much more in the ongoing relationship with the One. And that is why God said that the name by which the Living Lord would be known is: "I will be that which I will be." As with Moses, we experience the privilege and the struggle of the spirit through which we discover the many facets of God reflected in the multitude of names. This bespeaks the deepening of our relationship with HaMakom, the Place, the place in our souls in which we connect to the Source of life.

The ancient rabbis taught (Leviticus Rabba 7:2) that "broken vessels are scorned by humans, but God uses them." That is the essence of a spiritual life. We are all broken vessels, torn by pain, loss, and disappointed hopes. But we are vessels that God uses. There is strength, comfort and hope that can be discovered out of our vulnerability, out of our true meeting with the Patient One. Our ancestors who knew God so well are our models. Like Moses who stuttered and Jacob who limped from a spiritual struggle born out of fear and regret, we too are impaired. We are among life's wounded. We have lost love, lost time, lost dreams, and lost vision. We have struggled with the years that have slipped away, the aspirations unfulfilled, the limitations that confront us with each day, and the doubts that shake us. We know the pain and the wounds, the limping soul, and the stuttering uncertain spirit in our lives. But the very vessels that we scorn, God uses and cherishes. And it is precisely when we feel so small that we can reach within to find a source of eternal and indomitable strength and hope. The Friend of the Universe helps repair and use broken vessels, providing us with healing and with strength, with a r'fuat hanefesh, a healing of the soul that guides us to choose life. We all need a Friend in our lives.

Psalm 42

Like a hind crying for water, my soul cries for You, O God; my soul thirsts for God, the living God; O when will I come to appear before God! My tears have been my food day and night; I am ever taunted with, "Where is your God?" When I think of this, I pour out my soul...Why so downcast, my soul, why disquieted within me? Have hope in God; I will yet praise Him for His saving presence. O my God, my soul is downcast; therefore I think of You in this land of Jordan and Hermon, in Mount Mizar, where deep calls to deep in the roar of Your cataracts; all Your breakers and billows have swept over me. By day may the Lord vouchsafe His faithful care, so that at night a song to Him may be with me, a prayer to the God of my life. I say to God, my rock, "Why have You forgotten me, why must I walk in gloom, oppressed by my enemy?" Crushing my bones, my foes revile me, taunting me always with, "Where is your God?" Why so downcast, my soul, why disquieted within me? Have hope in God; I will yet praise Him, my ever-present help, my God.

* * *

Turn us to you, O Lord, and we shall return;
renew our days as of old.

הֲשִׁיבֵנוּ יְהוָה ׀ אֵלֶיךָ וְנָשׁוּבָה חַדֵּשׁ יָמֵינוּ כְּקֶדֶם

Ha-shi-vei-nu Adonai ei-le-chah, v'na-shu-vah, cha-desh ya-mei-nu ke'kedem

* * *

In these prayers, we do not talk about God,
we talk to the Shepherd of Israel,
and we listen to God's voice in the stillness of our souls.
We pray for strength, for comfort, for hope.
We pray to feel The Sustaining Presence in our own lives.
We pour out the thirst of our souls for wholeness;
we pray for strength and hope to navigate the uncertain storm-tossed waters of our lives;
we ask for courage to confront our loneliness;
we seek a healing of our broken spirits
and our shattereddreams.
Through our trials and our brokenness, and with these prayers,
do we walk by The Light of the Universe toward a renewed fullness of life.

* * *

Each of us enters this sanctuary with a different need.

Some hearts are full of gratitude and joy:
They are overflowing with the happiness of love and the joy of life; they are eager to confront the day, to make the world more fair; they are recovering from illness or have escaped misfortune.
And we rejoice with them.

Some hearts ache with sorrow:
Disappointments weigh heavily upon them, and they have tasted despair; families have been broken; loved ones lie on a bed of pain; death has take those whom they cherished.
May our presence and sympathy bring them comfort.

Psalm 41

Happy is he who is thoughtful of the wretched; in bad times may the Lord keep him from harm. May the Lord guard him and preserve him; and may he be thought happy in the land. Do not subject him to the will of his enemies. The Lord will sustain him on his sickbed; You shall wholly transform his bed of suffering. I said, "O Lord, have mercy on me, heal me, for I have sinned against You." My enemies speak evilly of me, "When will he die and his name perish?" If one comes to visit, he speaks falsely; his mind stores up evil thoughts; once outside, he speaks them. All my enemies whisper together against me, imagining the worst for me. "Something baneful has settled in him; he'll not rise from his bed again." My ally in whom I trusted, even he who shares my bread, has been utterly false to me. But You, O Lord, have mercy on me; let me rise again and repay them. Then shall I know that You are pleased with me: when my enemy cannot shout in triumph over me. You will support me because of my integrity, and let me abide in Your presence forever. Blessed is the Lord, God of Israel, from eternity to eternity.

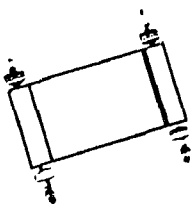
Some hearts are embittered:
They have sought answers in vain; ideals are mocked and betrayed; life has lost its meaning and value.
May the knowledge that we too are searching restore their hope and give them courage to believe that not all is emptiness.

Some spirits hunger:
They long for friendship; they crave understanding; they yearn for warmth.
May we in our common need and striving gain strength from one another, as we share our joys, lighten each other's burdens, and pray for the welfare of our community.

* * *

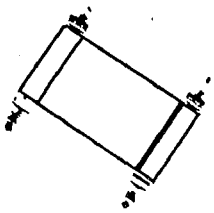
The soul that You have given me, O God, is pure! You have created and formed it, breathed it into me, and within me You sustain it.

אֱלֹהַי, נְשָׁמָה שֶׁנָּתַתָּ בִּי טְהוֹרָה הִיא!
אַתָּה בְרָאתָהּ, אַתָּה יְצַרְתָּהּ, אַתָּה נְפַחְתָּהּ בִּי,



E-lo-hai(2x) n'sha-ma
She-na-ta-ta bi t'ho-rahi

A-ta b'ra-ta, a-ta y'tzar-ta
A-ta n'fach-ta bi
V'a-ta m'sham'ra (2x) b'kir-bi



* * *

Prayer cannot bring water to parched fields, or mend a broken bridge, or rebuild a ruined city; but prayer can water an arid soul, mend a broken heart, and rebuild a weakened will.

please rise

בָּרְכוּ אֶת־יְיָ הַמְבֹרָךְ
Bar-e-chu et Adonai ham'vo-rach
Praise the Lord, to whom our praise are due!

בָּרוּךְ יְיָ הַמְבֹרָךְ לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד
Ba-ruch Adonai ham-vorach l'olam va-ed
Praise the Lord, to whom our praise is due, now and for ever!

Light and Darkness; The Essence of Living

Out of the creative darkness we were formed and each of us entered this world into light. From the blackness of nothingness, the bright star of creation led the way toward the Garden of Eden.

In the Garden, we tasted the sweetness of joy and the bitterness of pain. Along with our ancestors, we gained the knowledge that even in the depths of the night, a bright light of hope yet shines.

When the veil of evening falls, grant us, our Creator, patience, courage and inner strength, as we wait for the morning sun to rise. And when emptiness enters the dark lonely tunnels of the soul, may You, the One who knows the secrets of the heart, open our eyes to see the shining rays of hope.

* * *

Al Tasteir (Based on Psalm 27:9)

Don't hide Your face from me
I'm asking for Your help
I call to You - please hear my prayers, O God
If You would answer me as I have called to You
Please heal me now
Don't hide Your face from me.

* * *

שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל: יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ, יְיָ אֶחָד!
Shema Y'sra-el Adonai E-lo-hei-nu, Adonai e-chad

Hear O Israel: the Lord is our God, the Lord is One!

בָּרוּךְ שֵׁם כְּבוֹד מַלְכוּתוֹ לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד!
Ba-ruch shaim ke-vod mal-chu-to l'olam va-ed

Blessed is God's glorious kingdom forever and ever!

please be seated

* * *

Psalm 13

How long, O Lord; will You ignore me forever? How long will You hide Your face from me? How long will I have cares on my mind, grief in my heart all day? How long will my enemy have the upper hand? Look at me, answer me, O Lord, my God! Restore the luster to my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death; lest my enemy say, "I have overcome him," my foes exult when I totter. But I trust in Your faithfulness, my heart will exult in Your deliverance. I will sing to the Lord, for He has been good to me.

You Are the One

You are the One, for this I pray,
That I may have the strength to be alone.
To see the world, to stand among the trees,
And all the living things.
That I may stand alone and offer prayers and talk to You;
You are the One to whom I do belong.
And I'll sing my soul, I sing my soul to You
And give You all that's in my heart.
May all the foliage of the field,
All grasses, trees and plants,
Awaken at my coming, this I pray,
And send their life into my words of prayer.
So that my speech, my thoughts and my prayers will be made whole,
And through the spirit of all growing things.
And we know that everything is one,
Because we know that everything is You.
You are the One, for this I pray,
I ask You, God, to hear my words
That I pour out from my heart; I stand before You;
I, like water, lift my hands to You in prayer.
And grant me strength, and grant me strength to stand alone.
You are the One to whom I do belong.
And I'll sing my soul, I sing my soul to You
And give You all that's in my heart.

You are the One, for this I pray,
And I'll sing my soul to You.

* * *

וְאָהַבְתָּ אֵת יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכָל־לְבָבְךָ וּבְכָל־נַפְשְׁךָ וּבְכָל־מְאֹדֶךָ.
וְהָיוּ הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה, אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי מְצַוְּךָ הַיּוֹם, עַל־לְבָבֶךָ.
וְשִׁנַּנְתָּם לְבָנֶיךָ, וְדִבַּרְתָּ בָּם בְּשִׁבְתְּךָ בְּבֵיתֶךָ, וּבְלֶכְתְּךָ בַדֶּרֶךְ, וּבְשָׁכְבְּךָ וּבְקוּמֶךָ.

וּקְשַׁרְתָּם לְאוֹת עַל־יָדֶךָ, וְהָיוּ לְטֹטָפֹת בֵּין עֵינֶיךָ, וּכְתַבְתָּם עַל־מְזוּזוֹת בֵּיתֶךָ, וּבִשְׁעָרֶיךָ.

לְמַעַן תִּזְכְּרוּ וַעֲשִׂיתֶם אֶת־כָּל־מִצְוֹתָי, וִהְיִיתֶם קְדֹשִׁים לֵאלֹהֵיכֶם. אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם, אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִי אֶתְכֶם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לִהְיוֹת לָכֶם לֵאלֹהִים. אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם.

Psalm 61

Hear my cry, O God, heed my prayer. From the end of the earth I call to You; when my heart is faint, You lead me to a rock that is high above me. For You have been my refuge, a tower of strength against the enemy. O that I might dwell in Your tent forever, take refuge under Your protecting wings. Selah. O God, You have heard my vows; grant the request of those who fear Your name. Add days to the days of the king; may his years extend through generations; may he dwell in God's presence forever; appoint steadfast love to guard him. So I will sing hymns to Your name forever, as I fulfill my vows day after day.

Ve-a-hav-ta eit A-do-nai E-lo-he-cha, be-chol le-va-ve-cha, u-ve-chol naf-she-cha, u-ve-chol me-o-de-cha. Ve-ha-yu ha-de-va-rim ha-ei-leh, a-sher a-no-chi me-tsa-ve-cha ha-yom, al le-va-ve-cha. Ve-shi-nan-tam le-va-ne-cha, ve-di-bar-ta bam be-shiv-te-cha be-vei-te-cha u-ve-lech-te-cha va-de-rech, u-ve-shoch-be-cha u-ve-ku-me-cha.

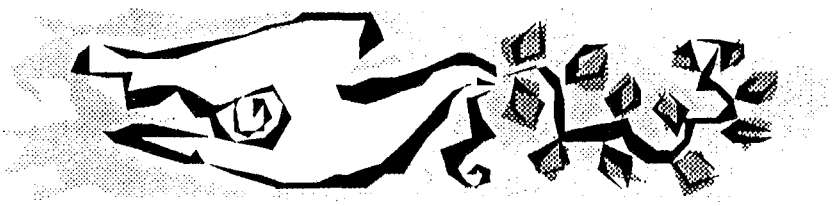
U-ke-shar-tam le-ot al ya-de-cha, ve-ha-yu le-to-ta-fot bein ei-ne-cha. U-che-tav-tam al me-zu-zot bei-te-cha u-vish-a-re-cha.

Le-ma-an tiz-ke-ru, va-a-si-tem et kol mits-vo-tai vi-he-yi-tem ke-do-shim lei-lo-hei-chem. A-ni A-do-nai E-lo-hei-chem, a-sher ho-tsei-ti et-chem mei-e-rets mits-ra-yim, li-he-yot la-chem lei-lo-him. A-ni A-do-nai E-lo-hei-chem.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-7
A season is set for everything, a time for every experience under heaven:
A time for being born and a time for dying,
A time for planting and a time for uprooting the planted;
A time for slaying and a time for healing,
A time for tearing down and a time for building up;
A time for weeping and a time for laughing,
A time for wailing and a time for dancing;
A time for throwing stones and a time for gathering stones,
A time for embracing and a time for shunning embraces;
A time for seeking and a time for losing,
A time for keeping and a time for discarding;
A time for ripping and a time for sewing,
A time for silence and a time for speaking;

Freedom from...

The ancient Israelites were enslaved by the brutality of the Egyptians. Today, we are enslaved by the shackles of despair. Our hearts yearn to be free from the pain that enters the soul and penetrates the heart. O God, Redeemer of all, allow our spirits to open as the Red Sea parted so that Your power of comfort and serenity will suffuse our inner spirits. Then we too will sing, "Who is like You, among the gods that are worshiped?"



Mi cha-mo-cha ba-ei-lim, Adonai?
Mi-ka-mo-cha, ne-dar ba-ko-desh,
no-ra te-hi-lot, o-seh fe-leh?

מִי־כָמֹכָה בָּאֵלִם, יְהוָה?
מִי כָּמֹכָה, נֶאְדָּר בַּקֹּדֶשׁ,
נוֹרָא תְהִלֹת, עֹשֵׂה פֶלֶא?

* * *

Psalm 77

I cry aloud to God; I cry to God that He may give ear to me. In my time of distress I turn to the Lord, with my hand uplifted [my eyes] flow all night without respite; I will not be comforted. I call God to mind, I moan, I complain, my spirit fails. Selah. You have held my eyelids open; I am overwrought, I cannot speak. My thoughts turn to days of old, to years long past. I recall at night their jibes at me; I commune with myself; my spirit inquires, "Will the Lord reject forever and never again show favor? Has His faithfulness disappeared forever? Will His promise be unfulfilled for all time? Has God forgotten how to pity? Has He in anger stifled His compassion?" Selah. And I said, "It is my fault that the right hand of the Most High has changed." I recall the deeds of the Lord; yes, I recall Your wonders of old; I recount all Your works; I speak of Your acts. O God, Your ways are holiness; what god is as great as God? You are the God who works wonders; You have manifested Your strength among the peoples. By Your arm You redeemed Your people...

please rise

Tefilah; A Prayer of the Heart

אַרְנֵי שִׂפְתַי תִּפְתָּח וּפִי יַגִּיד תְּהִלָּתֶךָ׃

Healer of broken hearts, open our lips,
so our mouths may declare Your glory.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ, אֱלֹהֵינוּ וֵאלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ וְאִמּוֹתֵינוּ׃

We praise You, the Source of our strength throughout the ages.

אֱלֹהֵי אַבְרָהָם, אֱלֹהֵי יִצְחָק, וֵאלֹהֵי יַעֲקֹב.

Who knew the fortitude of Abraham, the fragility of Isaac and the humanity of Jacob.

אלֹהֵי שָׂרָה, אֱלֹהֵי רִבְקָה, אֱלֹהֵי לֵאָה, וֵאלֹהֵי רָחֵל.

Who understood the yearnings of Sarah, the strength of Rebecca, the pain of Leah and the hope of Rachel.

הָאֵל הַגָּדוֹל הַגִּבּוֹר וְהַנּוֹרָא, אֵל עֶלְיוֹן,

Great is Your Power to assist, change and move us from despair to hope - for You are on high.

גּוֹמֵל חֲסָדִים טוֹבִים וְקוֹנֵה הַכֹּל,

Great is the divine compassion in us, for it is found in You, the Place..

וְזוֹכֵר חַסְדֵי אָבוֹת וְאִמָּהוֹת,

You remember the good deeds of all - for that is when Your Presence is felt on earth.

וּמֵבִיא גְּאֻלָּה לִבְנֵי בְנֵיהֶם, לְמַעַן שְׁמוֹ בְּאַהֲבָה.

Through You, the One who loves the People Israel, we will find redemption for us, for our children and for our children's children.

מֶלֶךְ עוֹזֵר וּמוֹשִׁיעַ וּמָגֵן.

You are the Hand of guidance ,the One who will save us and shield us in our time of need.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ, מָגֵן אַבְרָהָם וְעֶזְרַת שָׂרָה.

We praise You, the Shield of our Ancestors who is our Help today

* * *

Psalm 90

O Lord, You have been our refuge in every generation. Before the mountains came into being, before You brought forth the earth and the world, from eternity to eternity You are God. You return man to dust; You decreed, "Return you mortals!" For in Your sight a thousand years are like yesterday that has past, like a watch of the night. You engulf men in sleep; at daybreak they are like grass that renews itself; at daybreak it flourishes anew; by dusk it withers and dries up. So we are consumed by Your anger, terror-struck by Your fury. You have set our iniquities before You, our hidden sins in the light of Your face. All our days pass away in Your wrath; we spend our years like a sigh. The span of our life is seventy years, or, given the strength, eighty years; but the best of them are trouble and sorrow. They pass by speedily, and we are in darkness. Who can know Your furious anger? Your wrath matches the fear of You. Teach us to count our days rightly, that we may obtain a wise heart. Turn, O Lord! How long? Show mercy to Your servants. Satisfy us at daybreak with Your steadfast love

אַתָּה גִּבּוֹר לְעוֹלָם, אֲדֹנָי,

O Near and Infinite One, You are the everlasting strength of our lives.

מְחַיֵּה הַכֹּל אַתָּה, רַב לְהוֹשִׁיעַ.

You are the Giver of life and the Source from which we learn our full potential.

מְכַלְכֵּל חַיִּים בְּחֶסֶד, מְחַיֵּה הַכֹּל בְּרַחֲמִים רַבִּים.

With love You sustain the living, with great compassion You give life to all.

סוֹמֵךְ נוֹפְלִים, וְרוֹפֵא חוֹלִים, וּמַתִּיר אֲסוּרִים,

Through You , we lift up the falling, heal the sick, bring freedom to those who find themselves captive to the uncertainty of life.

וּמְקַיֵּם אֱמוּנָתוֹ לִישֵׁנֵי עָפָר. מִי כָמוֹךָ בַּעַל גְּבוּרוֹת

You are present with all; the upright and strong and those who sleep in the dust. Who is like You, Master of Strength?

וּמִי דּוֹמֶה לָךְ, מֶלֶךְ מֵמִית וּמְחַיֶּה וּמַצְמִיחַ יְשׁוּעָה?

Who is like You, Author of life and death, Source of salvation?

וְנֶאֱמָן אַתָּה לְהַחֲיוֹת הַכֹּל. בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ, מְחַיֵּה הַכֹּל.

Blessed are You, Adonai, the Source of Life.

please be seated

* * *

Prayer for Healing from Pain

מִי שֶׁבֵּרַךְ אֲבוֹתֵינוּ
מְקוֹר הַבְּרָכָה לְאִמּוֹתֵינוּ
Mi she-bei-rach a-vo-tei-nu
M'kor ha-bra-cha l'i-mo-tei-nu
May the source of strength
Who blessed the ones before us
Help us find the courage
To make our lives a blessing
And let us say, Amen

(continues on next page)

Psalm 90 cont...

that we may sing for joy all our days. Give us joy for as long as You have afflicted us, for the years we have suffered misfortune. Let Your deeds be seen by Your servants, Your glory by their children. May the favor of the Lord, our God, be upon us; let the work of our hands prosper, O prosper the work of our hands!

Psalm 3

O Lord, my foes are so many! Many are those who attack me; many say of me, "There is no deliverance for him through God." Selah. But You, O Lord, are a shield about me, my glory, He who holds my head high. I cry aloud to the Lord, and He answers me from His holy mountain. Selah. I lie down and sleep and wake again, for the Lord sustains me. I have no fear of the myriad forces arrayed against me on every side. Rise, O Lord! Deliver me, O my God! For You slap all my enemies in the face; You break the teeth of the wicked. Deliverance is the Lord's; Your blessing be upon Your people! Selah.

מִי שֶׁבֵּרַךְ אִמּוֹתֵינוּ
מְקוֹר הַבְּרָכָה לְאָבוֹתֵינוּ
Mi she-bei-rach i-mo-tei-nu
M'kor ha-bra-cha l'a-vo-tei-nu
Bless those in need of healing
with r'fu-a sh'lei-ma
The renewal of body
The renewal of spirit
And let us say, Amen

* * *

Psalm 23

יְהוָה רֹעִי לֹא אֶחְסָר: בִּנְאוֹת דֶּשֶׁא יַרְבִּיצֵנִי
עַל־מֵי מְנֻחוֹת יְנַהֲלֵנִי: נַפְשִׁי יְשׁוֹבֵב
יַנְחֵנִי בְמַעְגְּלֵי־צֶדֶק לְמַעַן שְׁמוֹ:
גַּם כִּי־אֵלֵךְ בְּגֵיא צַלְמָוֶת לֹא־אִירָא רָע
כִּי־אַתָּה עִמָּדִי שִׁבְטְךָ וּמִשְׁעַנְתֶּךָ הֵמָּה יְנַחֲמֻנִי:
תַּעֲרֹךְ לְפָנַי ׀ שֻׁלְחָן נֶגֶד צֹרְרָי
דִּשַּׁנְתָּ בַשֶּׁמֶן רֹאשִׁי כּוֹסִי רְוָיָה:
אַךְ ׀ טוֹב וָחֶסֶד יִרְדְּפוּנִי כָּל־יְמֵי חַיָּי
וְשַׁבְתִּי בְּבֵית־יְהוָה לְאֹרֶךְ יָמִים:

A-do-nai ro-i, lo ech-sar
Bin-ot de-she yar-bi-tze-ni
Al mei m'nu-chot y'na-ha-lei-ni
Naf-shi y'sho-veiv, yan-chei-ni
V'mag-lei tze-dek l'ma-an sh'mo
Gam ki ei-leich b'gei tzai-ma-vet
lo i-ra ra, ki a-ta i-ma-di
Shiv-t'cha u-mish-an-te-cha, hei ma y'na-cha-mu-ni
Ta-a-roch l'fa-nai shul-chan ne-ged tzo-r'rai
Di-shan-ta va-she-men ro-shi, ko-si r'va-ya
Ach tov va-che-sed yir-d'fu-ni kol y'mei cha-yai,
V'shav-ti b'veit Adonai l'o-rech ya-mim.

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.
He maketh me lie down in green pastures; He leadeth me beside still waters. He restoreth my soul; He guideth me in straight paths for His name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me.
Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of my enemies; Thou hast anointed my head with oil; my cup runneth over.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

* * *

Silent prayer

יִהְיוּ לְרָצוֹן אִמְרֵי־פִי וְהֶגְיוֹן לִבִּי לְפָנֶיךָ. יְיָ צוּרִי וְגוֹאֲלִי.

Yi-he-yu l'ratzon, imrei-fi, v'heg-yon libi le-fane-cha, Adonai tzuri v'go-ali.

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable to You, Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.

* * *

עֹשֶׂה שָׁלוֹם בִּמְרוֹמָיו, הוּא יַעֲשֶׂה שָׁלוֹם עָלֵינוּ עַל־כָּל־יִשְׂרָאֵל, אָמֵן:

O-seh sha-lom bi-me-ro-mav, hu ya-a-seh sha-lom a-lei-nu ve-al kol Yis-ra-eil, ve-i-me-ru: a-mein.

* * *

We bow this day to the reality that the universe and all its glory presents us with both challenge and hope. From illness to health, from emptiness to fulfillment, from poverty of the soul to the richness of the spirit, we participate in the experience of life. Our knees are bent in deference to You, O God, with the hope that through Your loving kindness and strength we will find fulfillment and this world will become one. When we take the power granted us by You, and use it for good and not for evil, we will become one and Your name will be one. We praise the Power and bow in gratitude.

וַאֲנַחְנוּ כּוֹרְעִים וּמִשְׁתַּחֲוִים וּמוֹדִים
לִפְנֵי מֶלֶךְ מַלְכֵי הַמְּלָכִים
הַקָּדוֹשׁ בָּרוּךְ הוּא.

V'anach-nu kor-im u-mish-tach-a-vim u-mo-dim lif-nei melech mal-chei ham-la-chim, ha-kadosh baruch hu.

Psalm 150

Hallelujah.
Praise God in His sanctuary;
praise Him in the sky, His stronghold.
Praise Him for His mighty acts;
praise Him for His exceeding greatness.
Praise Him with blasts of the horn;
praise Him with harp and lyre.
Praise Him with timbrel and dance;
praise Him with lute and pipe.
Praise Him with resounding cymbals;
praise Him with loud-clashing cymbals.
Let all that breathes praise the Lord.
Hallelujah.

Psalm 6

O Lord, do not punish me in anger, do not chastise me in fury. Have mercy on me, O Lord, for I languish; heal me, O Lord, for my bones shake with terror. My whole being is stricken with terror, while You, Lord—O, how long! O Lord, turn! Rescue me! Deliver me as befits Your faithfulness. For there is no praise of You among the dead; in Sheol, who can acclaim You? I am weary with groaning; every night I drench my bed, I melt my couch in tears. My eyes are wasted by vexation, worn out because of all my foes. Away from me, all you evil-doers, for the Lord heeds the sound of my weeping. The Lord heeds my plea, the Lord accepts my prayer. All my enemies will be frustrated and stricken with terror; they will turn back in an instant, frustrated.

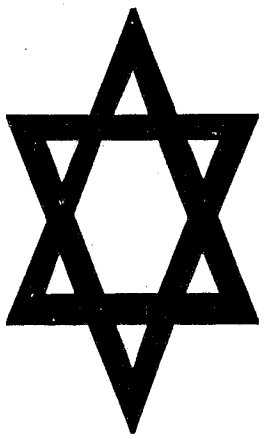
Yesh Kochavim

There are stars up above
So far away we only see their light
Long, long after the star itself is gone
And so it is with people that we loved
Their memories keep shining
Ever brightly though their time with us is done
But the stars that light up the darkest night
These are the lights that guide us
As we live our days
These are the ways we remember.

Yesh ko-cha-vim she-o-ram ma-gi-a ar-tza
Rak ka-a-sher hem atz-mam av-du v'e-nam
Yesh a-na-shim she-ziv zich-ram me-ir
Ka-a-sher hem atz-mam e-nam od-b-to-che-nu
O-rot e-le ha-mav--hi-kim b--chesh-kat ha-la-yil
Hem, hem she-mar'im la-a-dam et ha-de-rech

Kaddish

יִתְגַּדַּל וְיִתְקַדַּשׁ שְׁמֵהּ רַבָּא בְּעָלְמָא דִּי־בְרָא כִרְעוּתֵהּ,
וַיַמְלִיךְ מַלְכוּתֵהּ בְּחַיֵּיכוֹן וּבְיוֹמֵיכוֹן וּבְחַיֵּי דְכָל־בֵּית
יִשְׂרָאֵל, בַּעֲגָלָא וּבִזְמַן קָרִיב, וְאִמְרוּ: אָמֵן.



יְהֵא שְׁמֵהּ רַבָּא מְבָרַךְ לְעָלַם וּלְעָלְמֵי־עָלְמַיָּא.

יִתְבָּרַךְ וְיִשְׁתַּבַּח, וְיִתְפָּאַר וְיִתְרוֹמַם וְיִתְנַשֵּׂא, וְיִתְהַדַּר
וְיִתְעַלֶּה וְיִתְהַלַּל שְׁמֵהּ דְקוּדְשָׁא , בְּרִיךְ הוּא, לְעֵלָּא מִן
כָּל־בִּרְכָתָא וְשִׁירָתָא, תֻּשְׁבְּחָתָא וְנֶחֱמָתָא דַּאֲמִירָן בְּעָלְמָא,
וְאִמְרוּ: אָמֵן.

יְהֵא שְׁלָמָא רַבָּא מִן שְׁמַיָּא וְחַיִּים עָלֵינוּ וְעַל־כָּל־יִשְׂרָאֵל,
וְאִמְרוּ: אָמֵן.

עֹשֶׂה שָׁלוֹם בִּמְרוֹמָיו, הוּא יַעֲשֶׂה שָׁלוֹם עָלֵינוּ
וְעַל־כָּל־יִשְׂרָאֵל, אִמְרוּ: אָמֵן.

Yit-ga-dal ve-yit-ka-dash she-mei ra-ba be-al-ma di-ve-ra chi-re-u-tei,ve-yam-lich mal-chu-tei be-cha-yei-chon u-ve-yo-mei-chon u-ve-cha-yei de-chol beit Yis-ra-eil, ba-a-ga-la u-vi-ze-man ka-riv, ve-i-me-ru: a-mein.

Ye-hei she-mei ra-ba me-vo-rach le-a-lam u-le-al-mei al-ma-ya.

Yit-ba-rach ve-yish-ta-bach, ve-yit-pa-ar ve-yit-ro-mam ve-yit-na-sei, ve-yit-ha-dar ve-yit-a-leh ve-yit-ha-lal she-mei de-ku-de-sha, be-rich hu, li-ei-la min kol bir-cha-ta ve-shi-ra-ta, tush-be-cha-ta ve ne-cha-ma-ta, da-a- mi-ran be-al-ma,
vi-me-ru: a-mein.

Ye-hei she-la-ma ra-ba min she-ma-ya ve-cha-yim a-lei-nu ve-al kol Yis-ra-eil, ve-i-me-ru: a-mein.

O-seh sha-lom bi-me-ro-mav, hu ya-a-seh sha-lom a-lei-nu ve-al kol Yis-ra-eil, ve-i-me-ru: a-mein.

Psalm 130

Out of the depths I call You, O Lord. O Lord, listen to my cry; let Your ears be attentive to my plea for mercy. If You keep accounts of sins, O Lord, Lord, who will survive? Yours is the power to forgive so that You may be held in awe. I look to the Lord; I look to him; I await his word. I am more eager for the Lord than watchmen for the morning, watchmen for the morning. O Israel, wait for the Lord; for with the Lord is steadfast love and great power to redeem. It is He who will redeem Israel from all their iniquities.

The Angel's Blessing

May our right hand brings us closer to our Godliness
May our left hand give us strength to face each day.
And before us may our visions light our paths ahead.
And behind us may well-being heal our way.

* * *

Turn us to you, O Lord, and we shall return;
renew our days as of old.

הֲשִׁיבֵנוּ יְהוָה ו אֵלֶיךָ וְנָשׁוּבָה חַדֵּשׁ יָמֵינוּ כְּקֶדֶם

Ha-shi-vei-nu Adonai ei-le-chah, v'na-shu-vah, cha-desh ya'mei-nu ke'kedem

* * *

AKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Cover - Drawing by Ismar David in Songs and Hymns, ACC and CCAR

p. 1-2, "Each of us...", adapted from a meditation by Rabbi Robert I. Kahn, Gates of Prayer, p. 333

p. 2 *E-lo-hai n'shama* - song by Debbie Friedman

p. 3 *Al Tasteir* - song by Debbie Friedman

p. 4 *You Are the One* - song by Debbie Friedman

p. 7-8 *Mi she-be-rach* - song by Debbie Friedman

p. 8 *Psalm* 23 - song by Debbie Friedman

p. 10 *Yesh Kochavim* - poem by Hannah Senesh, song by Cantor Jeff Klepper

p. 11 *The Angel's Blessing* - song by Debbie Friedman

All other readings and prayers created by Rabbi Lewis H. Kamrass and Rabbi Richard M. Steinberg.

שמע קולנו

Shema Koleinu: A Liturgy for Healing

Rabbi Nancy Flam
***Ruach Ami*: the Bay Area Jewish Healing Center**

Rabbi Yoel Kahn
Congregation Sha'ar Zahav

Adar 5756/March 1996

GATHERING

What does the Rebbe do before praying?
I pray, was the reply, that I may be able
to pray properly.

In preparation for prayer, we may choose to wash our hands and contribute *tzedakah*. We begin the service with a *niggun*, a melody without words.

Kavvanah: *May this melody and this gathering help me to quiet my mind and open my heart. May I feel and know the connection that exists between myself and my Creator.*

May the tzedakah we contribute today for our community provide comfort, compassion and justice to others who are in need.

- The *niggun* is a wordless tune which may calm and focus us. Its repetition occupies the linear, language-making part of our brains, helping us to let go of the chatter within our minds.

- Water is a symbol of the *mikvah*, the ritual bath, which marks moments of personal transformation (e.g., a convert upon becoming Jewish, a woman after her menstrual period, men and women before marriage, and symbolically, the dead before burial). Washing our hands indicates our desire to enter our prayer open to the positive transformation it may bring. "You shall draw forth water with joy from the wells of salvation." [Isaiah 12:3]

- As we ready ourselves to pray for ourselves and for those whom we love, we remember that prayers are fortified by deeds; we therefore contribute *tzedakah* to help others.

- *Tzedakah* comes from a root which means justice; a *tzaddik*, a righteous person, is one who engages in the work of *tzedek*, justice; giving *tzedakah* is a component of justice.

- Rabbi Nachman would pray: *Master of the Universe, grant me the ability to be alone. May it be my custom to go outdoors each day amongst the trees and grasses, among all growing things, and there may I be alone and enter into prayer, to talk with the One to whom I do belong.*

BODY/SOUL: *ASHER YATZAR*

We offer these prayers for body and soul, in Hebrew or English, silently or aloud, in our own voices, making the prayer our own.

Kavvanah: ***This prayer calls me to appreciate the wondrousness of my body, even when it does not function entirely as I would like it to. As I offer my prayer individually, may I be strengthened by the voices of those around me.***

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,	Ba•ruch a•tah Adonai E•lo•hei•nu me•lech ha•o•lam
אֲשֶׁר יָצַר אֶת הָאָדָם בְּחָכְמָה,	a•sher ya•tzar et ha•a•dam be•choch•mah
וּבָרָא בוֹ נְקָבִים נְקָבִים,	u•va•rah vo ni•ka•vim ni•ka•vim
חֲלוּלִים חֲלוּלִים,	cha•lu•lim cha•lu•lim.
גָּלוּי וְיָדוּעַ לִפְנֵי כִסֵּא כְבוֹדֶךָ	Ga•lu•i ve•ya•du•ah lif•nei chi•sei che•vo•de•cha
שֶׁאִם יִפָּתֵחַ אֶחָד מֵהֶם,	she•im yi•fa•te•ach e•chad me•hem
אוֹ יִסָּתֵם אֶחָד מֵהֶם,	o•yi•sa•tem e•chad me•hem
אִי אֶפְשָׁר לְהִתְקַיֵּים וְלַעֲמוֹד לְפָנֶיךָ:	i•ef•shar le•hit•ka•yem ve•la•a•mod le•fa•ne•cha.
בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ, רוֹפֵא כָל בָּשָׂר,	Ba•ruch a•tah Adonai ro•fai kol ba•sar
וּמַפְלִיא לַעֲשׂוֹת:	u•maf•li la•a•sot.

- Rabbi Huna asked his son Rabbah why he did not attend the lesson of Rabbi Hisda, whose teaching was said to be very clever. The son replied: "When I go to him, he speaks of mundane matters; he tells me about certain natural functions of the digestive organs and how one should behave in regard to them." His father replied: "He occupies himself with the life of God's creatures and you call that 'a mundane matter'! All the more reason why you should go and study with him." [Talmud, Shabbat 82a]

- This prayer was originally said upon leaving the bathroom, after having used the toilet. It expresses amazement about the intricacy and complexity of the body's functioning, and praises the Creator for its awesome design. This prayer, as well as *Elohai Neshama* and "The Miracles of Daily Life," are taken from the Morning Blessings of the daily liturgy.

- Judaism regards our bodies and their pleasures as sources of holiness. "In the world to come we will be asked to give account for every fruit that we might have eaten but failed to taste." [Talmud:]

Once when Rabbi Hillel had finished a lesson,
his students asked, "Where are you going now?"
"To perform a religious duty," he answered.
"To bathe in the bathhouse."
"Is that a religious duty?" they asked.
"If somebody is appointed to clean the statues of the king that stand in the theaters and circuses, and is paid for that work," he answered, "should not I, who am created in the image and likeness of God, take care of my body?"

We praise the Eternal Source of Life, who has made our bodies in wisdom, creating openings, arteries, glands, and organs, marvelous in structure, intricate in design. Should but one of them by being blocked or opened fail to function, it would be difficult to stand before You. We praise You, God, Wondrous Source of our healing.

or

Blessed are You, Shaddai, who has formed us in wisdom, and created within us the spark of life. Each cell does the work of its Creator; each organ's existence is a tribute to God. If but one element of this wondrous structure were to fail in its task, we could not stand before You and give thanks for sustenance. Let us cherish this gift of flesh and blood, honoring it as God's creation. Blessed are You, our God, who performs the miracles of creation and healing.

❖ We so often focus on what does not work that we may overlook what does. One route to drawing attention to how our bodies are working—even when parts are not—is to recite a litany of organ systems and body parts that are working: *"I am grateful for: eyes that see, lungs that breathe, legs that walk."*

❖ Our connection with God is affected by our bodily state. For some people ill health facilitates prayer; for others or at other times, ill health makes prayer impossible. This interconnectedness of our body/mind/spirit reminds us of how our physical state may affect our spiritual state and how our spiritual state, in turn, may affect our bodies.

❖ While this prayer praises God for materials passing through "ducts and channels" on the physical level, one may offer the prayer as an affirmation of unblocked spiritual "channels" as well. We give gratitude for the unobstructed movement of our spirits:

Blessed is the miracle that is this body: a vast collection of miracles, of harmonious interactions that permit me to share existence. Blessed are the daily personal interactions that teach me to transcend the purely physical. It is a blessing to experience holiness now in my connections with the people with whom I share this room, this world. The sacred moments I have known have been within the context of inspired, loving relationships, some of which live now, in my heart, extending beyond the period of shiva or yahrzeit. [from a Rosh HaShanah sermon by Jonathan Pannor]

BODY/SOUL: *ELOHAI NESHAMA*

We give thanks for the wonder and uniqueness of our souls. Again, we pray in Hebrew or in English, silently or aloud, in our own voices, making the prayer our own. Before beginning the prayer, we pause to concentrate on our breathing, the symbol and essence of our life.

Kavvanah: ***May I live each day with gratitude for the uniqueness of my soul and my being. As I breathe in the breath of life, may my spirit be revived and renewed. As I offer my prayer individually, may I be strengthened by the voices of those around me.***

אֱלֹהַי, נְשָׁמָה שֶׁנָּתַתָּ בִּי טְהוֹרָה הִיא.	E•lo•hai, ne•sha•ma sha•na•ta•ta bi te•ho•rah hi.
אַתָּה בְרָאתָהּ, אַתָּה יְצַרְתָּהּ,	A•tah va•ra•ta, a•tah ya•tzar•ta,
אַתָּה נְפַחְתָּהּ בִּי,	a•tah ne•fach•ta bi,
וְאַתָּה מְשַׁמְּרָהּ בְּקִרְבִּי.	ve•a•tah me•sham•ra be•kir•bi.
כָּל זְמַן שֶׁהַנְּשָׁמָה בְּקִרְבִּי,	Kol ze•man she•ha•ne•sha•mah ve•kir•bi,
מוֹדָה /מוֹדֶה אֲנִי לְפָנֶיךָ,	[women:] mo•dah [men:] mo•deh a•ni le•fa•ne•cha,
יְיָ אֱלֹהַי וֵאלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתַי וְאִמּוֹתַי,	Adonai El•o•hai ve•e•lo•hei a•vo•tai ve•i•mo•tai,
רִבּוֹן כָּל הַמַּעֲשִׂים, אֲדוֹן כָּל הַנְּשָׁמוֹת.	ri•bon kol ha•ma•a•sim, a•don kol ha•ne•sha•mot.
בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ,	Ba•ruch a•tah Adonai,
אֲשֶׁר בְּיָדוֹ נֶפֶשׁ כָּל חָי	a•sher be•ya•do ne•fesh kol•chai
וְרוּחַ כָּל בְּשַׂר אִישׁ.	ve•ru•ach kol ba•sar ish.

- This prayer may have originally been a meditation on the breath. The "hey" at the end of several of the words is aspirated, emphasizing the breathiness of the word.
- This prayer is taken from the daily morning liturgy and was designed to be recited shortly after waking from sleep. In the rabbinic imagination, sleep is seen to be "a little death," wherein the soul deserts the body for the night and reunites with it in the morning. The traditional text of *Elohai Neshama* (not included here) speaks of the body and soul separating at death and their ultimate reunification at the end of days.
- The phrase "souls of all the living" resonates with a line from Psalm 150: "All that breathes will praise God." This verse can also be read as "We can praise God with every breath," or "We can praise God with the entirety of our being."

The rabbis of blessed memory said: "Let every soul [kol neshama] praise God." This means: Praise God with each and every breath [neshama], so you can say at every moment and continually: "Blessed is the Merciful One, Source of Creation, Sovereign of this moment."

The soul which You have given me, O God, is a pure one. You have created and formed it, breathed it into me, and within me You sustain it. So long as I have breath, therefore, I will give thanks to You, Adonai, my God, my ancestors' God, Sovereign of all creation, Source of all who breathe. Blessed is Adonai, in whose hands are the souls of all the living and spirits of all flesh.

or

You are generous to me, dear God;
you have taught my soul to trust you.
I have crept beside you and found
shelter in the shadow of your wings.

My great joy, God, is to praise you;
I will sing and awaken the dawn.
Wake up, my soul, wake up,
music in the depths of my heart.
I will praise you, God, to all people
and inspire them with my joy.

- The Hebrew verbs in the first sentence of the prayer are the same as those of the story of creation in Genesis, Chapter 2, and remind us of how the Holy One breathed life into Adam.
- In English, the word "inspiration" has its origins in the Latin, meaning "to breathe into"; as we "inspire" ourselves with our breath, we invite inspiration into our lives.

DARKNESS AND LIGHT: ACKNOWLEDGING THE DARK

We listen as these verses, taken from the wisdom literature of the Bible, are read aloud. We take time, pausing after each one, permitting the depth of suffering reflected in these verses to reach us.

Kavvanah: *We often deny the truth of our suffering. May these verses help me to acknowledge the moments of despair in my own life and the times when I feel distant from God.*

יָגַעְתִּי בְקָרְאִי נִחַר גְּרוֹנִי כָּלוּ עֵינַי מְיַחֵל לֵאלֹהָי׃

I am weary with calling, my throat is dry; my eyes fail while I wait for God. *[Psalm 69:4]*

אֶזְכְּרָה אֱלֹהִים וְאֶהֱמָיָה אָשִׂיחָה וְתִתְעַטֵּף רוּחִי׃

I call God to mind, I moan, I complain, my spirit fails. *[Psalm 77:4]*

נָקְטָה נַפְשִׁי בְּחַיָּי אֶעֶזְבָה עָלַי שִׂיחִי אֲדַבְּרָה בְּמַר נַפְשִׁי׃

I am disgusted with life; I will give reign to my complaint, speak in the bitterness of my soul. *[Job 10:1]*

לָמָּה יְהוָה תִּזְנַח נַפְשִׁי תַּסְתִּיר פָּנֶיךָ מִמֶּנִּי׃ עָנִי אֲנִי וְגוֹעַ מִנֹּעַר נָשָׂאתִי אֵמֶיךָ אָפוּנָה׃

Why Adonai do You reject me, why do You hide Your face from me? From my youth I have been afflicted and near death; I suffer Your terrors wherever I turn. *[Psalm 88:15-16]*

אֵלִי אֵלִי לָמָּה עֲזַבְתָּנִי רָחוֹק מִישׁוּעָתִי דִּבְרֵי שַׁאֲגָתִי׃ אֱלֹהַי אֶקְרָא יוֹמָם וְלֹא תַעֲנֶה וְלַיְלָה וְלֹא־דוּמִיָּה לִי׃

My God, my God, why have You abandoned me; why so far from delivering me and from my anguished roaring? My God, I cry by day, You answer not; by night, and I have no respite. *[Psalm 22:2-3]*

וְלִיהוָה שִׁמְעָה תְּפִלָּתִי וְשַׁוְעָתִי אֵלֶיךָ תָּבוֹא׃ אַל־תַּסְתֵּר פָּנֶיךָ מִמֶּנִּי בְּיוֹם צַר לִי הַטֵּה־אֵלַי אָזְנֶךָ בְּיוֹם אֶקְרָא מַהֵר עֲנֵנִי׃

Adonai, hear my prayer, let my cry come before You. Do not hide Your face from me in my time of trouble. Turn Your ear to me when I cry, answer me speedily. *[Psalm 102:2-3]*

❖ Our messianic vision is of a time when evil has been eliminated from creation. But our urge to vanquish the evil sometimes keeps us from fully recognizing and acknowledging its presence. These verses, drawn from the wisdom literature of the Bible, help us acknowledge our experience of pain and darkness, particularly the times when God seems absent.

❖ The Prophet Isaiah [45:7] quotes God: "I am the Eternal: I form light and create darkness, I make weal and create woe—I, the Eternal, do *all* these things."

❖ **Poppies**

The poppies send up their
orange flares; swaying
in the wind, their congregations
are a levitation

of bright dust, of thin
and lacy leaves.
There isn't a place
in this world that doesn't

sooner or later drown
in the indigos of darkness,
but now, for a while,
the roughage

shines like a miracle
as it floats above everything
with its yellow hair.
Of course nothing stops the cold,

black, curved blade
from hooking forward—
of course
loss is the great lesson.

But I also say this: that light
is an invitation
to happiness,
and that happiness,

when it's done right,
is a kind of holiness,
palpable and redemptive.
Inside the bright fields,

touched by their rough and spongy gold,
I am washed and washed
in the river
of earthly delight—

and what are you going to do—
what can you do
about it—
deep, blue night?

–Mary Oliver

❖ According to a *midrash*, the entire *Akedah* (the binding of Isaac on Mount Moriah by his father Abraham) took place as a vision in the mind of Abraham. Abraham had a vision of the future of the Jewish people. He saw a long dark tunnel with Isaac standing at the front and Jacob behind him and Dina and all the tribes behind him, and all the generations until now. All Abraham saw in that tunnel were the pogroms, the oppression, the near genocide of the Jewish people—and he decided in that moment to raise his knife and slay Isaac, to prevent all that suffering from happening. But at that very moment, another tunnel appeared before him, and this was a tunnel of light; there he saw Isaac standing at the front and Jacob behind him and Dina and all the tribes behind him, and all the generations of the Jewish people until now. But in this tunnel, all he saw were the beautiful *Shabbatot*, the festive dancing on the holidays and the songs that reached to heaven—and he decided in that moment, as if hearing the voice of God, that he should not slay Isaac. He realized that the suffering and the joy would come together, and that to get rid of one would be to get rid of the other.

DARKNESS/LIGHT: THE MIRACLES OF DAILY LIFE

We offer these traditional blessings of gratitude for the miracles of daily life. We may understand them in different ways at different times. After reciting the list drawn from the traditional liturgy, we may also give thanks aloud or in our hearts for other miracles which we are mindful of today. There are three introductory formulas invoking God's name, any of which may be chosen to begin each blessing.

Kavvanah: ***Each of these blessings expresses thanks for a wondrous occurrence that happens daily. May they help me to express gratitude and awe at the miraculous I know today.***

Openings:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יהוה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם...
Ba•ruch a•tah Adonai E•lo•hei•nu me•lech ha•o•lam ...
Praised are You Eternal, our God, Ruler of Creation...

בְּרוּכָה אָתְּ יָהּ חֵי הָעוֹלָמִים...
Be•ru•cha at Yah chai ha•o•la•mim...
We praise the One, Source of Eternity...

נְבָרֵךְ אֵת עֵין הַחַיִּים יוֹצֶרֶת הָעוֹלָם...
Ne•va•reh et Ein ha•cha•im yo•tzer•et ha•olam...
Let us bless the Source of life, Creator of all...

❖ ❖ ❖ ❖

Blessings:

1.

Men say:

...שֶׁעָשַׂנִי בְּצַלְמוֹ.
...she•a•sa•ni be•tzel•mo.

Women say:

...שֶׁעָשַׂנִי בְּצַלְמָהּ.
...she•a•sa•ni be•tzel•ma.

- ♦...who has made me in the divine image.
- ° ...who helps me see the divine image within.
- • ...for my uniqueness in the world.

2.

...שֶׁעָשַׂנִי יִשְׂרָאֵל
...she•a•sa•ni yis•ra•el.

...שֶׁעָשַׂנִי יִשְׂרְאֵלִית.
...she•a•sa•ni yis•ra•el•it.

- ♦...who has led me to my Jewish heritage.
- ° ...who encourages me to explore my Jewish heritage.
- • ...for my Jewish heritage.

3.

...שֶׁעָשַׂנִי בֶּן חוֹרִין.
...she•a•sa•ni ben•cho•rin.

...שֶׁעָשַׂנִי בַּת חוֹרִין.
...she•a•sa•ni bat•cho•rin.

- ♦...who has made me free.
- ° ...who enables me to become free.
- • ...for freedom of thought and action.

[Blessings continue on page 11]

❖ This section offers several different formulations for prayer, in Hebrew and English. The arrangements and translations range from the traditional to the contemporary. Different individuals and different communities will learn over time what arrangment or combination of arrangments speaks to and for their hearts.

❖ The traditional blessing formula opens by praising God and invoking the eternal Name and the sovereignty of God. Some choosing this blessing language because it conforms to the halachic tradition or because it may resonate most strongly with historical practice or be most familiar. This service also offers two alternative versions of the opening blessing formula The first alternative is inspired by the work of Marcia Falk and emphasizes human action: "Let us bless" replaces the passive "Praised are you..." Rather than the traditional sovereignty image, "King of the Universe," this formulation praises "the Source/Well-spring of Life, Creator of the Universe." The third blessing opening comes from Jewish renewal circles and uses uses feminine language to describe the qualities of the Holy One. The openings of the blessing formulas in English are translated directly from the Hebrew

❖ The opening blessing formula and the blessings t hemselves can be chanted or spoken in any combination: Hebrew and English, English and Hebrew, all Hebrew, all English.

❖ The blessings derive from two different Talmudic sources. Originally visualized as blessings to be recited daily as a person rose and went about daily activity, they were already being recited in the synagogue over a thousand years ago. Each action of daily life is compared metaphorically to an attribute of God. The opening three blessings, which have a different origin than the those which follow, draw our attention to the essence of who we are: people made in the image of the Holy One, informed by conscience and linked to Judaism.

❖ When a person opens their eyes, one should say: "Blessed is the Holy One who opens the eyes of the blind." When one stretches oneself and sits up, one should say: "Blessed is the Holy One who frees the bound." When one dresses, one should say: "Blessed is the Holy One who clothes the naked." When one draws oneself up, one should say: "Blessed is the Holy One who raises the bowed." When one steps on the ground one should say: "Blessed is the Holy One who spread the earth on the waters." When one commences to walk, one should say: "Blessed is the Holy One who makes human steps firm." When one ties one's shoes, one should say: "Blessed is the Holy One who has supplied all my wants." When one fastens one's girdle, one should say: "Blessed is the Holy One who girds Israel with might." When one spreads a kerchief over one's head one should say: "Blessed is the Holy One who crowns Israel with glory." [Talmud, Berachot 60b]

❖ Each of the blessings is given in three translations: a direct translation of the English, a metaphorical interpretation emphasizing human agency, and a humanistic alternative.

DARKNESS/LIGHT: THE MIRACLES OF DAILY LIFE

Openings:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יהוה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם...
Ba•ruch a•tah Adonai E•lo•hei•nu me•lech ha•o•lam ...
Praised are You Eternal, our God, Ruler of Creation...

בְּרוּכָה אָתְּ יָהּ חֵי הָעוֹלָמִים...
Be•ru•cha at Yah chai ha•o•la•mim...
We praise the One, Source of Eternity...

נְבָרֵךְ אֵת עֵין הַחַיִּים יוֹצֶרֶת הָעוֹלָם...
Ne•va•reh et Ein ha•cha•im yo•tzer•et ha•olam...
Let us bless the Source of life, Creator of all...

❖ ❖ ❖ ❖

Blessings

4.

...פּוֹקֵחַ עִוְרִים.
...po•ke•ach iv•rim.

- ...who opens the eyes of those who would not see.
- ...who enables us to see.
- ...for insight and vision.

5.

...מַלְבִּישׁ עֲרֻמִּים.
...mal•bish a•ru•mim.

- ...who clothes the naked.
- ...whose spirit clothes our bodies.
- ...for clothing and shelter.

6.

...מַתִּיר אֲסוּרִים.
...ma•tir a•su•rim.

- ...who frees the captive.
- ...who empowers us to free ourselves from oppression.
- ...for the courage to move beyond our own and others' expectations.

7.

...רוֹקַע הָאָרֶץ עַל הַמָּיִם.
...ro•ke•a ha•ar•etz al•ha•ma•yim.

- ...who makes the earth firm upon the waters.
- ...who establishes the rhythms of our bodies and our world.
- ...for ordering the universe.

8.

...שֶׁעָשָׂה לִי כָּל צָרְכִּי.
...she•a•sah li kol tzor•ki.

♦...who provides for all my needs.
°...who enables us to meet our needs.
•...for an earth blessed with abundance.

9.

... הַמֵּכִין מִצְעֲדֵי גָבֶר.
...ha•mai•cin mi•tza•dai ge•ver.

♦...who makes human steps firm.
°...who guides us on our journeys.
•...for paths and callings.

10.

...הַנּוֹתֵן לַיָּעֵף כֹּחַ.
...ha•no•tein le•ya•aif ko•ach.

♦...who gives strength to the weary.
°...who sustains our spirits.
•...for hope in the face of despair.

11.

...הַמְחַדֵּשׁ בְּכָל יוֹם תָּמִיד
מַעֲשֵׂה בְרֵאשִׁית.
...ha•me•cha•desh be•chol yom ta•mid
ma•a•seh ve•rai•shit.

♦...who renews the work of creation every day.
°...who summons us to grow each day.
•...for the daily mystery of creation unfolding.

We may now also give thanks, aloud or in our hearts, for other miracles which we are mindful of today.

Openings:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יהוה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם...
Ba•ruch a•tah Adonai E•lo•hei•nu me•lech ha•o•lam ...
Praised are You Eternal, our God, Ruler of Creation...

בְּרוּכָה אָתְּ יָהּ חֵי הָעוֹלָמִים...
Be•ru•cha at Yah chai ha•o•la•mim...
We praise the One, Source of Eternity...

נְבָרֵךְ אֵת עֵין הַחַיִּים יוֹצֶרֶת הָעוֹלָם...
Ne•va•reh et Ein ha•cha•im yo•tzer•et ha•olam...
Let us bless the Source of life, Creator of all...

HEARING INTO SPEECH: LISTENING TO ONE ANOTHER

If so moved, we speak briefly about what brings us and what we bring to this gathering today. Sharing aloud or remaining silent are equally good choices.

Kavvanah: ***At this gathering, each of us enters a place of prayer. We reflect upon the needs and yearnings of our hearts, as well as any sense of abundance or gratitude which we may bring. May I open myself to truly listen to those around me; may I find the courage and strength to name my own deepest yearnings.***

שמע

- Just as we ask God to listen, we need to listen to ourselves and to each other. It is important that we speak honestly and freely and not judge ourselves or others. Each person's pain and experiences are real and significant. There is no hierarchy of suffering.

- Sometimes, we do not know what we know until we say it aloud to another person. Feminist theologian Nelle Morton coined the phrase "hearing into speech" to describe this experience.

HEARING INTO SPEECH: *SHEMA*

The revelation of the Torah at Mount Sinai is likened to the sparks that fly when a hammer hits an anvil. Our midrash teaches that there were 600,000 sparks, one for each soul that stood at Mount Sinai. Each person saw a different spark, although all came from the same Source. We call out the Sh'ma in order to remind ourselves that even though we may each have a different connection to God, and our pictures may be different from each other's, we are all connected to the same Source.

Together, we call out the words of the *Shema* slowly to one another.

Kavvanah: ***May we unite ourselves, gathering up the sparks of our entire bodies and all of the holy sparks together, as one. I reach for wholeness within myself, unity with my community and communion with God.***

שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל יהוה אֱלֹהֵינוּ יהוה אֶחָד.
She•ma yis•ra•el Adonai E•lohei•nu Adonai E•chad.

בָּרוּךְ שֵׁם כְּבוֹד מַלְכוּתוֹ לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד.
Ba•ruch sheim ke•vod mal•chu•to le•o•lam va•ed.

Hear O Israel Adonai is our God Adonai is One.

❖ Why are the letters ע (the last letter of the first word, *Shema*) and the letter ד (the last letter of the word *Echad*) written large? Together, they spell עד *ed*, witness. When we bear witness to God's unity, then God is one. The *Shema* is both an article of faith and a promise; elsewhere God's unity is a hope of the future: "On that day God will be one and God's name one."

❖ God speaks within every moment
and creates the world with every breath.
God speaks from the center of the universe,
in the silence beyond all thought.
Mightier than the crash of a thunderstorm,
mightier than the roar of the sea,
is God's voice silently speaking
in the depths of the listening heart. [Psalm 93; based on a translation by Stephen Mitchell]

TORAH STUDY

We turn to our tradition as a source of wisdom, guidance, and teaching. We begin our study of Torah with a song.

Yehai Raavah

יְהֵא רַעֲוָא קָדָמָךְ	Ye•hai ra•a•vah ka•da•mach
דְּתִפְתַּח לִבָּאִי בְּאוֹרַיְתָא	de•tif•tach li•bi be•oh• rai•tah
וְתַשְׁלִים מִשְׁאֲלִין דְּלִבָּאִי.	ve•ta•shleim mish•a•lin de•li•bi
וְלִבָּא דְכָל עַמָּךְ יִשְׂרָאֵל.	ve•li•bah de•kohl a•mach Yis•ra•el
לְטַב וּלְחַיִּין וְלִשְׁלָם :	le•tahv u•le•chai•yin ve•li•shlam A•a•men

May it be Your will to open my heart to the Torah and to fulfill the yearnings of my heart, and those of the hearts of all Your people Israel for goodness, for life and for peace.

Pitchu li

פִּתְחוּ לִי שַׁעֲרֵי צֶדֶק,	Pit•chu li sha•a•rai tze•dek
אָבֹא בָם אוֹדֶה יָהּ.	ah•vo vam o•deh Yah
זֶה הַשַּׁעַר לַיְיָ,	Zeh ha•sha•ar la•A•do•nai
צַדִּיקִים יָבֹאוּ בוֹ.	tza•dik•kim ya•vo•u vo

Open the gates of righteousness for me; I shall enter there and praise Yah. This is the gate to the Almighty; the righteous shall enter through it.

The Blessing for the Study of Torah

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו, וְצִוָּנוּ לַעֲסוֹק בְּדִבְרֵי תוֹרָה:

Ba•ruch a•tah Adonai E•lo•hei•nu me•lech ha•o•lam a•sher kid•sh•a•nu be•mitz•vo•tav ve•tzi•va•nu la•a•sok be•div•rei to•rah.

Praised are You Eternal, our God, Ruler of Creation who sanctifies us through mitzvot and has commanded us to engage in the study of Torah.

or

בְּרוּכָה אַתְּ יָהּ חֵי הָעוֹלָמִים אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשַׁתְנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתַיִהָ, וְצִוִּתְנוּ לַעֲסוֹק בְּדִבְרֵי תוֹרָה.

Be• ru•cha at Yah chai ha•o•la•mim a•sher kid•shat•nu be•mitz•vo•tai•ha ve•tzi•vat•nu la•a•sok be•div•rei to•rah.

We praise You, the One, Source of Eternity, who teaches us holiness through mitzvot and has taught us to engage in the study of Torah.

When two people sit together and words of Torah pass between them, the Shechinah resides there..

Etz Chayim

עֵץ חַיִּים הִיא לַמַּחֲזִיקִים בָּהּ,	Etz cha•yim hi le•ma•cha•zi•kim bo
וְתוֹמְכֶיהָ מְאֻשָּׁר׃	ve tom•chei•hah me•u•shar
דְּרָכֶיהָ דַרְכֵי נֹעַם,	dar•chei•hah dar•chei no•am
וְכָל נְתִיבוֹתֶיהָ שָׁלוֹם׃	ve•kol ne•ti•vo•tei•hah sha•lom

Its a tree of life to those that hold fast to it and all its supporters are happy. Its ways are ways of pleasantness and all its pathways are peace.

❖ Rabbi Yochanan said: When the voice of God came forth at Mt. Sinai, it divided itself into the seventy languages of humankind, so that all peoples would be able to understand it. Rabbi Tanchuma said: The voice of God at Mt. Sinai was understand by everyone according to their ability to understand. The elders according to their ability, the younger people according to theirs, the children according to theirs. Even Moses himself understood only in accordance with his own ability. That is why it is said: "As Moses spoke, God answered him with a voice." This means: with a voice that Moses could understand.

HEALING PRAYERS: *MI SHEBERACH*

We gather to our hearts and minds those who are in need of healing, including ourselves. We name those who are in our prayers, whether aloud or in our hearts.

Kavvanah: ***May God's blessing be with those who are in my heart as I utter this prayer. May my prayers strengthen me to be more fully present for those who are suffering. May I become a messenger of God's caring and compassion, a partner with God in the work of healing.***

מִי שֶׁבֵּרַךְ אֲבוֹתֵינוּ וְאִמּוֹתֵינוּ אַבְרָהָם יִצְחָק וְיַעֲקֹב, שָׂרָה, רִבְקָה, לֵאָה וְרָחֵל, הוּא יְבָרֵךְ אֶת כָּל חוֹלִים שֶׁאֲנוּ מִתְפַּלְלִים בַּעֲבוּרָם. הַקָּדוֹשׁ בָּרוּךְ הוּא יִמָּלֵא רַחֲמִים עֲלֵיהֶם, לְהַחֲלִימָם וּלְרַפּאתָם וּלְהַחֲזִיקָם וּלְהַחֲיוֹתָם, וְיִשְׁלַח לָהֶם [וְלָנוּ גַּם יַחַד] רְפוּאָה שְׁלֵמָה, רְפוּאַת הַנֶּפֶשׁ וּרְפוּאַת הַגּוּף, בְּתוֹךְ שְׁאָר חוֹלֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְכָל הָעוֹלָם, הַשְׁתָּא בַּעֲגָלָא וּבִזְמַן קָרִיב. וְנֹאמַר: אָמֵן

May the One who blessed our ancestors, Sarah and Abraham, Rebecca and Isaac, Leah, Rachel and Jacob bless.....along with all the ill among us. Grant insight to those who bring healing, courage and faith to those who are sick, love and strength to all who are in need.

God, let Your spirit rest upon all who are ill and comfort them. May we soon know a time of complete healing, a healing of the body and a healing of the spirit, and let us say: Amen.

❖ Many people refer to the *Mi sheberach* for healing as "the *Mi sheberach*," despite the fact that there are "*mi sheberach*" prayers for many occasions. "*Mi sheberach*" is simply one formulaic way to begin Jewish prayer; it is named after the opening words, "May the One who blessed..." Our calling the *Mi sheberach* for healing "the *Mi sheberach*" indicates its importance for us.

❖ The *Mi sheberach* for healing is traditionally offered in the synagogue after an *aliya* to the Torah is completed. At this time, the whole community is assembled. In this way, when the community hears the name of someone for whom this prayer is being said, it is alerted to the fact that someone is ill. The prayer then functions partly as petition and partly as community announcement. Linking prayer to deed, some people might fulfill the *mitzvah* of *bikkur cholim* as a result of having heard the prayer.

❖ The *Mi sheberach* for healing asks for a full or whole healing (*refuah shleyma*) and then it specifies what that means: healing of the *nefesh* (the soul, spirit, or whole person) and healing of the *guf* (the body). Early rabbinic liturgy expresses the truth that there are multiple dimensions to the experience of illness and healing. This prayer speaks of two dimensions: the physical and the spiritual. Certainly we seek healing of the body, or cure, but we also seek healing from all of the social, emotional and spiritual assaults to the person that often occur with serious illness.

When a person becomes sick, it is the duty of every person to visit the one who is ill, for we find that the Holy One, blessed be, visits the sick. How do we know this? Our rabbis taught that after his circumcision, our father Abraham was resting in the doorway of his tent. The Eternal came to visit him, as it is written: "And Adonai appeared unto Abraham in the plains of Mamre." [Genesis 18:1] Why did God appear at this time? The Eternal appeared in order to visit and comfort him in his hour of pain. We therefore learn the mitzvah of visiting the sick from the example of the Holy One, blessed be.

Mi sheberech [song]

מִי שֶׁבֵּרַךְ אֲבוֹתֵינוּ
Mi she·bei·rach a·vo·tei·nu
מְקוֹר הַבְּרָכָה לְאִמּוֹתֵינוּ
Me·kor ha·be·ra·cha le·i·mo·tei·nu,
may the source of strength
Who blessed the ones before us,
help us find the courage
to make our lives a blessing
And let us say: Amen.

מִי שֶׁבֵּרַךְ אִמּוֹתֵינוּ
Mi she·bei·rach i·mo·tei·nu
מְקוֹר הַבְּרָכָה לְאָבוֹתֵינוּ
Me·kor ha·be·ra·cha le·a·vo·tei·nu,
bless those in need of healing
with רְפוּאָה שְׁלֵמָה *re·fu·a she·lei·ma,*
the renewal of body,
the renewal of spirit,
and let us say: Amen.

Prayer for Those Who Help

May the One who blessed and led our forbearers give countenance unto those who provide help for the ill and troubled among us. May they be filled with fortitude and courage, endowed with sympathy and compassion, as they give strength to those at their side. May they fight against despair and continue to find within themselves the will to reach out to those in need. And in their love of others, may they feel the blessing of community and faith through each hour of the day..

❖ In pre-modern, pre-feminist times, Jews were called by their first names and the names of their fathers. Praying for healing is the only occasion when one is *traditionally* called by one's first name and the name of one's mother. (In modern feminist Jewish communities, people are generally called by their first names and the names of both their mothers and fathers.)

What is the origin of this custom? Perhaps when praying for health, healing, and life, the mother as a symbol of the life force is invoked. Alternatively, the mother may be remembered as the one who tended us when we were sick and nursed us to health. There may also be a theological reason. In this prayer, we ask for God's *rachamim* (compassion). In the early midrashic literature, God is portrayed as having both a masculine and a feminine side. God's masculine side is associated with *midat ha-din*: judgement, justice, measure for measure, getting what we deserve. God's feminine side is associated with *midat ha-rachamim:* compassion, mercy, empathic loving presence and unconditional regard. At times of illness, we do not appeal to God's *din*; in fact, we want nothing to do with it! Instead, we appeal to God's *rachamim*: the motherly love of the Almighty. *Rechem*, the root of *rachamim*, means womb.

❖ Jewish teaching mandates that when we pray for the healing of one person, we include in our prayers all others who are ill. Therefore, at the end of the prayer one prays for the individual person who is called by name "along with all who are ill." For the person who is ill, being included in the collective prayer can be a source of comfort. One is reminded that one is not alone, that there are many who suffer, and that suffering is indeed an inluctable feature of this physical creation. As the natural tendency of illness is to isolate, knowing that one is not the only one "singled out" for such hardship can in itself further spiritual healing.

HEALING PRAYERS: A LITANY FOR HEALING

We pray not just for ourselves and for those whom we love but also for all who are ill. When Miriam was sick her brother Moses prayed: "*El na re-fah na la; O God, pray, heal her please!*" We join in this responsive prayer, based on Moses' prayer.

Kavvanah: *I pray now for a healing which includes but extends beyond the body and beyond the self to encompass families, loved ones, care providers and nations. May I share in the healing, encouragement, strength and understanding which we yearn for in this prayer.*

We pray for those who are now ill.

Source of Life, we pray: Heal them.

We pray for those who are affected by illness, anguish and pain.

Heal them.

Grant courage to those whose bodies, holy proof of Your creative goodness, are invaded by illness and the pain of illness.

Encourage them.

Grant strength to families and friends who give their loving care and support; help them to overcome despair.

Strengthen them.

❖ What do we expect when we pray? Do we expect God to hear our prayer and grant it, as a king or queen might hear a request of one of his or her subjects? Do our prayers actually move God in any way? Or do they move the hearts, minds and wills of the pray-ers only? We do not know. And yet, we allow ourselves the pleading petitionary prayer, for its articulation is an honest expression of our hearts. We open up our hearts as a child to her parents, deeply desiring the fulfillment of her soulfelt yearning which she cannot achieve alone.

Prayer invites God to let the Divine Presence suffuse our spirits, to let the will of the Eternal prevail in our lives. Prayer cannot bring water to parched fields, nor mend a broken bridge, nor rebuild a ruined city: but prayer can water an arid soul, mend a broken heart, and rebuild a weakened will.

Grant wisdom to those who probe the deepest complexities of Your work as they labor in the search for treatment and cures.

Inspire them.

Grant clarity of vision and strength of purpose to the leaders of our institutions and our government. May they be moved to act with justice and compassion.

Guide them.

Grant insight to us, so we may understand that whenever death comes, we must accept it—but that before it comes, we must resist it by cherishing our life and making our lives worthy as long as we live.

Bless and heal us all.

❖ Hope is not the same as joy that things are going well, or willingness to invest in enterprises that are obviously headed for early success, but, rather, an ability to work for something because it is good, not just because it stands a chance to succeed. Hope is definitely not the same thing as optimism. It is not the conviction that something will turn out well, but the certainty that something makes sense, regardless of how it turns out. The deepest and most important form of hope, the only one that can keep us above water and urge us to good works, and the only true source of the breathtaking dimension of the human spirit and its efforts, is something we get, as it were, from "elsewhere." It is this hope, above all, which gives us the strength to live... even in conditions that seem as hopeless as ours do, here and now. [Vaclav Havel, *Disturbing the Peace*]

❖ I remember when I used to dismiss the bumper sticker "Pray For Peace." I realize now that I did not understand it, since I also did not understand prayer, which I know now to be the active affirmation in the physical world of our inseparableness from the divine...War will stop when we no longer praise it, or give it any attention at all. Peace will come wherever it is sincerely invited. Love will overflow every sanctuary given it. Truth will grow where the fertilizer that nourishes it is also truth. Faith will be its own reward...Teach yourself peace. Pass it on. [Alice Walker, *Living by the Word*]

REMEMBRANCE: REFLECTIONS

We turn our attention to those who have died, in preparation for honoring their memories with the Kaddish.

Dirge without music

I am not resigned to the shutting away of loving hearts in the hard ground.
So it is, and so it will be, for so it has been, time out of mind:
Into the darkness they go, the wise and the lovely. Crowned
With lilies and with laurel they go; but I am not resigned.

Lovers and thinkers, into the earth with you.
Be one with the dull, the indiscriminate dust.
A fragment of what you felt, of what you knew,
A formula, a phrase remains—but the best is lost.

The answers quick and keen, the honest look, the laughter, the love—
They are gone. They are gone to feed the roses. Elegant and curled
Is the blossom. Fragrant is the blossom. I know. But I do not approve.
More precious was the light in your eyes than all the roses in the world.

Down, down, down into the darkness of the grave
Gently they go, the beautiful, the tender, the kind:
Quietly they go, the intelligent, the witty, the brave.
I know. But I do not approve. And I am not resigned.

'Tis a fearful thing

'Tis a fearful thing to love what death can touch.
A fearful thing to love, hope, dream: to be—
to be,
and oh! to lose.
A thing for fools, this
and a holy thing,
a holy thing
to love.

For your live has lived in me,
your laugh once lifted me,
your word was gift to me.
To remember this brings painful joy.

'Tis a human thing, love,
a holy thing,
to love
what death has touched.

The Intention

Healing is both an exercise
and an understanding
and yet not of the will
nor of the intention
Is a wisdom
and a deeper knowledge
of the daily swing
of life and death
in all creation
There is defeat
to overcome
and acceptance of living
to be established
and always
there must be hope
Not hope of healing
but the hope which informs
the coming moment
and gives it reason
The hope which is
each one's breath
the certainty of love
and of loving
Death may live
in the living
and healing rise
in the dying
for whom the natural end
is part of the gathering
and of the harvest
to be expected
To know healing
is to know that
all life is one
and there is no beginning and no end
and the intention is loving.

Unending Love

We are loved
by an unending love.
We are embraced
by arms that find us
even when
we are hidden from ourselves.
We are touched
by fingers that soothe us
even when
we are too proud for soothing.
We are counseled
by voices that guide us
even when
we are too embittered to hear.

We are loved
by an unending love.
We are supported
by hands that uplift us
even in
the midst of a fall.
We are urged on
by eyes that meet us
even when
we are too weak for meeting.

We are loved
by an unending love.
Embraced, touched, soothed, and
counseled....
ours are the arms,
the fingers, the voices;
ours are the hands,
the eyes, the smiles;
We are loved
by an unending love.

REMEMBRANCE: MOURNER'S KADDISH

Our thoughts turn to those who have died: our own loved ones and those whom our friends, neighbors, and community have lost. As we remember them, let us meditate on the meaning of love and loss, of life and death.

Kavvanah: I lovingly call to mind loved ones whom I have lost. May the precious gifts of their memory and spirit be with me now. May these ancient words of longing for unity and faith link me to those who have died, through the eternity of God.

יִתְגַּדַּל וְיִתְקַדַּשׁ שְׁמֵהּ רַבָּא.
בְּעָלְמָא דִּי בְרָא כִרְעוּתֵהּ,
וְיַמְלִיךְ מַלְכוּתֵהּ בְּחַיֵּיכוֹן
וּבְיוֹמֵיכוֹן וּבְחַיֵּי דְכָל בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל.
בַּעֲגָלָא וּבִזְמַן קָרִיב וְאִמְרוּ אָמֵן:

Yit•ga•dal ve•yit•ka•dash she•meih raba.
Be•al•ma di•va•ra chi•ru•tei,
ve•yam•lich mal•chu•tei• Be•cha•yei•chon
u•ve•yo•mei•chon u•ve•cha•yei de•chol•beit
Yis•ra•el, ba•a•ga•la u•vi•ze•man ka•riv ve•im•ru:
a•men.

יְהֵא שְׁמֵהּ רַבָּא מְבָרַךְ
לְעָלַם וּלְעָלְמֵי עָלְמַיָּא:

Ye•hei she•mei ra•bah me•vo•rach
le•o•lam ul•al•mei• al•ma• yah.

יִתְבָּרַךְ וְיִשְׁתַּבַּח, וְיִתְפָּאַר וְיִתְרוֹמַם
וְיִתְנַשֵּׂא וְיִתְהַדַּר וְיִתְעַלֶּה וְיִתְהַלַּל שְׁמֵהּ
דְּקֻדְשָׁא בְּרִיךְ הוּא
לְעֵלָּא מִן כָּל בִּרְכָתָא וְשִׁירָתָא,
תֻּשְׁבְּחָתָא וְנֶחֱמָתָא, דַּאֲמִירָן בְּעָלְמָא,
וְאִמְרוּ אָמֵן:

Yit•ba•rach ve•yish•ta•bach ve•yit•pa•ar ve•yit•ro•mam
ve•yit•na•sei ve•yit•ha•dar ve•yit•a•leh ve•yit•ha•lal she•mei
de•kud•sha, be•rich hu.
Le•ei•la min kal•bir•cha•ta ve•shi•ra•tah,
tush•be•cha•ta ve•ne•che•ma•ta, da•a•mi•ran be•al•mah
ve•im•ru: a•men.

יְהֵא שְׁלָמָא רַבָּא מִן שְׁמַיָּא וְחַיִּים
עָלֵינוּ וְעַל כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל, אִמְרוּ אָמֵן:

Ye•hei she•la•ma ra•ba min•she•mei•ya ve•cha•yim
a•lei•nu ve•al kol yis•ra•el, ve•im•ru: a•men.

עֹשֶׂה שָׁלוֹם בִּמְרוֹמָיו הוּא יַעֲשֶׂה שָׁלוֹם
עָלֵינוּ וְעַל כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל, וְאִמְרוּ אָמֵן:

O•seh sha•lom bim•roh•mav, hu ya•a•seh sha•lom
a•lei•nu ve•al kol yis•ra•el, ve•im•ru: a•men

As the time approached for Moses to leave this world, the Holy One said to him: "Behold, your time is drawing near." Said Moses: "Dear Holy One, after all my efforts on behalf of Your people, You can tell me that my time is drawing near? 'I shall not die, but live, and proclaim the works of the Eternal!'" [Psalms 118:17] Said God: "Moses, you cannot prevail, for 'this is the destiny of all people.'" [Ecclesiastes 12:13]

Let the glory of God be extolled, and God's great name be hallowed in the world whose creation God willed. May God rule in our own day, in our own lives, and in the life of all Israel, and let us say: Amen.

Let God's great name be blessed for ever and ever.

Beyond all the praises, songs, and adorations that we can utter is the Holy One, the Blessed One, whom we yet glorify, honor, and exalt. And let us say: Amen.

For us and for all Israel, may the blessing of peace and the promise of life come true, and let us say: Amen.

May the One who causes peace to reign in the high heavens let peace descend on us, on all Israel, and all the world, and let us say: Amen.

May the Source of peace send peace to all who mourn, and comfort to all who are bereaved. Amen.

❖ The *Kaddish* was originally recited at the end of a study period. After the teacher would offer a few words of consolation and hope, the leader would proclaim God's greatness with the opening words of the *Kaddish*, which became the ritual for dismissal. Those gathered would respond with the words "May God's name be blessed into all eternity." Beginning in the ninth century, two further paragraphs were added. *Kaddish* then became a mourners' rite based upon the story that Rabbi Akiba helped redeem the soul of a dead man by teaching his son to recite the *Kaddish*.

❖ *It is hard to sing of oneness when our world is not complete, when those who once brought wholeness to our life have gone, and nothing but memory can fill the emptiness their passing leaves behind.*

But memory can tell us only what we were, in company with those we loved; it cannot help us find what each of us, alone, must now become. Yet no one is really alone; those who live no more echo still within our thoughts and words, and what they did is part of what we have become.

We do best homage to our dead when we live our lives most fully, even in the shadow of our loss. For each of our lives is worth the life of the whole world; in each one is the breath of the Ultimate One. In affirming the One, we affirm the worth of each one whose life, now ended, brought us closer to the Source of life, in whose unity no one is alone and every life finds purpose. [Richard Levy]

CLOSING: BLESSINGS

We rise and find a partner. We take turns placing our hands on the head or shoulders, or taking the hands of each other as we offer words of blessing. We bless each other with the words of the priestly blessing, below, and/or with words that flow from our own hearts.

Kavannah: ***Created in the image of the Holy One, I am a holy vessel. May I now freely and lovingly turn to another person and offer a blessing from my heart; may I open myself to listen to and take in the fullness of blessing which is offered to me.***

For a woman:

יְבָרֶכְךְ יְיָ וְיִשְׁמְרֶךְ.
יָאֵר יְיָ פָּנָיו אֵלַיִךְ וִיחֻנֶּךָּ.
יִשָּׂא יְיָ פָּנָיו אֵלַיִךְ
וְיָשֵׂם לְךְ שָׁלוֹם.

For a woman:

Ye•var•chaich Adonai ve•yish•me•raich
Ya•air Adonai pa•nav e•leich ve•ye•chu•naich
Yi•sah Adonai pa•nav e•lech
ve•ya•seim lach sha•lom

For a man:

יְבָרֶכְךָ יְיָ וְיִשְׁמְרֶךָ.
יָאֵר יְיָ פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ וִיחֻנֶּךָּ.
יִשָּׂא יְיָ פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ
וְיָשֵׂם לְךָ שָׁלוֹם.

For a man:

Ye•va•re•che•chah Adonai ve•yish•me•re•chah
Ya•air Adonai pa•nav e•le•chah ve•ye•chu•ne•chah
Yi•sah Adonai pa•nav e•le•chah
ve•ya•seim le•chah sha•lom

May God bless and keep you.

May the Divine Countenance shine upon you.

May the Beauty of Creation be lifted towards you and may you be filled with peace.

- In the Torah [Numbers 6:24-26], offering this blessing is the prerogative of the Levites. Later, only the Kohanim, the priests, and their descendants blessed the congregation as a whole. It is now commonly spoken on a variety of ritual occasions.
- In the Bible, a blessing is most simply understood to be a gift. This verbal blessing should be offered as a gift.
- The first blessing speaks of our desire that God offer us a sense of protection.
- The second blessing asks God to shower us with goodness not because of our merits, but because of God's overflowing abundance and graciousness.
- The third blessing asks God to bless us with the ultimate gift of wholeness and completeness: the gift of *shalom*.
- Judaism always encourages personal prayer. Our personal, spontaneous words of blessing can be a source of strength and sustenance to another. Especially after having been "acted upon" by others, it can be deeply meaningful to be an active agent, offering the heartfelt words of our own hearts.

CLOSING SONGS

As we have prayed for ourselves and our loved ones, we pray now for peace and wholeness for all the world. May God help us make wholeness here on earth.

Oseh Shalom

עֹשֶׂה שָׁלוֹם בִּמְרוֹמָיו הוּא יַעֲשֶׂה שָׁלוֹם
עָלֵינוּ וְעַל כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל, וְאִמְרוּ אָמֵן :

O-seh sha-lom bim-roh-mav, hu ya-a-seh sha-lom
a-lei-nu ve-al kol yis-ra-el, ve-im-ru: a-men

Sim Shalom

שִׂים שָׁלוֹם טוֹבָה וּבְרָכָה, חֵן וָחֶסֶד
וְרַחֲמִים, עָלֵינוּ וְעַל כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל עַמֶּךָ.

Sim sha-lom, to-vah uv-ra-chah, chain va-che-sed
ve-ra-cha-mim a-leinu ve-al kol yis-ra-el am-e-chah.