**12. The Prayer Against Slanderers**

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| May there be no hope for slanderers.  And may wickedness instantly perish.  And may all of Your enemies by quickly destroyed.  May You quickly uproot, break, destroy and make humble the arrogant.  Blessed are You, Adonai, who smashes enemies and makes humble the arrogant. | וְלַמַּלְשִׁינִים אַל תְּהִי תִקְוָה.  וְכָל הָרִשְׁעָה כְּרֶגַע תּאבֵד.  וְכָל אויְבֵי עַמְּךָ מְהֵרָה יִכָּרֵתוּ.  וְהַזֵדִים מְהֵרָה תְעַקֵּר וּתְשַׁבֵּר וּתְמַגֵּר וְתַכְנִיעַ בִּמְהֵרָה בְיָמֵינוּ.  בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה', שׁובֵר אויְבִים וּמַכְנִיעַ זֵדִים: |

**The History of This Prayer**

This prayer was the last prayer added into the Shemoneh Esreh, the 18 blessings of the Amidah. Traditionally, this has been the explanation as to why there actually 19 blessings in the Amidah (count them) and not 18 as the name suggests.

Whatever its origins may be, the prayer is directed against someone. Our version reads that it is against "slanderers" or "the arrogant." However, an earlier version of this prayer was found in the Cairo Geniza, a geniza where scholars have found siddurim that are up to 1000 years old! This version reads as follows:

1. May there be no hope for apostates.
2. And may you quickly uproot the arrogant kingdom in our day.
3. And may the Christians and heretics instantly perish.
4. May they be erased from the book of life, and may they not be written with the righteous.
5. Blessed are You, Adonai, who humbles the arrogant.

This version of the prayer is clearer. It is directed against Christians and against those who convert to Christianity (apostates). The "arrogant kingdom" could refer to either Rome or the Christian Church. The Jews who composed this prayer suffered greatly at the hands of the Christians. Crusaders often forced Jews to either convert or be killed. Christian leaders forced Jews to debate them in matters of theology or biblical interpretation—Jews were not allowed to win such debates. If they did, they could lose their lives. In contrast, Jewish relationship with Moslems were generally far better. We can understand historically why Jews would have prayed to God for such persecution to end. It is easy to imagine how angry Jews who stuck with Judaism would have been against their fellow Jews who gave in and converted to Christianity. Such Jews who converted to Christianity at times turned on their own communities and persecuted those Jews who remained Jewish. This prayer was originally against such betrayers of Judaism.

Our version no longer reads "Christians" "apostates" or "heretics" because the Christian Church did not allow Jews to say such a blessing. Often Jews who converted to Christianity would "slander" the Jews to the Church and in response, the Church forced the Jews to change their prayers. A Jew or synagogue caught saying such a prayer could be severely punished. A hint at this target of the prayer remains to this day—we pray against "slanderers" those who say bad things about Judaism to others. The rest of the words have been made more general—"enemies," "the arrogant" and "wickedness" are all that is left.

**The Meaning of the Prayer to Us Today**

While we can understand why Jews used to pray against Christians and Jews who converted to Christianity, today we try to live in peace with members of other religions. We believe that they have a right to practice their faith as they see fit, and we hope that they respect our right to practice our beliefs. We would not like it if they prayed against us in their synagogues,

Some recent Reform and Reconstructionist siddurim removed this prayer altogether. But it remains in the Conservative siddur. So if we're going to say it, we have to ask what it means to us, today, to ask God for these things.

* What do we mean by "slanderers"? Is this people who say bad things about us personally, or is there a national meaning to the word, people who slander Judaism, Jews or maybe Israel?
* How do we feel about Jews who say negative things about Judaism to the larger, non-Jewish world? Are there times when this makes us feel angry? Is it okay for a Jew to write an article, for instance, saying negative things about Judaism? When, if ever, might this not be okay?
* This prayer is the only "angry" prayer in the Amidah. Is it good for us to be a little angry in the midst of our prayers? Is anger a dangerous thing? Is it scary to ask God to "smash, destroy" other people? Do we take this literally?