**מקורות לדברי תפילה**

**קיץ 2013**

**מחנה רמה ניו אינגלנד**

**ג'וש קולפ, ראש בית מדרש**

**Sources for Divrei Tefillah**

**Summer 2013**

**Camp Ramah in New England**

**Josh Kulp, Rosh Bet Midrash**

**אֲדֹנָי שְׂפָתַי תִּפְתָּח וּפִי יַגִּיד תְּהִלָּתֶךָ**

**Dear CRNE Tzevet Member, Kayitz 2013:**

A couple of months ago my son was at tefillot with me on Shabbat morning. He had been in for the Shacharit Amidah, gone out to play in the courtyard during the Torah reading and now he was back in for Musaf. He said: "Abba, what should I say from the siddur?" I pointed to the beginning of Musaf Amidah and said, "Say that." He looked up puzzled and said, "Again."

My son was correct and probably not the first person/child to notice that we are saying the same prayers over and over again. Indeed, the Amidah prayer is traditionally said at least 3 times a day (4 on Shabbat and holidays, 5 on Yom Kippur) every day of the Jewish year. It seems that if the prayer is so central to our religious lives and we say it so frequently, we might as well try to understand it to the best of our ability.

This summer at camp we hope to do exactly that. One of our educational themes is the Amidah. This booklet contains source material for almost every one of the paragraphs of the Amidah. Each page begins with the Hebrew of the berakhah, an English translation, some explanation and many thoughts, quotes, stories, midrashim and other such material which should be a source to help you and your campers understand what they are saying.

You will all be attending some explanation sessions during Shavua Hakhanah as to how to use this material. But I'd like to emphasize here that the most important element of this program is that YOU TAKE OWNERSHIP OVER IT. Your chanichim know YOU. They respect YOU (even if they don't always show it). They are interested in what YOU think, how YOU act, what YOU believe in. The Amidah is an amazing prayer, and if you can use these sheets in the creative ways that YOU can think up, then you will be able to help your chanichim have a deeper understanding and appreciation of their prayers. Putting together these sheets is something that I can do. But as of now, like the Amidah itself, it is just words on paper. Making the Amidah meaningful, bringing it to the chanichim is one of the reasons that you are staff members here this summer.

Of course, I am around all summer to help you. Don't be afraid to come up to me at any time and say, Josh, I need some help understanding, or Josh, I'm not sure how to get my point across. You can usually find me in the library, at meals or wandering around camp. You can also text me at 203-6858679. I'll even invite you to take a run with me in the early morning and we can talk over this material or anything else about camp you'd like to talk about. There are of course many other tzevet members whom you can use as a resource over the summer. We are all here to help you do as best of a job as you can. Please don't ever be afraid to ask.

**בהצלחה!**

**Joshua Kulp (Rosh Bet Midrash, 2013)**

**The History of the Amidah: The Rambam**

The following text is from the introduction of the Rambam (Maimonides) to the laws of tefillah. The point of reading this text is not just to get you to think about the history of Jewish prayer, but to get you to think about why Jewish prayer is the way it is today. What did the Rambam, who wrote this text, think about the purpose of prayer? To help you on your way we have put together the following questions. There are no right or wrong answers to these questions. They are meant to get you thinking. There are also questions at the end and in the footnotes to help you think.

* What is "prayer"? What do we mean when we use that word?
* Why should people pray? Are our prayers for God or for us?
* Why should we have set formulas for prayer? Why not just pray spontaneously whenever we want to?
* How did prayer change from the time the Torah was given until the time when the Amidah was created (around second century C.E.)?
* What exactly is the Amidah? What types of things do we say in the Amidah?

**Halakhah One**

It is a positive commandment (מצוה) to pray (להתפלל) every day, as it says: "And you shall worship Adonai your God" (Shemot 23:25). Tradition teaches that this \*Avodah\* (worship) is Tefillah, as it says "...and to worship Him with all of your hearts..." (Devarim 11:13). The Rabbis said: What sort of \*Avodah\* is there with the heart? - Tefillah.[[1]](#footnote-1)

**Halakhah Two**

The number of [daily] Tefillot is not mandated by the Torah, nor is the liturgy of Tefillah mandated by the Torah, nor does Tefillah have a set time from the Torah…

The commandment of the Torah is for a person to plead before God and to pray every day, saying the praise of the *Kadosh Barukh Hu* (the Holy One, Who is Blessed). Afterwards, he can ask for his needs by requesting and pleading. And then he gives praise and thanks to God for the good which He has granted him. [[2]](#footnote-2) Everyone prays according to his own ability.

**Halakhah Three**

If he was one who regularly prayed, he would increase his supplications and requests and if it was hard for him to find the words he could speak according to his ability - at any time he wanted.[[3]](#footnote-3)

Similarly, the number of Tefillot was according to his ability: Some would say Tefillah once a day and some people would say Tefillah many times [a day]. Everyone would say Tefillah facing the Bet Hamikdash - wherever it might be.

This is how the matter was from the times of Moshe Rabbenu until Ezra[[4]](#footnote-4).

**Halakhah Four**

Once the Jews were exiled in the times of the evil Nebuchadnezzar[[5]](#footnote-5), they assimilated in Persia and Greece and other nations, had children in those countries and those children spoke confusing languages, each one was a mixture of several languages. Due to this, people couldn't express themselves fully in one language, rather it would be a mish-mash of language, as it says: **"And half of their children spoke the language of Ashdod, and they could not speak the language of Judah, but spoke the language of various peoples"** (Nehemiah 13:24); and when one of them would pray, he would find it difficult to request or praise **the Kadosh Barukh Hu** (the Holy One, Who is Blessed) in **Lashon haKodesh** (the holy language, Hebrew) without other languages mixing in.

Once Ezra (c. 450 BCE) and his court saw this, they established 18 berakhot in order:

The first three praising Hashem;

The last three thanking Hashem;

And the middle berakhot which contain requests for all sorts of the things. These are general categories for all people's wishes and for the needs of the community.

This was done so that they [the berakhot] would be set in everyone's mouth and they could learn them easily and quickly.

And the Tefillah of those who had trouble speaking would be as complete a Tefillah as the Tefillah of those who speak easily. Because of this matter, they established all of the Berakhot and Tefillot in the mouths of all of Yisraeel so that the theme of each berakhah would be set even in the mouth of one who has trouble speaking.

**Concluding things to think about:**

The Rambam claims that there are two levels of tefillah. The Torah commands everyone to worship according to his/her own ability, whenever they want, for as long as they want. It just has to be done every day. The rabbis saw that this was hard for people, so they established fixed prayers for the Jewish people.

* Why do you think the rabbis made such a big change in how Jews should pray?
* What were the advantages to the earlier system?
* Why should we pray in Hebrew?
* How do you feel about having a commandment to pray? Does this make it easier or harder for you?
* What would Judaism be like without regular mandatory prayer?

**Some General Rules Concerning the Amidah**

**Body Position**

1. One should stand still during the entire Amidah prayer. This means the two legs are together, no walking around the room, no shuffling around. It is preferable to remain standing until all of those around you have completed their prayer. You certainly should not talk until everyone has finished.

2. There are four bows: the first two are at the end of the first two berakhot. The third is at the beginning of Modim (the 18th berakhah, next to last) and the last is at the end of the Modim berakhah.

3. Before beginning the Amidah, one takes three steps forward. And upon completion, three steps backward. There is no need to take three steps backward in the beginning or three forward at the end.

4. One should face east during the Amidah, towards Israel. However, if everyone is facing the aron kodesh, the ark, then one shouldn't do something different than everybody else is doing. The best scenario would be for the Makom Tefillah to be set up so that the Aron Kodesh is on the east-side of the room.

**Reciting the Amidah**

1. Take all of the time you need to say the Amidah. If the rest of the community has continued, you should continue to say the Amidah until you are done.

2. The best time to add a personal prayer into the Amidah is at the end, after Sim Shalom.

3. There are additions that occur regularly—Saturday night, fast days, Rosh Hodesh and holidays. Pay attention so that you don't miss these additions.

**The History of the Amidah: The Mishnah**

The Amidah is not mentioned anywhere in the Bible. Indeed, communal, organized and fixed (set words) prayer is not mentioned in the Bible. The only prayer we hear about in the Bible is spontaneous prayer, said whenever a person felt the need to pray, for instance during a battle or when someone is sick.

The first Jewish sources that talk about fixed prayer are rabbinic sources composed between the years 135 C.E. and 500 C.E. Some of these sources seem to imply that regular fixed prayer was established by Rabban Gamaliel, a rabbinic leader who lived in the generation following the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 C.E.

The first and most famous source is a Mishnah from tractate Berakhot. Below is my explanation of this mishnah and some questions for you to think about:

**Mishnah Berakhot 4:3-4**

רבן גמליאל אומר בכל יום מתפלל אדם שמונה עשרה

רבי יהושע אומר מעין שמונה עשרה.

ר' עקיבא אומר אם שגורה תפלתו בפיו יתפלל שמונה עשרה ואם לאו מעין י"ח.

רבי אליעזר אומר העושה תפלתו קבע אין תפלתו תחנונים.

Rabban Gamaliel says: every day a person should pray the eighteen [blessings].

Rabbi Joshua says: an abstract of the eighteen.

Rabbi Akiva says: if he knows it fluently he prays the eighteen, and if not an abstract of the eighteen.

Rabbi Eliezer says: if a person makes his prayers fixed, it is not [true] supplication.

***Explanation***

Rabban Gamaliel demands that every person recite these eighteen blessings (the Amidah, which now has 19 blessings). Note that this would not have been easy in a time when people did not have siddurim (prayerbooks). The first siddurim were not composed until around the 8th century and until the printing press (15th century) most people would not have had one. Nevertheless, Rabban Gamaliel mandates that every person recite the entire Amidah three times a day, every day.

Rabbi Joshua says that a person need not recite the full eighteen but rather may recite an abbreviated form. It seems that he thinks that the full eighteen is just too long.

Rabbi Akiva tries to compromise between the two previous opinions. If he is capable of reciting the full Amidah, then he should do so. If, however, he is not capable because he is not familiar enough with it, then he may recite the shorter version.

Rabbi Eliezer objects to the entire institution of set prayer, prayers with wording that must be recited every day. One who is given a fixed set of prayers is not really asking God for anything. The only reason he is saying the prayer is that he is obligated to do so. Prayer should be from the heart, and not the recitation of a set formula.

**Questions for Thought:**

* What are the benefits and detriments of all of these positions? Whose opinion do we follow? Why do you think that this opinion "won out" in the end?
* With whom do you most agree? Why?
* Try to think about the issue from the perspective of one of the rabbis with whom you disagree. Why did he say what he said? What is beneficial about his way of thinking of the issue?
* If you didn't have fixed prayer, meaning prayers you were supposed to say every day, how often would you pray? Do you ever pray when you are not at "teffilot"?
1. **The God of our Ancestors :מגן אברהם**

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| אֲדנָי שפָתַי תִּפְתָּח וּפִי יַגִּיד תְּהִלָּתֶךָ: בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלהֵינוּ וֵאלהֵי אֲבותֵינוּ. אֱלהֵי אַבְרָהָם. אֱלהֵי יִצְחָק. וֵאלהֵי יַעֲקב. הָאֵל הַגָּדול הַגִּבּור וְהַנּורָא אֵל עֶלְיון. גּומֵל חֲסָדִים טובִים. וְקונֵה הַכּל. וְזוכֵר חַסְדֵּי אָבות. וּמֵבִיא גואֵל לִבְנֵי בְנֵיהֶם לְמַעַן שְׁמו בְּאַהֲבָה: מֶלֶךְ עוזֵר וּמושִׁיעַ וּמָגֵן: בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה', מָגֵן אַבְרָהָם | Adonai, open my lips so my mouth will declare your praise.Blessed are You, Adonai, our God, and the God of our ancestors, the God of Avraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. The great, mighty and awesome God. God who is supreme. Who acts most piously. Who is the creator of everything. Who remembers the pious acts of our ancestors. And who brings a redeemer to their descendants for the sake of His name, with love.A king who helps, and saves and protects.Blessed are You, Adonai, the shield of Abraham. |

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**The Opening Meditation**

The Amidah opens with six words that are not actually part of the Amidah but that were attached to it in a later period by the rabbis. Interestingly, these six words are part of Psalm 51, a psalm recited by David when Natan the prophet came to rebuke him for what David had done with Bathsheba. David asks God to help him approach God in repentance. Indeed, the words which follow are an appropriate introduction to the Amidah: "You do not want me to bring sacrifices; You do not desire burnt offerings. True sacrifice is a contrite spirit; God, You will not despise a contrite and crushed heart." God does not actually want these specific words. What God wants, and what we need to give, is the proper feeling, the emotions, that are meant to accompany these prayers.

We open the Amidah by reminding ourselves that we are approaching God with contriteness, asking for forgiveness, asking for mercy. We are not perfect human beings; we have made mistakes; even King David made some mistakes. We hope that through our recitation of the Amidah we can begin to mend our lives.

Two note of instruction:

* These six words are part of the Amidah. The steps taken forward before the Amidah should be taken before and not while these words are being recited.
* One should be careful not to talk between "*goel yisrael*" the conclusion of the berakhah right before the Amidah and these words. Any announcements should be made before that final berakhah is recited, including telling people what pages the Amidah are on. Indeed, it is best to make as many of the announcements as possible before the "barchu."

**Our God and the God of Our Ancestors, the God of Avraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob**

The words, "The God of Avraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob" are taken from Shemot 3:6 (and elsewhere in that chapter). After telling Moses to remove his shoes, the first thing that God says to Moses is "I am the God of your ancestors, the God of Avraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob."

* Why are these God's first words to Moses?
* Why do you think the authors of the Amidah chose to begin the Amidah by first referring to God as "our God" and then as "God of Abraham, God of Isaac and God of Jacob?
* Why not just say "God of our ancestors"? Why do we need to repeat, God of Avraham, etc? Why not "God of Avraham, Isaac and Jacob"?
* How can you make the God of your ancestors into your God?

**The Imahot (Matriarchs)**

The original blessing mentions only the "patriarchs" the "fathers" of the Jewish people. The "matriarchs" the mothers were not traditionally part of this prayer.

In recent years some Conservative synagogues and institutions have begun to include a mention of the "imahot" in the Amidah. Some rabbis have said that this inclusion is legitimate and even necessary and there have been other voices in the Conservative movement who have said that the tefillot should not be changed, at least not in this way.

At Camp Ramah in New England we have instituted a compromise. Sometimes we say the imahot and sometimes we do not. In your personal prayers you are free to choose to do as you wish. If you wish to always include the imahot, then you should add them to yourselves on days when the rest of the kehillah is not saying them. If you do not wish to say them ever, then you should just not recite those words when the kehillah recites them. In this way the kehillah can act in compromise but each person can act according to their beliefs.

Below are some of the claims as to why we should include them and why we should not:

**Why should we say the Imahot?**

1. Changes in the wording of the Amidah have occurred throughout history, even before the modern period. There have even been changes that have reflected different ideologies. Therefore, it is legitimate to change the wording of the Amidah. Furthermore, the addition of the imahot is not a "major" change in the blessing, one which changes the entire subject.
2. The imahot, Sarah, Rebecca, Leah and Rachel, are important figures in Bereshit. They are not "just" the wives of the patriarchs or the mothers of their children. They are significant factors in the unfolding of God's covenant.
3. We live in a world in which women are considered equal to men. Our prayer should reflect that world. Women should serve as religious role models not just to other women, but to men as well.

**Why should we not say the Imahot?**

1. While change in the Amidah has occurred and is occasionally legitimate, the addition of the imahot changes parts of the berakhah that may not be changed, specifically the conclusion "magen Avraham" and the opening words of the berakhah. Furthermore, it changes the intent of the berakhah which is not allowed.
2. Nowhere does it say that God made a covenant with the "imahot." God does make covenants with Avraham, Isaac and Jacob but the stories of Bereshit never portray God as making a covenant with their wives. While we may live in an egalitarian society, the society in the Torah was not. And if we were to include the imahot because they are important figures, why not include David, Joseph, Aaron, Solomon? What about Bilhah and Zilpah?
3. If one wishes to acknowledge the role of women in the Bible and to make more frequent mention of them in the siddur, the Amidah is not the correct place to do so. The Amidah is fixed liturgy—these exact words must be recited. "Prayer" is something that comes from one's heart and therefore one is free to add in prayers, or to recite religious poetry, when one's heart desires.

**2. God's Great Power**: **גבורה**

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| אַתָּה גִּבּור לְעולָם אֲדנָי. מְחַיֵּה מֵתִים אַתָּה רַב לְהושִׁיעַ: **בקיץ -**מורִיד הַטָּל: **בחורף -**מַשִּׁיב הָרוּחַ וּמורִיד הַגָּשֶּׁם: מְכַלְכֵּל חַיִּים בְּחֶסֶד. מְחַיֶּה מֵתִים בְּרַחֲמִים רַבִּים. סומֵךְ נופְלִים. וְרופֵא חולִים וּמַתִּיר אֲסוּרִים. וּמְקַיֵּם אֱמוּנָתו לִישֵׁנֵי עָפָר. מִי כָמוךָ בַּעַל גְּבוּרות וּמִי דומֶה לָּךְ. מֶלֶךְ מֵמִית וּמְחַיֶּה וּמַצְמִיחַ יְשׁוּעָה: וְנֶאֱמָן אַתָּה לְהַחֲיות מֵתִים: בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה', מְחַיֵּה הַמֵּתִים:  | You are forever mighty, Adonai, giving life to the dead. You are a mighty savior.In summer say: You bring down the dew. In winter say: You cause the wind to blow and you bring down the rain.You sustain life with kindness. You give life to the dead with great mercy. You support the fallen. You heal the sick. You free the captive. And You keep Your faith with sleepers in the dust. Who is like You, master of might? Who is similar to You, a king who causes death and life, and causes salvation to flourish.And You are faithful to give life to the dead.Blessed are You, Adonai, who gives life to the dead. |

**What Does God Do? What Do We Do?**

In this prayer we praise God for all sorts of attributes. It seems that there are several different types of attributes in this berakhah, some of which only God can do (bring down rain, for instance) and some which humans can sometimes do as well (support the fallen, heal the sick and free the captive).

* What do you make of these different attributes?
* Why does the author pick out these attributes specifically?
* What are other things that we might praise God for doing?
* Why do we praise God for things we can do ourselves?

**Gives Life to the Dead**

This berakah three times refers to "giving life to the dead" which has also been translated as "revives the dead" or "resurrects the dead." This is how the translation and the Hebrew blessing appears in traditional siddurim. Conservative and Reform Jews often do not believe literally that God will bring the dead back to life.

Therefore, Conservative siddurim have kept the Hebrew but have usually given a symbolic translation such as "Master over life and death."

Reform and Reconstructionist siddurim have replaced both the Hebrew and the English with phrases such as "who has planted within us immortal life" "giving life to everything" "source of life."

The translation above is somewhat ambiguous—"gives life to the dead." One can take it literally, as many traditional Jews do, that someday God will bring the dead back to life. Or one can understand it spiritually, that by remembering people we knew who have died, we can continue to give them life.

* Of all of the powers of God, why would the author have focused so much on this power?
* Even if you personally don't believe in the literal "resurrection of the dead" why do you think that so many Jews believe in it?
* Are there values we can learn from the belief in resurrection even if we don't literally believe that the dead will someday come back to life?

**Dew and Rain: Mentioning God's "Wet" Powers**

There are words in this prayer that vary depending on the season. From the end of Sukkot until Pesah we praise God for causing the wind to blow and the rain to fall. During the summer months, when it doesn't rain in Israel, we no longer mention rain. According to some versions of the siddur during these months we praise God for dew.

There is an interesting debate about this in the following mishnah (Taanit 1:1):

מאימתי מזכירין גבורת גשמים?

רבי אליעזר אומר מיום טוב הראשון של חג.

רבי יהושע אומר מיום טוב האחרון של חג.

אמר לו רבי יהושע הואיל ואין הגשמים אלא סימן קללה בחג למה מזכיר

אמר לו רבי אליעזר אף אני לא אמרתי לשאול אלא להזכיר משיב הרוח ומוריד הגשם בעונתו. אמר לו אם כן לעולם יהא מזכיר:

From when do they mention the powers of [bringing] rain?

Rabbi Eliezer says: from the first day of the Festival [of Sukkot].

Rabbi Joshua says: on the last day of the Festival [of Sukkot].

Rabbi Joshua said to him: Since rain on the Festival is nothing but a sign of [God’s] curse why should he mention it?

Rabbi Eliezer said to him: I also did not say to request [rain] but to make mention, “He causes the wind to blow and the rain to fall” in its due season.

He replied to him: if so one should at all times make mention of it.

**Explanation of the Mishnah**

Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Joshua both agree that we begin to mention "rain" only on Sukkot. Sukkot is when the rainy season begins in Israel. However, rain on Sukkot is considered to be a bad sign from God because it prevents one from being able to dwell (eat and sleep) in the Sukkah. Therefore, Rabbi Joshua argues, it does not make sense to mention God’s rain-giving powers at a time when we don't want to experience this power.

Rabbi Eliezer agrees that rain on Sukkot is a curse. However, he responds that he was not suggesting that we **ask** for rain at the beginning of Sukkot, but rather that we just **mention** that God has the power to bring rain in its due season. We ask for rain later the Amidah when we say, “And provide dew and rain (*ten tal umatar*).”

Rabbi Joshua responds that if all we are doing in this prayer is mentioning rain, why not mention it all throughout the year.

**Questions for further thought:**

* Why is mentioning rain one of the main issues we discuss in this berakhah?

**Morid Hatal—The Power to Bring Dew**

The custom to say "מוריד הטל" was originally a Sephardi custom. In dry lands such as Israel and other parts of the Middle East, including Babylonia, dew helps keep the vegetation dry during the summer months. The Jews who added these words into the berakhah felt that God should be praised even for the small amount of moisture that falls to the ground. Ashkenazi Jews, whose customs originated in Germany and northern France, did not rely much on dew, for it rained there in the summer as well as the winter. Therefore, they did not add these words to their prayers. In Israel all Jews, Ashkenazi and Sephardi, say these words as part of their Amidah.

**4. Wisdom, Insight and Understanding: אתה חונן**

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| You generously give people wisdom, and you teach human beings insight.Generously give us wisdom, insight and understanding.Blessed are you Adonai, who generously gives wisdom. | אַתָּה חונֵן לְאָדָם דַּעַת. וּמְלַמֵּד לֶאֱנושׁ בִּינָה: חָנֵּנוּ מֵאִתְּךָ דֵעָה בִּינָה וְהַשכֵּל. בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה', חונֵן הַדָּעַת. |

After the first three paragraphs that begin every Amidah, we continue with paragraphs in which we ask God for something. In the first paragraph, we ask for wisdom.

* Why do you think we begin the Amidah with a request for wisdom?
* Does wisdom come from God? If not, where does wisdom come from?

**Wisdom in the Jewish Tradition**

**Shulkhan Arukh, Orah Hayyim 115:1**

Because the difference between human beings and animals is in their wisdom and understanding, they set up this tefillah first (after the opening three), for without understanding, there can be no prayer.

**Mishnah Avot 4:1**

Ben Zoma said: Who is wise? One who learns from every person.

**Bavli Tamid 32a**

Alexander the Great asked the sages: Who is called wise? They said to him: Who is wise? One who sees what happens before it happens.

* How do these sources define who is wise? What would you expect them to say?
* If you were asked "who is wise" what would you answer?

**Midrash Tehillim 119:24**

"Get wisdom, get understanding" (Proverbs 4:5): He who has wisdom but no understanding is like a person with bread in his hand but nothing to eat with it. And he who has understanding but no wisdom is like a person with a tasty dish in his hand but no bread to eat it with. But he who has both wisdom and understanding is like a person who has in his hand bread and a tasty dish—he eats both and he is full.

* What is the difference between wisdom and understanding?
* How is wisdom like bread and understanding like a tasty dish?
* Can you think of an example in your life in which one type of intelligence depends on another type of intelligence?

**Wisdom in the World**

“You can tell whether a man is clever by his answers. You can tell whether a man is wise by his questions.”

Naguib Mahfouz, Egyptian Novelist, 1988 Nobel Prize for Literature

## "Imagination is more important than knowledge. Knowledge is limited. Imagination encircles the world."

 Albert Einstein

**5. Teshuvah: תשובה**

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| --- | --- |
| Return us back to your Torah, our Father.And draw us closer to your worship, our king.And bring us back in full repentance before You.Blessed are You, Adonai, who desires teshuvah (repentance).  | הֲשִׁיבֵנוּ אָבִינוּ לְתורָתֶךָ. וְקָרְבֵנוּ מַלְכֵּנוּ לַעֲבודָתֶךָ וְהַחֲזִירֵנוּ בִּתְשׁוּבָה שְׁלֵמָה לְפָנֶיךָ. בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה', הָרוצֶה בִּתְשׁוּבָה:  |

This berakhah immediately follows our request for knowledge, wisdom and understanding. It is as if the order of the berakhot implies that once we are wise, the first thing we recognize is that we are not perfect, we have shortcomings.

* What does it mean that we ask God to bring us back in teshuvah? Why can't we just do this ourselves?
* How do you feel when you're told you must do teshuvah? Does it help you to do teshuvah or make it harder?
* The last line says that God wants teshuvah. Wouldn't God just prefer that we never mess things up in the first place? What do you think?

**Teshuvah and Forgiveness in the Jewish Tradition**

**Rambam, Mishneh Torah, Laws of Ethics, 6:6**

When a person does something wrong to another person the person who has been wronged shouldn't keep quiet. Rather, it is a mitzvah for her to tell the other person and say to her, "Why did you do that to me?" or "Why did you do that wrong thing to me?"

And if the person who did something wrong asks for forgiveness, the other person must forgive her. And the forgiver should not be cruel at that moment.

* Why is it sometimes important to not keep quiet when someone has done something wrong to you?
* How does this law connect up with our description of God as "desiring repentance?"

**Rambam, Mishneh Torah, Laws of Teshuvah, 2:1**

"What is complete teshuvah? She who is confronted by the identical situation in which she previously sinned and she is able to do the same sin again, but she nevertheless doesn't do so because she wants to repent, and not because she is too afraid or too weak [to repeat the sin].

* Why does one have to face the same situation in order to know that one has done teshuvah?
* What does this teach us about what teshuvah really is? What is teshuvah meant to accomplish?

**Babylonian Talmud 10a**

In the neighborhood of Rabbi Meir there lived some bullies who hassled him so much that he prayed for them to die. His wife Beruriah said to him: Why do suppose your prayer should be heard? Do you justify yourself because of the Psalmist’s pleas, ‘Let sins cease from the land?’ Sinners don’t have to die for sins to cease; it is sufficient that they stop sinning. Rather, you should ask mercy for them so that they may repent. Rabbi Meir did ask God to have mercy on them and they returned in teshuvah.

**6. Forgiveness: סליחה**

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| סְלַח לָנוּ אָבִינוּ כִּי חָטָאנוּ. מְחַל לָנוּ מַלְכֵּנוּ כִּי פָשָׁעְנוּ. כִּי מוחֵל וְסולֵחַ אָתָּה. בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה', חַנּוּן הַמַּרְבֶּה לִסְלחַ:  | Forgive us, our Father, for we have sinned. Pardon us, our king, for we have transgressed; for you forgive and pardon. Blessed are You, Adonai, who is gracious and quick to forgive. |

In the previous berakhah we asked God to help us regret our sins, the wrong things we did. Now, we that we have repented, we ask God to indeed forgive us for our sins. We have to hope that God is a forgiving God.

* In the first line we address God as "father" or "parent"; in the second line we address God as "king" or "ruler". What is the difference between thinking of God as parent or ruler? Why do we begin with "father" (or parent) and then change to "king"? How is it different when forgiveness is given by a parent from when it is given by a different authority figure, such as a teacher, principal or camp director?
* Is it easy to forgive, especially when you know the person will continue to mess things up? As a forgiver, how is God different from human beings? What can we learn from God?

**Forgiveness in the Jewish Tradition**

**Rambam, Laws or Repentance 2:10**

It is forbidden for a person to be cruel and not to forgive. Rather, he should be easily appeased and hard to anger. And when someone who has wronged him wholeheartedly asks him forgiveness and he sincerely wants to be forgiven, even if that person really bothered him and did many wrong things to him he shouldn't hold a grudge. And acting in this way is what it means to be a part of the Jewish people.

* Why do you think the Rambam adds in that acting in this way is at least part of what it means to be part of the Jewish people?

**Babylonian Talmud Taanit 20a**

Our Rabbis have taught: A person should always be gentle like a reed and never hard like a cedar.

Once Rabbi Elazar son of Rabbi Shimon was coming from Migdal Gedor, from the house of his teacher, and he was riding on his donkey by the riverside and was feeling happy and elated because he had studied much Torah.

There chanced to meet him an exceedingly ugly man who greeted him, ‘Peace be upon you, my master."

Rabbi Shimon did not return his greeting but instead said to him, "You worthless creature! How ugly you are. Are all the people of your city as ugly as you are?"

The man replied: ‘I do not know, but go and tell the craftsman who made me, 'How ugly is the vessel which you have made.'"

When Rabbi Elazar realized that he had done wrong he got off of his donkey and bowed down before the man and said to him, "I apologize to you, please forgive me." The man replied: "I will not forgive you until you go to the craftsman who made me and say to him, 'How ugly is the vessel which you have made.'"

Rabbi Elazar walked behind the man until he reached his home town. When the people of the city came out to meet him they said, "Peace to you our Teacher, our Master."

The man asked them, ‘Who are you calling "master and teacher?"

They replied, "The man who is walking behind you."

He exclaimed, "If this man is a teacher, may there not be any more like him in Israel!"

The people asked him: "Why?"

He replied: "He did such and such a thing to me."

They said to him: "Nevertheless, you should forgive him, for he is a man greatly learned in the Torah."

The man replied: "For your sakes I will forgive him, but only on the condition that he does not act in the same manner in the future."

Soon after this Rabbi Elazar son of Rabbi Shimon entered [the Bet Hamidrash] and

said, "A person should always be gentle as a reed and let him never be hard as a

cedar. And for this reason the reed merited that of it should be made a pen for the writing of the Torah, Tefillin and Mezuzoth.

**Questions for Thought:**

* What mistakes did the rabbi make? What mistakes did the ugly man make? What things did they do right?
* What do you think of the main characters in the story? With whom do you have sympathy: the rabbi or the ugly man? What about the people of the town?
* Whom do you think the story teller has sympathy for?

**7. Redemption: גאולה**

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| --- | --- |
| See our affliction, and fight our fight.And redeem us quickly for your name.For you are a mighty redeemer.Blessed are you, Adonai, who redeems Israel. | רְאֵה בְעָנְיֵנוּ. וְרִיבָה רִיבֵנוּ. וּגְאָלֵנוּ מְהֵרָה לְמַעַן שְׁמֶךָ. כִּי גּואֵל חָזָק אָתָּה. בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה', גּואֵל יִשרָאֵל:  |

This berakhah shifts the theme from the three personal berakhot (intelligence, repentance and forgiveness) to a more national theme—the redemption of Israel.

Remember, the Amidah was written after the Second Temple was destroyed, at a time when Israel did not rule over itself in its own land. Today, Jews have returned to the land of Israel and created there an independent Jewish state. One siddur in Israel has even changed the second line to reads, "And quickly redeem us with a **complete redemption**." The person who made this change wanted to show that through the State of Israel, the Jews have begun to be redeemed.

* What does redemption mean? What are we asking to be redeemed from?
* How do we make sense of this prayer in a time when most Jews in most places are not oppressed?

**Geulah (Redemption) in Jewish Literature**

The word גואל, to redeem, appears in many places in the Tanakh. Think about how it is used differently in the following verses. What kind of redemption do you hope for?

**Genesis 48:16 (Jacob is speaking, right before he dies)**

The Angel who has redeemed (הַגֹּאֵל) me from all harm — May he bless the boys. In them may my name be recalled, and the names of my fathers, Abraham and Isaac, and may they become many upon the face of the earth.

* What does a redeemer do in this verse? What is Jacob asking him for?

**Exodus 6:6 (God is speaking to Moses)**

Say, therefore, to the Israelite people: I am the Lord. I will take you from the hard, exhausting work of the Egyptians and deliver you from their bondage. I will redeem you (וְגָאַלְתִּי) with an outstretched arm and through great judgments.

* What does it mean to redeem in this verse? How is this connected to the redemption in the Amidah prayer?

**Leviticus 25:47-48 (According to this law, if a Jew is sold into slavery to pay off a debt, he can be redeemed by one of his family members)**

If a foreigner who lives among you prospers, and one of your family member grows poor and is sold to the foreigner living with you, or to one of his family members. After he is sold he has the right of redemption (גְּאֻלָּה). One of his family members shall redeem him.

* What kind of redemption is described in this verse? How does it compare to the redemption in the other verses?

**8. Healing: רפואה**

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| Heal us, Adonai, so that we will be healed.Save us, so that we will be saved.For You are our praise. Bring full healing to all of our wounds.[If praying for a specific individual add:May it be your will, Adonai, our God and God of our ancestors, that you quickly send a full recovery from heaven, physical and mental healing to \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ who is sick, along with others who are sick among Israel.]For you are our King, a faithful and merciful healer.Blessed are you, Adonai, who heals his people Israel. | רְפָאֵנוּ ה' וְנֵרָפֵא. הושִׁיעֵנוּ וְנִוָּשֵׁעָה כִּי תְהִלָּתֵנוּ אָתָּה. וְהַעֲלֵה רְפוּאָה שְׁלֵמָה לְכָל מַכּותֵינוּ. [יְהִי רָצון מִלְּפָנֶיךָ ה' אֱלהַי וֵאלהֵי אֲבותַי. שֶׁתִּשְׁלַח מְהֵרָה רְפוּאָה שְׁלֵמָה מִן הַשָּׁמַיִם. רְפוּאַת הַנֶּפֶשׁ וּרְפוּאַת הַגּוּף לְחולֶה (פב"פ) בְּתוךְ שְׁאָר חולֵי יִשרָאֵל:] כִּי אֵל מֶלֶךְ רופֵא נֶאֱמָן וְרַחֲמָן אָתָּה. בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה', רופֵא חולֵי עַמּו יִשרָאֵל:  |

This prayer was written at a time when medicine as we know it did not exist. Think about how your lives would be different without all of the advances of modern medicine.

* Why do we still thank God when healing comes from doctors and medicine?
* Are there still problems with our health that we must pray to God to help us heal?

**Medicine in the Jewish Tradition**

**Midrash Shmuel 4**

R. Yishmael and R. Akiva were walking through the streets of Jerusalem with a certain man, when a sick person confronted them and said: "Masters, tell me, how can I be healed?"

They replied: "Take such and such, and you will be healed."

The man accompanying the sages asked them, "Who struck this person with sickness?"

They replied, "The Holy One (God)."

The man said back, "Then why are you getting involved in something that doesn't concern you? God struck him with illness, and you are going to heal him?"

The sages said to him: "What is your work?"

He said, "I till the soil. You see, I have a sickle in my hand."

The sages said: "Who created the vineyard?"

The main replied: "The Holy One (God)."

The sages said: "Then why are you getting involved in a matter that doesn't concern you?"

The man: "If I didn't go out and plow the vineyard, prune the branches, fertilize it and weed it, nothing would have grown."

The sages said: "You are the biggest fool in the world. Don't you know that the verse says, 'As for a man, his days are as grass' (Psalms 103:15). A tree, if it is not fertilized, weeded and the area around it plowed, will not grow. And even if it does grow, if it's not given water to drink, it will die. So too the human body is a tree, medicine is the fertilizer and a doctor is the tiller of the soil."

* What conflicts are contained in this story? How do you feel about the characters in the story?
* How do we respond to people today who refuse medicine for themselves or their children because they believe their health is in God’s hands?
* What does this story teach about Judaism's view of the role of human beings in the world? What lessons can we learn from it?
* What mistakes did the man walking with Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Ishmael make?
* Do you believe that God causes or heals sicknesses?  How does God's involvement work with the things that modern medicine can or can’t do?  What roles does prayer have in keeping a person healthy?

**Healing in Jewish Law**

**Rambam's Commentary on the Mishnah**

According to Jewish law a doctor must heal a sick person and this is part of the rabbis' interpretation of the verse, "And you shall return it [the lost object] to him": this includes returning him his own [healthy] body. That if one sees him lost [i.e. sick] and he can save him, he must save him whether he uses his body, his money or his knowledge.

* According to the Rambam, the commandment to heal a person is part of the commandment to return lost objects.
* How is healing a person like returning a lost object? What has been lost?
* Why should it be a "commandment" for a doctor to heal? Why not just let it be voluntary?
* What responsibility do we have to keep ourselves healthy?
* Do non-doctors also have responsibilities to preserve the health of others? If so, who has this responsibility? Who must pay to keep others healthy? Is this a cost that all people need to share, or is it up to the individual to keep him/herself healthy?

**9. Blessing for the Year: ברכת השנים**

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| --- | --- |
| בָּרֵךְ עָלֵינוּ ה' אֱלהֵינוּ אֶת הַשָּׁנָה הַזּאת וְאֶת כָּל מִינֵי תְבוּאָתָהּ לְטובָה. וְתֵן (בקיץ - בְּרָכָה) (בחורף - טַל וּמָטָר לִבְרָכָה) עַל פְּנֵי הָאֲדָמָה וְשבְּעֵנוּ מִטּוּבָהּ. וּבָרֵךְ שְׁנָתֵנוּ כַּשָּׁנִים הַטּובות. בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה', מְבָרֵךְ הַשָּׁנִים:  | Bless for us this year, Adonai our God, and all of its produce for goodness.*[From Pesah to December say]*And give a blessing,*[From December to Pesah say]*And give dew and rain for a blessingUpon the land and nourish us with its goodness.And bless this year like the good years.Blessed are You, Adonai, who blesses the years.  |

This blessing focuses on agriculture, on God blessing the land so that it produces enough food for people to eat. This prayer was understood generally not just as a prayer for rain but as a prayer for people to be able to make a livelihood.

* How does the amount of rain that falls connect with a person's livelihood? What do we mean when we say the word, "livelihood"?
* How does this blessing connect with the previous blessing, concerning healing the body?
* Today, what kinds of natural things are necessary for people's livelihoods? What are the things that we all depend upon and what are those that only some of us depend upon?

**The Land of Israel and the Diaspora**

In the land of Israel it doesn't rain during the summer months, basically from Pesah through Sukkot. Therefore, during those months we don't ask for rain, we ask simply for a blessing.

* Why should the blessing of the land tie into the weather found in Israel?
* Do you think that Jews living in parts of the world where it rains all year round should ask for rain all year?

There are two customs as to when we begin to ask for rain. In Israel we begin to ask for rain two weeks after Sukkot. This is when the rainy season begins. We don't ask for rain on Sukkot because when the Temple still stood it would take people up to two weeks to travel home after being in Jerusalem. Since we don't want it to rain on them during their journey, we wait.

Outside of Israel, the custom is based on Babylonia, where many Jews lived during the first thousand years of the common era. In Babylonia rain wasn't needed until later in the year. Therefore, they waited until 60 days after the autumnal equinox. This leads to the calculation being December 4 (or 5th during a leap year). Interestingly, this is the only case where a secular date, one that doesn't follow the Jewish calendar, has meaning in Jewish law.

**Judaism and Rain**

In modern thought, especially in America and even more especially at camp, we tend to think of rain as unwanted. A children's song begins, "Rain, rain, go away, come again another day." A "rainy day" does not usually bring up good connotations. On rainy days at camp, we can't swim or play sports.

In contrast, in traditional Jewish thought, rain is the greatest blessing. Consider a few of the following sources:

**Midrash Psalms 117**

Rabbi Tanchum ben Chiyya taught: The sending of rain is an event greater than the giving of the Torah.  The Torah was a joy for Israel only, but rain gives joy to the whole world, including birds and animals, as it is said:  You take care of the earth and irrigate it. (Psalm 65:10) (Middrash Psalms117).

**Midrash Bereshit Rabbah 13:4**

The power involved in making rain is as formidable as that of all of the works of creation.

* How should praying for rain impact the way we treat the world?
* When we ask God for something, does that mean we don't need to help to make our wish into a reality?
* How is praying for rain different from praying for "health" or "understanding"? How is it similar?
* What power do we have to bring rain?
* Do we have other abilities that do aid in providing safe water for the world to use?
* Are there other things in life that we may not want ourselves but may be for the greater good? How do and should we act in such situations?

**10. Gathering of the Exiles (קיבוץ גלויות)**

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| תְּקַע בְּשׁופָר גָּדול לְחֵרוּתֵנוּ. וְשא נֵס לְקַבֵּץ גָּלֻיּותֵינוּ. וְקַבְּצֵנוּ יַחַד מֵאַרְבַּע כַּנְפות הָאָרֶץ.בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה', מְקַבֵּץ נִדְחֵי עַמּו יִשרָאֵל:  | Sound a great shofar blast for our freedom.And lift up a banner for the gathering of our exiles.And gather us together from the four corners of the earth.Blessed are You, Adonai, who gathers the dispersed among his people Israel.  |

The concept of a Jewish homeland in the land of Israel is one of the strongest concepts in the Jewish tradition. However, for Jews living outside of the land of Israel it has often been one of the most difficult, especially in times of peace where Jews are not being persecuted.

In the modern period there have been several attempts to change this prayer to reflect the values of Jews who respect Israel but do not wish to pray to return there. Read the following changes in the siddur and think about how they have changed the traditional version:

**1) Gates of Prayer (1975, a Reform siddur):**

Sound the great horn to proclaim freedom, inspire us to strive for the liberation of the oppressed, and let the song of liberty be heard in the four corners of the earth.

**2) Reconstructionist Daily Prayer Book (1996)**

Bring home the homeless of our People in peace from the four corners of the earth, and enable them to march upright into our Land.

**3) Sim Shalom (1989)**

Sound the great shofar to herald our freedom, raise high the banner to gather our exiles. Gather us together from the ends of the earth. Praised are You, Lord who gathers the dispersed of his people Israel.

**A Talmudic Debate Concerning the Land of Israel**

The following passage is from the Babylonian Talmud, a book written in Babylonia during the 2nd – 5th centuries C.E. This was a time in Jewish history when more and more Jews were moving away from the land of Israel and settling elsewhere. Babylonia was the center of world Jewry for around 600 years. It was probably the strongest Jewish diaspora in all of Jewish history. In comparison, America has been a strong center of world Jewry for no more than 100 years, perhaps even less. We can imagine how hard it must have been in these centuries for Jews making the difficult choice to leave the land of Israel.

What is interesting about this text is that it contains voices on both sides of the debate concerning whether a Jew must live in Israel. On the right side of this column I've put some of the statements that imply that living in Israel is the primary value in Judaism. On the left side I've put some that claim that there are other values such as the quality of Jewish life that are more important. In the footnotes there are questions to get you to think about what these texts are trying to teach. Imagine that instead of the question being whether to live in Babylonia or Israel, the question is whether to live in America or Israel. How do you understand these texts? How do you relate to them?

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| --- | --- |
| **Other values are more important than living in Israel** | **Living in the Land of Israel is the most important value in Judaism** |
| Rav Judah stated in the name of Shmuel: Just as it is forbidden to leave the Land of Israel for Babylonia so too it is forbidden to leave Babylon for other countries.[[6]](#footnote-6)Rav Judah said: Whoever lives in Babylon is counted as if he lived in the Land of Israel.[[7]](#footnote-7)R. Zera was evading Rav Judah because he desired to go up to the Land of Israel while Rav Judah had expressed [the following view:] Whoever goes up from Babylon to the Land of Israel transgresses a positive commandment.[[8]](#footnote-8)  | Our Rabbis taught: One should always live in the Land of Israel, even in a town most of whose inhabitants are non-Jews,[[9]](#footnote-9) but let no one live outside the Land, even in a town most of whose inhabitants are Jews.[[10]](#footnote-10)When R. Zera went up to the Land of Israel, he could not find a ferry to cross [a certain river]. He grasped a rope bridge and crossed. Thereupon a certain heretic (a Jew who didn’t believe in Judaism)[[11]](#footnote-11) sneered at him: ‘Hasty people, that put your mouths before your ears, you are still, as ever, clinging to your hastiness’[[12]](#footnote-12). R. Zera replied: ‘The spot which Moses and Aaron were not worthy [of entering] who could assure me that I should be worthy [of entering]?’ |

**11. Justice: משפט**

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| Restore our judges as in the days of old and our advisors as in former times.Turn away from us sorrow and suffering.And rule over us, You, Adonai, alone, with kindness and mercy.And find us innocent in trial.Blessed are You, Adonai, a king who loves righteousness and mercy. | הָשִׁיבָה שׁופְטֵינוּ כְּבָרִאשׁונָה וְיועֲצֵינוּ כְּבַתְּחִלָּה. וְהָסֵר מִמֶּנּוּ יָגון וַאֲנָחָה. וּמְלךְ עָלֵינוּ אַתָּה ה' לְבַדְּךָ בְּחֶסֶד וּבְרַחֲמִים. וְצַדְּקֵנוּ בַּמִשְׁפָּט. בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה', מֶלֶךְ אוהֵב צְדָקָה וּמִשְׁפָּט:  |

This prayer follows the previous berakhah, where we asked God to return us to the land of Israel. Returning to our own land means that we must take responsibility for our own society. As such we need leaders, and especially judges and advisors.

However, we also know that human beings are never perfect. Even as we wish for "our judges in the days of old," we know that they too had their failures. Therefore, we also wish for the compassionate and just rule of God over us. God becomes for us the image of the perfect judge—we wish all of our human judges could be as perfect.

* Why does a society need good judges? Think about what happens when judges pervert justice.
* Today both in the United States and Israel, the Supreme Court has the highest judges in the land. What are the goals of the Supreme Court? What does it try to do? Whom does it protect?
* Who acts as judges in your lives? Upon what basis do they judge? Who appointed them? What happens when they don't act justly?
* In this prayer we ask God to find us innocent. What happens if we are not innocent? Can we ask God to appoint "just" judges, people who always judge based only on the facts and yet at the same time expect mercy?

**Justice in the Jewish Tradition**

**Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin 6b**

Moses used to say, "Let the law pierce the mountain." But Aaron loved peace, pursued peace, and made peace between people, as it is said, "The law of truth was in his mouth, and unrighteousness was not found on his lips; he walked with Me in peace and uprightness, and did not turn away from sin" (Malachi 2:6).

* How are Moses and Aaron portrayed in this saying?
* Whom does the author prefer? Why? Are both models necessary?

**Pirke Avot 2:4**

Hillel used to say:…Do not judge not your fellow human being until you have reached his/her place.

* What does this saying really mean?
* Why shouldn't we judge others until we have reached their place?
* In your lives, when have you mistakenly judged others before you reached their place?
* Have there been times when you have thought about this and not judged others until you were in their place? How did it help?
* Are there times when we should judge others, even if we have not been in their place?

**12. The Prayer Against Slanderers: ברכת המינים**

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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?

**13. A Prayer for the Righteous: על הצדיקים**

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| Show compassion Adonai, our God, for the righteous, for the pious, for the elders of Your people, the House of Israel, and to the remnant of their sages, and to righteous converts, and to us.And give a good reward to all who truly trust in Your name.And let our lot be with them forever, that we will not be ashamed that we have put our trust in you. Blessed are You, Adonai, who is the support and trust for the righteous.  | עַל הַצַּדִּיקִים וְעַל הַחֲסִידִים. וְעַל זִקְנֵי עַמְּךָ בֵּית יִשרָאֵל. וְעַל פְּלֵיטַת סופְרֵיהֶם. וְעַל גֵּרֵי הַצֶּדֶק. וְעָלֵינוּ. יֶהֱמוּ רַחֲמֶיךָ ה' אֱלהֵינוּ. וְתֵן שכָר טוב לְכָל הַבּוטְחִים בְּשִׁמְךָ בֶּאֱמֶת. וְשים חֶלְקֵנוּ עִמָּהֶם לְעולָם וְלא נֵבושׁ כִּי בְךָ בָטָחְנוּ.בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה', מִשְׁעָן וּמִבְטָח לַצַּדִּיקִים:  |

**The Placement of this Blessing in the Amidah**

In blessing 11 we asked God for justice. In blessing 12 we asked God to get rid of the wicked. Here, we ask God to protect the righteous. It is as if we are saying that the wicked (or perhaps our own inadequacies, our "wickedness") is what prevents pure justice from leading to a world where our leaders are righteous. We ask God to "let our lot be with them"—we want them, and not the wicked to be our leaders, the people whom we look up to. But to do that, we, together with God, must first pave a path such that wickedness and bad people do not prevent good people from thriving in the world.

**Questions about the prayer:**

* When you recite this prayer, do you think of specific people? Whom? People you know? Famous people?
* The prayer seems to urge us not to think of ourselves as "the righteous" because later we add "and us"? Why shouldn't we consider ourselves righteous?
* Why do we ask for "support" for the righteous? What's so hard about being righteous? Why does a good person need support?
* What is the meaning of "being ashamed" in this prayer? Why would be ashamed? Are you sometimes embarrassed by your beliefs? Are you sometimes embarrassed when you try to do the right thing?

**The Place of the Convert in Judaism**

Interestingly, in this prayer we specifically mention "righteous converts" people who convert to Judaism and then lead righteous lives.

* Why do you think we go out of our way to mention "converts"?
* Might this have something to do with prayer 12 where we prayed against people who convert out of Judaism?
* There are many famous converts in the Bible, including Abraham and Sarah, Yitro (Moses's father-in-law) and Ruth.
* Think about what you know about these people? What drew them to Judaism?
* Think about the people you know who have converted? What drew them to Judaism?

**A Midrashic Parable About Converts (in Two Versions)**

God loves converts:

To what is this similar: A king had a flock of goats that went to the field every day and returned at dusk. One day, a deer joined the flock and grazed with the goats. When the flock returned to its pen, the deer would go with it, and when the flock went out to graze again, the deer would go with it.

People said to the king, “This deer joined the flock and grazes with it. Every day he goes out with the flock and returns with it.” The king loved the flock (especially the stag) and put it in the care of a good shepherd, who did not let anyone mistreat it; when he returned (home from his daily affairs), he told the shepherd to give the flock something to drink. He loved it very much.

The shepherd said (to the king), “My Lord, you have so many goats, you have so many lambs, and you have so many kids, yet you do not order me to take special care of them. But you do order me to take special care of the deer.”

**Version 1:**

The king replied, “The flock, as you might expect, will graze in the field, go out in the morning and return at night, but deer sleep in the desert and are not in the habit of living with people. Shouldn’t I be grateful to this deer, who left the wide desert and the other animals and came to live in my house?”

Likewise don't we need to be grateful to the convert who left his family, his ancestral home, his people and came to us. Therefore, be very careful how you treat a convert.

**Version 2** (in this version the shepherd loves the deer; there is no king):

The shepherd explained to the people why he favored the deer: I had to perform many kinds of labor for my flock until they grew up: I took them out in the morning and brought them back in the evening. But this one, who grew up in the wilderness and forests, came into my flock on his own. Should I not love him very much?

Likewise God said: I had to do a lot of work for Israel. I brought them out of Egypt, lit the way for them, sent down the manna for them, made the well gush up for them, and encompassed them with clouds of glory before they were willing to accept my Torah. But this one came on his own. He is therefore deemed by Me the equal of an Israelite, even of a Levite.

**Questions about the Midrash**

* What is there about converts that the author of the midrash admires?
* Think about the converts that you know. How do they compare with those Jews born as Jews that you know? What do you admire about these people?
* With all of this in mind, why do you think we especially include converts in this prayer about the righteous?

**14: A Prayer for Yerushalayim: ירושלים**

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| Return to your city Yerushalayim with mercy.And dwell in her as You promised.And rebuild her quickly in our days, an eternal building.And quickly establish David's throne within her.Blessed are You, Adonai, who rebuilds Jerusalem. | וְלִירוּשָׁלַיִם עִירְךָ בְּרַחֲמִים תָּשׁוּב. וְתִשְׁכּן בְּתוכָהּ כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְתָּ. וּבְנֵה אותָהּ בְּקָרוב בְּיָמֵינוּ בִּנְיַן עולָם. וְכִסֵּא דָוִד מְהֵרָה לְתוכָהּ תָּכִין.בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה', בּונֵה יְרוּשָׁלָיִם:  |

This prayer and the next are connected to the rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem and the restoration of the kingship of David. Both of these are connected in Judaism to a belief in what could be called "the end of times" or "the coming of the Messiah." Many religions, especially Judaism and Christianity, believe that the world in which we live is an imperfect world, one which we hope could be made perfect in some mythological "end of days" when God or a messiah, or somehow, the world will be redeemed and the problems of the world will be solved. The symbol of such "redemption" is the rebuilding of Jerusalem, the idealized perfect city, and the restoration of perfect justice, symbolized by the kingship of David.

* Do you think it is important for people to believe in an "end of days"?
* Even if this is a hard belief for you personally to accept, could you imagine why it might help people? What type of people might it especially help?
* Are there other beliefs that you might not rationally accept, but that you could hope for anyway?
* When else in the Jewish calendar or prayers do we hope for "redemption" (גאולה) or for a return to Jerusalem?
* Is there a modern version of this belief, for instance the belief that in the future there will be no more war, or technology will solve our problems? Do you believe that this will happen? Why do you think so many people, even those who are not particularly religious, hold out hope that the world will "be redeemed?"

**Has Jerusalem Really been Rebuilt**

This prayer seems to be a bit strange—after all, Jerusalem has largely been rebuilt. In 1948 during the Independence War, Israel took over the western half of Jerusalem. And in 1967, during the Six Day War, Israel conquered the remaining half of Jerusalem, including the Old City, the Western Wall and many other sites of historical significance. Since then Jerusalem has been vastly rebuilt, with a modern university, hospitals, numerous government buildings, museums, synagogues, schools and many tourist sites. Today there is even a rail line to take one quickly from one end of the city to the other. How then can we still say this prayer, hoping for Jerusalem to be rebuilt?

With this question in mind read the following aggadah (legend):

**Tanhuma Noah 17**

Rabbi Shmuel bar Nahmani said: Jerusalem will not be rebuilt until all the exiles have been gathered. If someone says to you: All the exiles have been gathered, but Jerusalem is still not rebuilt , do not believe him, for the Bible says, "Adonai will rebuild Jerusalem" and then (immediately after) it says, "He will gather together the dispersed."

According to this source, the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the gathering of all exiled Jews are inseparable. That is to say—the two will happen at the same time and one cannot happen without the other.

* According to this source what does it mean for Jerusalem to be rebuilt?
* Why must all of the exiles be gathered for Jerusalem to be considered rebuilt?
* What might Jerusalem represent?

**The Belief in the Messiah in Judaism**

There are many contradictory beliefs in Judaism concerning the hope for a messiah, a person to come and redeem the world from its troubles. Think about the following two sources and then compare them:

**1) Avot de-Rabbi Natan 31**

Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai used to say: If you have a sapling in your hand and are told, "Look, the Messiah is here," you should first plant the sapling and then go out to welcome the Messiah.

* Why does Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai tell the person to first plant a tree?
* What is his attitude towards the "coming of the Messiah"?
* What do you think is the attitude of the person he is talking to?

**2) Bavli Ketubot 111b**

Our rabbis taught: The verse, "A handful of wheat in the Land will reach up to the top of the mountains" means that a stalk of wheat will rise as high as a palm tree, reaching up to the tops of the mountains. But you may say, "Then it will be difficult to harvest it." Therefore the Bible says, "Its fruit shall rustle like the Lebanon." Out of His treasury the Holy One will bring a wind, which will blow upon the wheat and cause its fine flour to drop. Then a man will go out into the field and bring in a mere handful of the flour, out of which there will be enough for his own and his household's maintenance.

* What is the person who reads this legend hoping for? What do you think his life is like?
* How will reading this aggadah affect his life?
* Do you wish for things like this to happen in your life?
* How does this story/passage differ from the previous one? Do they disagree?
* If we combine the message from these stories what might we think about "the coming of the messiah?"

**15: The Off-Shoot of David: את צמח דויד**

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| Cause the off-shoot of David, Your servant, to blossom quickly.Let his light rise through your salvation.For we await your salvation every day.Blessed are You, Adonai, who causes the light of salvation to blossom. | אֶת צֶמַח דָּוִד עַבְדְּךָ מְהֵרָה תַצְמִיחַ. וְקַרְנו תָּרוּם בִּישׁוּעָתֶךָ. כִּי לִישׁוּעָתְךָ קִוִּינוּ כָּל הַיּום. בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה', מַצְמִיחַ קֶרֶן יְשׁוּעָה:  |

In our study of this prayer, we shall focus on some of the important Hebrew words and see how our prayers are like sound-bites from the Bible.

Specifically we will focus on two words "*tzemach*" and "*keren*."

The word " צֶמַח" comes from the word for "plant." We have translated it "off-shoot" because it usually refers to something that sprouts from another plant.

The word is an echo of Isaiah 11:1:

"A shoot (צֶמַח) shall sprout out of the stump of Jesse [David's father] a twig shall sprout from its roots."

* Why would Isaiah refer to a "shoot sprouting out of the stump of Jesse"?
* What does a stump symbolize? How is Jesse like a stump? Who is the "shoot?"
* Why do you think Isaiah uses the imagery of plants to imagine the restoration of David's line of kings?

Another verse which uses this root is Jeremiah 33:15. The language of this verse is found quite precisely in the Shemoneh Esrei.

"In those days and at that time I will cause to sprout [אַצְמִיחַ] for David a righteous sprout [צֶמַח]."

The second interesting word in this prayer is קֶרֶן or וְקַרְנו. This word can mean either "horn" as in the horns on an animal. It could also mean "light." When Moses comes down from Mt. Sinai his face is said to have "shined." But this is where the confusion came in that Jews have horns—some interpreters thought it meant that Moses had grown horns and that is where the myth came that Jews had horns!

The word is combined with אַצְמִיחַ—cause a sprout to grow—in Ezekiel 29:21:

"On that day I will cause a horn to sprout [אַצְמִיחַ קֶרֶן ] for the House of Israel, and I will grant you opening of the mouth among them. And they shall know that I am the Lord."

* What does an animal's horn symbolize?
* When in Judaism do we use an animal's horn?
* What does it mean to "cause a horn to sprout"?
* What words are found in the prayer but not in these verses?

**16: God Who Hears Prayer: שומע תפילה**

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| Hear our voice, Adonai our God, have compassion upon us and spare us.And accept with mercy and desire our prayers.For You are a God who hears prayers and supplications.And do not turn us away empty-handed, our King.For You hear the prayers of Your people Israel with mercy.Blessed are You Adonai, who hears prayer. | שְׁמַע קולֵנוּ. ה' אֱלהֵינוּ חוּס וְרַחֵם עָלֵינוּ. וְקַבֵּל בְּרַחֲמִים וּבְרָצון אֶת תְּפִלָּתֵנוּ. כִּי אֵל שׁומֵעַ תְּפִלּות וְתַחֲנוּנִים אָתָּה. וּמִלְּפָנֶיךָ מַלְכֵּנוּ. רֵיקָם אַל תְּשִׁיבֵנוּ: כִּי אַתָּה שׁומֵעַ תְּפִלַּת עַמְּךָ יִשרָאֵל בְּרַחֲמִים. בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה', שׁומֵעַ תְּפִלָּה:  |

This is the final prayer in the section of the Amidah that is only said on weekdays. We finish the section in which we ask God for many things by reminding God and ourselves that we believe that God "hears prayer."

The idea that God hears prayer is not easy for us to understand. After all, most of us do not believe that there is a little old man sitting up in the heavens with ears listening to what each of us say. God is not a "Jewish Santa Claus" who hears exactly what we ask for and then decides whether he's going to give it to us or not.

With that in mind, what do you mean when you say that God hears prayers?

Could you still pray if we didn't think God heard our prayers?

How might a person's life be different if she believes or doesn't believe that God hears prayers?

**Prayers for Rain**

The land of Israel is frequently plagued by drought. It only rains in the winter there, basically from Sukkot through Pesah. When it doesn't rain, Jews add special prayers to this paragraph of the Amidah to ask for rain. There are also special fasts that are observed in order to ask God for rain.

There are some very interesting stories in the Talmud about rabbis and other Jews praying or decreeing fasts for rain. In some cases God does listen to them and and in some cases God does not. When reading these stories ask yourself the following questions:

* What are these stories are meant to teach? What is their "moral"?
* To whom does God listen? Why does God listen to some and not others?
* What does this teach us about Jewish values and Jewish prayer and the connection between the two?
* Why doesn't God listen to the rabbis? What does this tell us about being a rabbi?

**Babylonian Talmud Taanit 24a**

Once Rabbi Judah Hanasi decreed a fast and no rain fell.

Thereupon Ilfa (someone's name) went down before the ark (to be a shaliah tzibbur) and said, "He causes the wind to blow, (משיב הרוח) and the wind blew. [He continued], "He causes the rain to fall" (ומוריד הגשם) and rain fell.

Rabbi then asked him: What do you do [such that God listens to you]?

He replied: I live in a poor remote place where wine for Kiddush and Havdalah cannot be found but I take the trouble to get wine for Kiddush and Havdalah and thus

I help also others to fulfill their duty.

**Babylonian Talmud Taanit 24b**

Once Rav came to a certain place and decreed a fast but no rain fell. The shaliah tzibbur then went before the ark and said, "He causes the wind to blow, (משיב הרוח) and the wind blew. [He continued], "He causes the rain to fall" (ומוריד הגשם) and rain fell.

Rav then asked him: What do you do [such that God listens to you]?

He replied: I am a teacher of young children and I teach the children of the poor as

well as those of the rich; I take no fees from any who cannot afford to pay; further, I have a fishpond and any boy who is reluctant [to learn] I bribe with some of the fishes from it and thereby appease him so that he becomes eager to learn.

**Mishnah Taanit 3:8**

It happened that they said to Honi the circle drawer: “Pray for rain to fall.”

He replied: “Go and bring in the pesah ovens so that they do not dissolve.”

He prayed and no rain fell.

What did he do? He drew a circle and stood within it and exclaimed before Him: “Master of the universe, Your children have turned their faces to me because I am like one who was born in Your house. I swear by Your great name that I will not move from here until You have mercy upon Your children.”

Rain then began to drip, and he exclaimed: “I did not request this but rain [which can fill] cisterns, ditches and caves.

The rain then began to come down with great force, and he exclaimed: “I did not request this but pleasing rain of blessing and abudance.”

Rain then fell in the normal way until the Jews in Jerusalem had to go up Temple Mount because of the rain.

They came and said to him: “In the same way that you prayed for [the rain] to fall pray [now] for the rain to stop.”

He replied: “Go and see if the stone of people claiming lost objects has washed away.”

Rabbi Shimon ben Shetah sent to him: “If you were not Honi I would have excommunicated you, but what can I do to you, for you are spoiled before God and he does your will like a son that is spoiled before his father and his father does his request. Concerning you it is written, “Let your father and your mother rejoice, and let she that bore you rejoice” (Proverbs 23:25).

* Why does God listen to Honi? Why didn't God listen to Honi at the outset?
* Why is Rabbi Shimon ben Shetah so angry at Honi? Why does he say that Honi is "spoiled"?
* What does Rabbi Shimon b. Shetah think about God listening to prayer in general?
* What do you think about Honi? Does he act appropriately? Is he a model for Jewish prayer?

**18: Thanksgiving: מודים אנחנו לך**

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| מודִים אֲנַחְנוּ לָךְ. שָׁאַתָּה הוּא ה' אֱלהֵינוּ וֵאלהֵי אֲבותֵינוּ לְעולָם וָעֶד. צוּר חַיֵּינוּ. מָגֵן יִשְׁעֵנוּ אַתָּה הוּא לְדור וָדור: נודֶה לְּךָ וּנְסַפֵּר תְּהִלָּתֶךָ עַל חַיֵּינוּ הַמְּסוּרִים בְּיָדֶךָ. וְעַל נִשְׁמותֵינוּ הַפְּקוּדות לָךְ. וְעַל נִסֶּיךָ שֶׁבְּכָל יום עִמָּנוּ. וְעַל נִפְלְאותֶיךָ וְטובותֶיךָ שֶׁבְּכָל עֵת. עֶרֶב וָבקֶר וְצָהֳרָיִם: הַטּוב כִּי לא כָלוּ רַחֲמֶיךָ. וְהַמְרַחֵם כִּי לא תַמּוּ חֲסָדֶיךָ. מֵעולָם קִוִּינוּ לָךְ: וְעַל כֻּלָּם יִתְבָּרַךְ וְיִתְרומַם שִׁמְךָ מַלְכֵּנוּ תָּמִיד לְעולָם וָעֶד: וְכל הַחַיִּים יודוּךָ סֶּלָה. וִיהַלְלוּ אֶת שִׁמְךָ בֶּאֱמֶת. הָאֵל יְשׁוּעָתֵנוּ וְעֶזְרָתֵנוּ סֶלָה. בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה', הַטּוב שִׁמְךָ וּלְךָ נָאֶה לְהודות:  | We acknowledge You, that You, Adonai, are our God and God of our ancestors for ever and ever. You are the rock of our lives and the shield of our salvation from generation to generation. We acknowledge you and we tell Your praises for our lives which are in Your hand. And for our souls which are entrusted to You. And for the miracles that are with us each and every day. And for the wonder and goodness at every time, evening, morning and afternoon. You are good, for your mercy never ceases. You are merciful, for you kindness never ends. We have always hoped for You.For all of these Your name will be blessed and exalted, our king, forever to the ends of time. All that lives will gratefully acknowledge You forever and praise your name in truth, God, our salvation and our help, forever. Blessed are You, Adonai, whose name is good and to whom giving grateful acknowledgement is pleasing. |

**Thanks or Acknowledgement**

The word מודה or מודים is the same word as תודה, which usually means "thanks." However, in the Hebrew the same word can mean—"we agree with you" or "we admit to you [that you are right]." Thus the opening line of this berakhah could be "we thank You, that You Adonai are our God" or as is translated above. The same could be true in the remainder or the berakhah. Everywhere that it says "acknowledge" could alternatively be translated "thank."

What is the difference between "acknowledge" and "thank"? Are they the same?

Which do you think is a better translation?

What other prayers use the words מודה or נודה?

**Two Versions of Modim**

In most siddurim you will notice two versions of this prayer. One that is recited whenever one recites the silent Amidah and that is always recited by the shaliach tzibbur. The other version is recited only by the tzibbur (the congregation). This berakhah is the only berakhah where the tzibbur,says something with the shaliach tzibbur (the prayer leader) when s/he is repeating the Amidah.

The Talmud asks: What does the tzibbur say when the shaliach tzibbur is saying "Modim"?

Rav says: We thank You, Adonai, our God, that we are thanking you.

Shmuel says: We thank You, God of all flesh, that we are thanking you.

* Why should we thank God that we are thanking God?
* Why do you think that in this case the tzibbur says something whereas there is nothing for the tzibbur to say in other prayers?

**The Miracles that are with us Each and Every Day**

The berakhah emphasizes that every day there are ordinary "miracles" with us or "wonders" and "goodness" that exist at all times. There are two famous stories in Judaism that cause us to pay attention to miraculous ordinary activities. Interestingly, both of these stories include the element of fire, which seems to be both totally ordinary and at the same time incredibly amazing.

The first story is the Hannukah story. On Hannukah we light the hannukiah for eight days to commemorate the 8 day "miracle of the oil." But was the first day really miraculous? After all, even without a miracle the oil would have lasted for 8 days. Really the miracle was for 7 days! The fact that we celebrate the holiday for 8 days reminds us that fire itself is a miracle. The fact that we can gain such benefit from destruction by burning teaches us that we should pay attention to the simple wonders of our world.

The second story is Moses passing by the burning bush. Moses looks at the bush and notices that despite the fire, the bush was not being consumed. But how long would it take to notice such a thing? Moses must have stopped to look at the fire for a while before he noticed that the bush was not being burned up by the fire. Why did Moses stop and look? Why didn't he just move on, perhaps flee from the dangerous fire? It might be that Moses was also looking at the everyday miracle of fire and admiring that something that doesn't have any substance can destroy things that have substance. Perhaps he was only able to see the deeper miracle once he had already noticed the everyday one.

* Do you see miracles around you on a regular basis?
* Why would you call these things miracles?
* What's the point of paying careful attention to the little things that are occurring all the time around us?

**Modim: A Prayer Said Even At the End of Times**

"In the time to come all prayers will cease, but the prayer of thanksgiving (Modim) will not cease" (Leviticus Rabbah 9:7).

According to this source, in the future messianic age people will no longer say the entire Amidah. But they will say this one prayer, Modim. There is clearly something different about Modim, such that the other prayers will no longer be required but this one will.

* What is different about Modim?
* Why does this midrash say that even in the future age people will still say it?
* What values is the midrash trying to express?

**19: Sim Shalom: שים שלום**

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| שים שָׁלום טובָה וּבְרָכָה. חֵן וָחֶסֶד וְרַחֲמִים עָלֵינוּ וְעַל כָּל יִשרָאֵל עַמֶּךָ. בָּרְכֵנוּ אָבִינוּ כֻּלָּנוּ כְּאֶחָד בְּאור פָּנֶיךָ. כִּי בְאור פָּנֶיךָ נָתַתָּ לָּנוּ ה' אֱלהֵינוּ תּורַת חַיִּים וְאַהֲבַת חֶסֶד. וּצְדָקָה וּבְרָכָה וְרַחֲמִים וְחַיִּים וְשָׁלום. וְטוב בְּעֵינֶיךָ לְבָרֵךְ אֶת כָּל עַמְּךָ יִשרָאֵל בְּכָל עֵת וּבְכָל שָׁעָה בִּשְׁלומֶךָ: בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה', הַמְבָרֵךְ אֶת עַמּו יִשרָאֵל בַּשָּׁלום:  | Grant peace, goodness and blessing, grace, kindness and mercy to us and to all of Israel, your people. Bless us, our Father, all of us as one, in the light of your face, for the light of your face, Adonai our God, you gave us the Torah of life, a love of grace, righteousness, blessing, mercy, life and peace. And in your eyes it is good to bless your people Israel, at all times and in all hours with your peace.Blessed are You, Adonai, who blesses his people Israel with peace. |

**Shalom: Peace or Well-Being**

Shalom is a difficult word to translate. Sometimes it means something like the word "peace" in English, the absence of fighting or conflict. For instance, the Mishnah teaches us that one of the greatest mitzvot is "to bring peace (shalom) between one person and another." Most siddurim translate the word here as "peace."

However, the word can also mean "well-being" or "wholeness" as in the similar Hebrew word "*shalem*."

* What is the meaning of asking God for "well-being" or "wholeness"?
* How is this different from peace?
* Why might the same word be used for both in Hebrew? What might this teach us?

**The Priestly Blessing: יברכך ה' וישמרך**

In Israel and in some synagogues on holidays in America, before the Sim Shalom prayer, the kohanim bless the tzibbur with the Birkat Kohanim, the blessing of the priests, taken from Bamidbar 6:24-26). While reciting these words, the kohanim cover their hands with a tallit and people are not supposed to look at them when they are blessing the people. However, the tzibbur is also not supposed to turn their backs to the kohanim. Some people cover their own heads with a tallis while others just look down.

* Why do you think that people should not see the kohanim while they are blessing the people?
* Some people are disturbed by the fact that only kohanim, those born to a father who is a kohen, can recite this blessing. In some synagogues for this reason the birkat kohanim is never done.
* Why do you think this bothers some people? What is the problem with the message it might send?
* What do you think about this custom?

**Shalom: Peace in the Jewish Tradition**

**Mishnah Eduyot 8:7**

[What will Elijah do when he comes]…:

And the Sages say: [He will] make peace in the world, for it is said, “Behold I send to you Elijah the prophet”, etc., “and he shall turn the heart of the parents to the children and the heart of the children to their parents” (Malachi 3:23-24).

The rabbis in this mishnah debate what Elijah the prophet will do when he returns to the world. According to the sages, when Elijah comes he will bring peace to the world. The proof is what the prophet Malachi (a prophet whose words are found in a book in the Tanakh) says, that God will turn the hearts of parents to their children and children to their parents. We should note that there seems to be a slight difference between what the sages say, "bring peace to the world" and what Malakhi says, bring peace between parents and children. It seems that "shalom" begins with what is called "Shalom Bayit" peace in the home. Bring peace to the world does not just mean going out and ending wars and oppression. It especially means bring peace into our own homes.

**Mishnah Avot 1:18 and Yerushalmi Taanit 4:2**

Rabban Shimon ben Gamaliel used to say: on three things does the world stand:

On justice, on truth and on peace, as it is said: “execute the judgment of truth and peace in your gates” (Zechariah 8:16).

These three are things are linked: when justice is done, truth is achieved, and peace is established.

* Why does peace depend upon justice?
* Are there times when peace and justice might be opposed to each other?

**Babylonian Talmud Yevamot 14b**

Although the school of Shammai and the school of Hillel were in disagreement--what the one forbade, the other permitted--nevertheless the school of Shammai did not refrain from marrying women of the families of the school of Hillel, nor did the school of Hillel refrain from marrying those of the school of Shammai. This should teach you that they showed love and friendship toward one another, thus putting into practice the injunction "You shall love truth, but also peace" (Zech. 8:19).

Bet Shammai and Bet Hillel were famous for always disagreeing with each other. Nevertheless, they remained at peace with one another, people from each school married each other. According to other sources, they still ate at each other's houses. In short, they didn't split and form two totally different groups.

* How can people strongly disagree with each other and still remain in a state of "shalom"? When does this happen today and when does it seem not to happen?
* Are there times when it might be better to side with "truth" over "peace"? Are there times when unity is wrong?
1. Avodah—worship—usually means worship at the Temple which was done through sacrifice. But according to the rabbis there is an avodah done in one's heart—prayer. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Note that this is a summary of the contents of the Amidah. The beginning is praise of God, the middle parts are requests and the last part returns to praise and thanksgiving. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. This is an explanation of the last line of halakhah 2—"everyone prays according to his own ability." [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The leader of the Jews who returned to the land of Israel after the Babylonian exile which followed the destruction of the first Temple. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. The Babylonian king who destroyed the first Temple, 586 B.C.E. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Why does Rav Judah think it is forbidden to leave Eretz Yisrael? At the time this text was written, Babylonia was the center of Judaism. Why then would it be forbidden to leave Babylonia? [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Why? What does Babylonia have that makes it equivalent to Eretz Yisrael? [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Why do you think Rav Judah is so opposed to moving to the land of Israel? [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. What does this show concerning why one should live in Israel? What would a person’s life be like if he lived in Eretz Yisrael but he lived with only non-Jews? [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Why not—if everyone is Jewish why not live outside of the land of Israel? [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Why does the teller of this story say that a heretic was the first person to notice R. Zera arriving in Israel? What is the meaning of the fact that R. Zera, who always wanted to make Aliyah, is greeted by a heretic? [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. The reference here is to “we will do and we will hear” that the Israelites said before they received the Torah. They promised to keep the Torah before they heard its details. How is R. Zera similar to those people? What happened to the Israelites after they received the Torah? [↑](#footnote-ref-12)