

LESSON 4

INTENTION, CONNECTION, AND INTROSPECTION



TEXT 1

CLAUDIA CHERNOV AND DR. CAROL DIAMENT, *PRAY TELL, INTRODUCTION*

Chernov: Author and editor of many study guides on Judaism and women; Diamant: Teacher and lecturer who has edited numerous books on Judaism and women.

Chernov: How can we invest ourselves in the words of prayer when, to us, the words make no sense or, worse, are obviously untrue? How do we bring our heart and soul into the words of a formula when that formula violates the dictates of our heart and soul? . . . Poet Marcia Falk, author of an alternative prayer book, asks: “Why should we be willing to hold one set of beliefs as our truths while we articulate something very different in worship? If we do not try to touch our deepest faith—or most truthful truths—in prayer, then where?”¹

Diamant: . . . Although I, and other Jewish feminists, welcome changes in the English translations and though I welcome original prayers and new feminist rituals . . . I believe that public, communal Hebrew prayer should remain largely fixed . . . [Traditional] Hebrew prayer, even today, is shared by Jews in all countries of the world. I pray with greatest intensity when the words are familiar and link me to earlier generations and to Jews in Israel and elsewhere.

J. Harlow, with T. Cohen, R. Furstenberg, D. Gordis, and L. Tanenbaum. 2003. *Pray Tell: A Hadassah Guide to Jewish Prayer*, ed. C. Chernov and C. Diamant. Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, ix–xvii.



TEXT 2

MAIMONIDES (RAMBAM), *MISHNEH TORAH*, *LAWS OF PRAYER* 1:1, 3, 4

(1135–1204) (Moshe ben Maimon) Philosopher, codifier, communal leader, and doctor in Spain and Egypt.

1. It is a positive commandment to pray every day, as it states [Exodus 23:25]: “You shall serve the Lord, your God.” Oral tradition teaches us that this service is prayer, as it states [Deuteronomy 10:12]: “And serve Him with all your heart,” and our Sages said: Which is service that is in the heart? This is prayer. The number of prayers is
5 not [prescribed] by the Torah. The formula for this prayer is not [prescribed] by the Torah. Also, prayer does not have a fixed time [prescribed] by the Torah.

3. If he was accustomed, he would offer abundant prayers and requests. If words came to him with difficulty he would speak as well as he could and whenever he
10 desired. Similarly, the number of prayers was dependent on each person’s ability . . . This was the ongoing practice from [the time of] Moshe Rabbenu until Ezra.

4. When Israel was exiled in the time of the wicked Nebuchadnezzar, they became interspersed in Persia and Greece and other nations. Children were born to them
15 in these foreign countries and those children’s language was jumbled. The speech of each and every one was a jargon of many tongues. No one was able to express himself coherently in any one language . . . Consequently, when someone would pray, he would be limited in his ability to request his needs or to praise God in Hebrew without blending in other languages. When Ezra and his court saw this, they
20 established eighteen blessings in sequence . . . Thus, the prayers could be set in the mouths of everyone. They could learn them and the prayer of those unable to express themselves would be as complete as the prayer of the most eloquent. It was because of this matter that they set all the blessings and prayers so that they would be ordered in the mouths of all Israel, so that each blessing would be arranged in
25 the mouth of each person unable to express himself.

רב מִשְׁנָה בֶּן מִימּוֹן (רמב"ם), מִשְׁנָה תוֹרָה, הַלְכוֹת תְּפִלָּה א: א, ג-ד

א. מִצְוֹת עֲשֵׂה לְהַתְפַּלֵּל בְּכָל יוֹם שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר וְעַבַדְתֶּם אֶת ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם מִפִּי הַשְּׁמוּעָה לְמַדּוֹ שֶׁעַבֻּדָּה זֶה הִיא תְּפִלָּה שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר וְלַעֲבֹדוֹ בְּכָל לִבְבְּכֶם אָמְרוּ חֲכָמִים אִי זֶה הִיא עַבְדוּתָה שֶׁכָּל זֶה תְּפִלָּה וְאִין מִנִּין הַתְּפִלוֹת מִן הַתּוֹרָה וְאִין מִשְׁנָה הַתְּפִלָּה הַזֹּאת מִן הַתּוֹרָה וְאִין לְתְּפִלָּה זְמַן קָבוע מִן הַתּוֹרָה.

ג. אִם הָיָה רָגִיל מְרַבָּה בְּתַחֲנֻנָּה וּבִקְשָׁה וְאִם הָיָה עָרַל שְׁפָתַיִם מְדַבֵּר כְּפִי יְכָלְתוּ וּבְכָל עֵת שִׁירָצָה, וְכֵן מִנִּין הַתְּפִלוֹת כָּל אֶחָד כְּפִי יְכָלְתוּ . . . וְכֵן הָיָה הַדְּבָר תָּמִיד מִמִּשְׁנָה רַבִּינוּ וְעַד עֲזָרָא.

ד. כִּיּוֹן שֶׁגָּלוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל בִּימֵי נְבוּכַדְנֶצַּר הָרָשָׁע נִתְעַרְבוּ בְּפָרִס וַיִּזְוּ וּשְׂאָר הָאוֹמוֹת וְנוֹלְדוּ לָהֶם בָּנִים בְּאַרְצוֹת הַגּוֹיִם וְאוֹתָן הַבָּנִים נִתְפַּלְּלוּ שְׁפָתָם וְהִיתָה שְׁפַת כָּל אֶחָד וְאֶחָד מְעוֹרְבֵת מִלְּשׁוֹנוֹת הָרַבָּה וְכִיּוֹן שֶׁהָיָה מְדַבֵּר אִינוּ יָכוֹל לְדַבֵּר כָּל צָרָכּוֹ בְּלִשׁוֹן אַחַת אֶלָּא בְּשִׁבּוּשׁ . . . וּמִפְּנֵי זֶה כְּשֶׁהָיָה אֶחָד מִהֶן מִתְּפַלֵּל תִּקְצַר לְשׁוֹנוֹ לְשִׂאוֹל חֲפָצָיו אוֹ לְהַגִּיד שִׁבְחַת הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא בְּלִשׁוֹן הַקְּדוֹשׁ עַד שִׁיעָרְבוּ עִמָּה לְשׁוֹנוֹת אַחֲרוֹת וְכִיּוֹן שֶׁרָאָה עֲזָרָא וּבֵית דִּינּוּ כִּי עָמְדוּ וְתִקְּנוּ לָהֶם שְׁמִנָּה עֲשָׂרָה בְּרִכּוֹת עַל הַסֵּדֶר . . . כְּדִי שִׁיְהִיו עֲרוּכוֹת בְּפִי הַכֹּל וְיִלְמְדוּ אוֹתָן וְתִהְיֶה תְּפִלָּתָם אֵלּוּ הָעֲלָגִים תְּפִלָּה שְׁלֵמָה כְּתְּפִלָּתָם בְּעָלִי הַלְשׁוֹן הַצָּחָה וּמִפְּנֵי עֲנִין זֶה תִּקְּנוּ כָּל הַבְּרִכּוֹת וְהַתְּפִלוֹת מְסוּדָרוֹת בְּפִי כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל כְּדִי שִׁיְהִי עֲנִין כָּל בְּרִכָּה עֲרוּךְ בְּפִי הָעֶלֶג.



TEXT 3

MISHNAH, TRACTATE *BERAKHOT* 4:4

Compilation of teachings of 3rd century BCE–3rd century CE scholars in Eretz Yisrael (*tanna'im*); compiled and edited by Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi.

Rabbi Eliezer says, If a person makes prayer a set task, the prayer is not [genuine] supplication.

מִשְׁנָה, בְּרִכּוֹת ד, ד
רַבִּי אֱלִיעֶזֶר אוֹמֵר הָעוֹשֶׂה תְּפִלָּתוֹ קָבַע אִין תְּפִלָּתוֹ תַּחֲנוּנִים.

BABYLONIAN TALMUD, TRACTATE *BERAKHOT* 29B

Compilation of teachings of 3rd–6th century scholars in Babylonia (*amora'im*); final redaction in the 6th–7th centuries.

What is meant by “a set task”?

Rabbi Yaakov bar Idi said in the name of Rabbi Osha'ya, Any whose prayer appears to them like a burden.

The Rabbis say, Any prayer not formulated as a supplication.

- 5 Rabbah and Rav Yosef both say, Any [prayer] into which one cannot introduce something new.

תלמוד בבלי, מסכת ברכות דף כט עמוד ב
מאי קבע?

אמר רבי יעקב בר אידי אמר רבי אושעיא כל שתפלתו דומה עליו כמשוי.
ורבנן אמרי כל מי שאינו אומר בלשון תחנונים.
רבה ורב יוסף דאמרי תרויהו כל שאינו יכול לחדש בה דבר.

BACKGROUND TEXT 4

The biblical book of *Shmuel* opens with the story of Chanah. Married to Elkanah, she is his favored wife, but remains childless. Like other biblical women before her, she watches Elkanah's other wife, Peninah, with her many children. Her hope of a child burns within her and forms the topic of her prayer offered at her annual visit to the Temple.



TEXT 4

I SAMUEL (*SHMUEL*) 1:10-16

10 In her wretchedness, she prayed to the LORD, weeping all the while. **11** And she made this vow: “O LORD of Hosts, if You will look upon the suffering of Your maidservant and will remember me and not forget Your maidservant, and if You will grant Your maidservant a male child, I will dedicate him to the LORD for all the days of his life; and no razor shall ever touch his head.”

12 As she kept on praying before the LORD, Eli watched her mouth. **13** Now Hannah was praying in her heart; only her lips moved, but her voice could not be heard. So Eli thought she was drunk. **14** Eli said to her, “How long will you make a drunken spectacle of yourself? Sober up!” **15** And Hannah replied, “Oh no, my lord! I am a very unhappy woman. I have drunk no wine or other strong drink, but I have been pouring out my heart to the LORD. **16** Do not take your maidservant for a worthless woman; I have only been speaking all this time out of my great anguish and distress.”

שְׁמוּאֵל א א, י-טז

י וְהָיָא מָרַת נַפְשׁ וְתַתְּפִלָּל עַל ה' וּבְכָה תְּבָכָה. יָא וְתִדְר נְדָר וְתֹאמַר ה' צָבָאוֹת אִם רָאָה תִּרְאָה
בְּעֵינַי אִמְתָּהּ וּזְכִרְתִּי וְלֹא תִשְׁכַּח אֶת אִמְתָּהּ וְנִתְּתָה לְאִמְתָּה זֶרַע אֲנָשִׁים וְנִתְּתִיו לָהּ כָּל יְמֵי חַיֶּי
וּמוֹרָה לֹא יַעֲלֶה עַל רֹאשׁוֹ. יב וְהָיָה כִּי הִרְבֵּתָה לְהִתְפַּלֵּל לִפְנֵי ה' וְעָלִי שֹׁמֵר אֶת פִּיהָ. יג וְחֲנָה הִיא
מִדְּבָרָתָהּ עַל לֵבָהּ רַק שִׁפְתֶיהָ נִעוֹת וְקוֹלָהּ לֹא יִשְׁמָע וַיַּחֲשֹׁבָה עָלַי לְשַׁכָּרָה. יד וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלֶיהָ עָלִי עַד
מָתִי תִשְׁתַּכְּרִין הִסִּירִי אֶת יֵינָהּ מֵעַלְיָהּ. טו וְתַעֲזַן חֲנָה וְתֹאמַר לֹא אֲדַנִּי אִשָּׁה קִשְׁתָּ רוּחַ אֲנֹכִי וַיִּזֵּן
וְשֹׁכֵר לֹא שְׁתִּיתִי וְאִשְׁפֹּף אֶת נַפְשִׁי לִפְנֵי ה'. טז אֵל תִּתֵּן אֶת אִמְתָּהּ לִפְנֵי בֵּית בְּלִיעַל כִּי מֵרַב שִׁיחִי
וּבְעֵסִי דְּבַרְתִּי עַד הַנָּה.



TEXT 5

DR. ALIZA LAVIE, *HANNAH'S PRAYER*

Israeli academic, politician, author, publicist, media personality, and social activist.

Significantly, Judaism's entire conception of prayer originated with a woman. After the destruction of the Temple, a fixed prayer formula was set down to replace the daily Temple sacrifices. Many of the laws and details pertaining to this prayer formula were derived from the biblical account of the supplication of Hannah, the mother

5 of the prophet Samuel, for a son. Out of all the instances of prayer in the Bible, the rabbis chose this woman's heartfelt, personal appeal to God as the paradigm for the individual, whispered prayer that is at the heart of every public prayer service . . .

Hannah knew how to pray without any external guidance. The pure expression of

10 her pain and bitterness of spirit, together with her manifest faith in the power of the Creator of the universe, are together the essence of the power of her prayer.

A. Lavie. 2008. *A Jewish Woman's Prayer Book*. New York: Spiegel and Grau, xix.



TEXT 6

DR. CAROL OCHS AND RABBI KERRY M. OLITZKY, *WHY DO WE PRAY?*

Ochs is a retired Professor of Jewish Religious Thought at HUC-JIR, and Olitzky served as the Executive Director of Big Tent Judaism (formerly known as the Jewish Outreach Institute).

If we start out with the understanding that prayer is an occasion for an encounter with God, we can never confuse praying with saying prayers. It would be like confusing a genuine conversation with repeating a set piece. There are texts in the prayer service, but it is not on the literal level that they function for the person

5 praying. Some parts of the institutionalized service, repeated once or several times a day, keep the conscious mind occupied while some more hidden aspect of ourselves opens up to an encounter. The words drop away and a deeper engagement occurs.

During the time of the Bible, our people had no prayer books, no collected body of texts that a person referred to when it was time to pray. Even the psalms, the earliest known prayers of our people, whose texts can be found scattered throughout our prayer books, were generally used only in public assembly at the Temple in Jerusalem. As a result, no one could confuse the simple rote recitation of words in the prayer book with the act of praying (a distinction that is often lost today). Real prayer involves opening our self to the reality of God's presence. In the midst of prayer, we can learn to talk to God about everything – our needs, our fears, our sense of shame and guilt, our gratitude and wonder. We are able to transcend the words of the prayer text. Our capacity to do so – to “fly” – is based in part on our deep rootedness in the tradition. We are familiar with this language, these images, the world view presupposed by the tradition. That comfort is precisely what allows our thoughts the freedom to use the given text as a springboard for a wordless relationship.

C. Ochs and K. M. Olitzky. 1997. *Jewish Spiritual Guidance*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 31-32, 35.



TEXT 7

RABBI DR. ABRAHAM J. HESCHEL, *PRAYER: EXPRESSION AND EMPATHY*

(1907–1972) American philosopher of religion, leading Jewish theologian of the 20th century.

Prayer is an event that comes to pass between the soul of man and the word. It is from this point of view that we have to distinguish between two main types of prayer: prayer as *an act of expression* and prayer as *an act of empathy*.

- 5 The first type comes to pass when we feel the urge to set forth before God a personal concern. Here the concern, and even the mood and the desire to pray, come first; the word follows. It is the urge to pray that leads to the act of praying.

While it is true that the prayer of expression is a common and universal phenomenon, it is inaccurate to assume, as most people do, that prayer occurs primarily as an act of expression. The fact is that the more common type of prayer is *an act of empathy*. There need be no prayerful mood in us when we begin to pray. It is through our reading and feeling the words of the prayers, through the imaginative projection of our consciousness into the meaning of the words, and through empathy for the ideas with which the words are pregnant, that this type of prayer comes to pass. Here the words come first, the feeling follows. . . .

In the prayer of empathy, we begin by turning to the words of the liturgy. At first, the words and their meaning seem to lie beyond the horizon of the mind. How remote is the meaning of *Blessed be Thou* to thoughts in which we are usually immersed. We must, therefore, remember that the experience of prayer does not come all at once. It grows in the face of the word that comes ever more to light in its richness, buoyancy, and mystery. Gradually, going out to meet its meaning, we rise to the greatness of prayer. On the way to the word, on its slopes and ridges, prayer matures – we purify ourselves into beings who pray. . . .

In the prayer of expression, we often arrive at thoughts that lie beyond our power of expression. In the prayer of empathy, we often arrive at words that lie beyond our power of empathy. It is in such tensions that our worship gains in strength and our knowledge in intuitive depth. . . .

Those who plead for the primacy of the prayer of expression over the prayer of empathy ought to remember that the ability to express what is in the heart is a rare gift, and cannot be counted upon by all men. What, as a rule, makes it possible for us to pray is our ability to affiliate our own minds with the pattern of fixed texts, to unlock our hearts to the words, and to surrender to their meanings. The words stand before us as living entities full of spiritual power, of a power which often surpasses the grasp of our minds. The words are often the givers, and we the recipients. They inspire our minds and awaken our hearts.

A. J. Heschel. 1959. *Between God and Man*. New York: The Free Press, 203–205.



TEXT 8

RABBI ELIEZER BERKOVITS, *PRAYER*

(1908–1992) Orthodox rabbi and theologian in the United States and Israel.

It is easy to acknowledge the religious importance of the spontaneity of free personal prayer. It is unparalleled in intensity of emotion and sincerity of devotion. Yet, such immediate and free praying, brought on by specific occasions, has its pitfalls and shortcomings. In the case of supplication, this is quite obvious.

- 5 That a human being, in a situation of crisis, should seek the nearness of God is understandable enough. That he should seek it only in such a situation is also understandable, but not necessarily right in the context of a broader God-oriented interpretation of human existence. To seek God only in a time of trouble implies that one needs Him only when in trouble. The free outpouring of the heart may indeed be
10 felt very deeply but, however genuine, it is a crisis prayer. God, however, is not just a crisis God....

- Turning to God spontaneously in times of trouble may cast a reflection on the value of such prayer, if it represents a small island of God-seeking in the midst of an
15 ocean of God-forgetting...; those who remember God in their troubles are concerned only with themselves....

- [I]f supplication means turning to God in one's need, man is never without his creaturely needfulness; his need is not occasion-conditioned but existential. Man
20 is never without it, and therefore, he is never without the need of turning to God in creaturely dependence. There is no time in human life which is not an occasion for prayer.

- In view of the ever-present appropriateness of prayer, the free occasional prayer
25 becomes problematic. But can one pray all the days of one's life? And since, obviously, this is impossible, how is the dilemma to be resolved? In Judaism, it is done by means of the institution of obligatory prayer.

E. Berkovits. 1962. *Studies In Torah Judaism*. New York: Yeshiva University Press, 37.

BACKGROUND TEXT 9

At first, prayer was private and individually formulated, as the many biblical examples cited in previous lessons showed. It was after the destruction of the Temple, when sacrifices could no longer be offered, and when Hebrew ceased to be a commonly spoken language that many fixed, formulated prayers were introduced to be recited regularly in prayer services. Yet, these prayers were never intended to be a replacement for personal, individual prayers. The Talmud includes many examples of private prayers.

Jewish medieval literature also provides many examples of prayers composed by individuals for others to use in their personal prayers. It was especially common to see women writing prayers for general use or for other women to use, as there were instances in which they wanted to thank God or praise God for things the rabbinic writers had not considered when composing the fixed prayers.

Prayers for women or by women can be found in collections known as *tekhines* in Yiddish (*tekhinot* in Hebrew). The first known *tekhinah* was published in 1577 in Cracow. In the 17th century, such collections were published in Amsterdam and in Venice. In book form, they appeared in the early 18th century.

Each *tekhinah* was usually written in the singular, having been composed by specific women as their own way to talk to God. One can see how different the *tekhinot* sound from many of the ancient rabbinic prayers found in a siddur. Apart from the language in which the prayer was composed (the Rabbis wrote their prayers in Hebrew, while the women prayed in the vernacular and wrote them in the language they spoke, mostly Yiddish or Ladino), the traditional (Orthodox) siddur makes reference only to the patriarchs, whereas the *tekhinot* are likely to mention the matriarchs. Additionally, if a siddur is generally organized by the time of day or time of year in which the prayers are to be recited, the *tekhinot* are usually organized by theme, mostly around those experiences lived by women in their daily lives.

Newer collections of *tekhinot* have been prepared recently. Examples of *tekhinot* follow.



TEXT 9 PRAYER FOR A BABY'S FIRST TOOTH

Author unknown

O Great God. Your wonders and Your providence over Your creations cannot be told about. As the child has to go on its own, and be weaned, You prepared teeth for him to chew his food.

- 5 I thank and praise Your beloved name for his dear present, this kosher find, this pearl that I have found in my child's mouth. And I beg Your mercy that You not remove Your kindness further, help it cut through easily, and the remaining teeth until the last one.
- 10 May he be able to do Your will, to eat and gather strength, to go to cheder, to learn Your holy Torah. I beseech You, O God, strengthen his heart and help us, that we may protect him, heaven forbid, so that with his teeth he not eat any forbidden food - only that he be good and observant.
- 15 May God and man be happy with him. Amen.

R. Zakutinsky. 1999. "Shas Techina Chadasha." In *Techinas: A Voice from the Heart*, vol. 3. New York: Aura Printing, Inc.

BACKGROUND TEXT 10

In 1916, the Hebrew Publishing Company published the first volume of *tekhninot* in New York. The prayers were written in Yiddish, the language spoken by the majority of the Jewish immigrants, and took into consideration the reality of their lives in the new country. One woman recalls that when she received the book from her aunts, she was told, "It has everything a woman needs to say here in America."²



TEXT 10

AARON DAVID AGUZ, *NEW TKHINE FOR SABBATH CANDLE LIGHTING FOR AMERICA*

(1865–1943) Russian American Jewish journalist; member of the editorial staff of the Jewish Morning Journal.

Today we are in exile, where the trouble of making a living, the worry for a livelihood, is great. Circumstances are often such that we cannot keep the Sabbath and holidays according to Jewish law. . . . Making a living here [in America] is very hard, and because of our many sins, Jewish children have no choice but to desecrate the Sabbath and holidays. I accuse no one, heaven forbid, of doing this simply to anger

- 5 You, to blaspheme Your Holy Name. But time and circumstances have brought this about. They do it first out of need and later out of habit.

(The prayer continues by asking God to protect the supplicant, her husband, and her children from Shabbat desecration and to give all Jews an abundant livelihood so

- 10 that they will not have to desecrate the holy day.)

J. D. Baumel-Schwartz. 2017. *My Grandmother's Tkhine: Immigrant Jewish Women's Lives, Identities and Prayers in Early Twentieth-Century America*. Indiana University Press, 146-168.

BACKGROUND TEXT 11

In modern times, there have been many instances in which people wished for a prayer to recite but could not find a traditional one. Modern liturgists write and publish their prayers for others to use and these prayers often end up becoming part of the service of specific synagogues or specific movements, which might even ultimately include them in their prayer books. For Solovy, a modern liturgist living in Israel, the removing of a wedding ring is an emotional moment in one's life. So many thoughts and feelings are present at such a time, and yet often one is at a loss for words.



TEXT 11

ALDEN SOLOVY, *THIS RING: AN ENDING*

Poet, liturgist, and CCAR Press author of a trilogy of new Jewish prayers, most recently *This Precious Life: Encountering the Divine with Poetry and Prayer*.

When I put this ring on my finger
I wrapped it around my heart.

In removing this ring from my finger

5 I release my heart

With grief and joy,
Uncertainty and faith,
In unequal measures.

10 Ancient One,

God of compassion and grace,
Let this moment be a blessing
So that healing continues
To flow into my hours and days.

15 Grant me the strength and insight

To honor the past and embrace the future
With dignity and passion,
Wisdom and thanksgiving,
Kindness and charity.

Then, God of wholeness and healing,

20 I will return to song and dance,

Laughter and praise,
As a beacon of Your light,
A source of joy, hope and love.

A. Solovy. 2017. *This Grateful Heart: Psalms and Prayers for a New Day*. Chicago: CCAR Press.

BACKGROUND TEXT 12

This prayer reflects another turning point in one's life that many want to mark: sending a child off to college, an experience not reflected in traditional Jewish prayers.



TEXT 12

MARK S. KRAM, *A NEW TRAVELER'S PRAYER*

American Reform rabbi and life coach.

Holy One of Blessing, Master of All things, may this young man enter this new stage of his life with blessing, with strength, with joy, and with a thirst of knowledge. Even as we were freed from responsibility for his Jewish life at his bar mitzvah, today, he more fully takes charge.

5

May it be Your will, O God, and God of our ancestors, to direct his steps and guide his life with peace, and lead him to ever-fuller life. Deliver him from every enemy, pitfall, harm on his way, and from all misfortune and trouble that he may find on his own journey in life. Send a blessing to empower the work of his hands. May he continue to attain kindness, a loving attitude, compassion, and tolerance for all with whom he comes in contact. You are the God who listens to prayer. Praised are You, God, who hears our prayers.

10

Praised are You, God, Master of the Universe, who makes the young responsible for their own lives. AMEN.

15

From "Blessing a Child Leaving for College" by D. N. Cohen and available online at [forward.com](https://www.forward.com). Viewed August 2021.



TEXT 13

ALDEN SOLOVY, *THE ROLE OF THE MODERN JEWISH LITURGIST*

Poet, liturgist, and CCAR Press author of a trilogy of new Jewish prayers, most recently *This Precious Life: Encountering the Divine with Poetry and Prayer*.

We are the inheritors of two traditions of prayer: the fixed prayers of our *siddur* and spontaneous prayer. Spontaneous Jewish prayer – which appears to cycle in and out of popularity and acceptance – has two main traditions. The *paytanim*, prayer poets, composed both on paper and from the *bima*, making them the spoken-word artists of their day. *Hitbodedut* – pioneered by Rebbe Nachman of Breslov – is our tradition of unstructured, spontaneous, individual prayer. Both practices are making a resurgence in the current wave of rediscovered Jewish spirituality.

The tradition of communal prayer from the *siddur* can overwhelm the tradition of personal prayer. We can forget how to pray in our own voices. The role of a modern Jewish liturgist is to invite others to pray in their own words, in two ways. First, by creating new prayer, the liturgist shows by example that it's a legitimate Jewish practice to pray in our own words. Second, in creating prayers that address the ancient yearnings of our people – and filling in gaps in the traditional liturgy – the new liturgist offers prayer resonant with current needs and language. Examples from my work range from meditations on *Shema*, Torah, and Shabbat, to prayers addressing Covid, infertility (for men and women), loss of a beloved pet, infidelity, and social justice.

The new liturgist often draws on our inherited tradition to create new prayer. An example from my work is “Hallel in a Minor Key,” written for times when sorrow and loss occur simultaneously with the requirement to recite *Hallel*. Another is “Come, Beloved,” inspired by *Yedid Nefesh*. But when our tradition is silent on a painful topic, such as miscarriage, the resulting text is a pouring out of the soul, thus calling on others to add their own words to the text.

There's one more goal of the contemporary Jewish liturgist: inviting individuals back to reconsider the traditional liturgy, renewing their relationship with our classic text. The liturgist must both respond to the yearnings of people disaffected from traditional prayer and create a bridge back into the historic prayers of the Jewish people.

Text written especially for this lesson.

KEY TERMS

Amidah. [עֲמִידָה]. The central Jewish prayer of the three daily services, also known as the *Shemoneh Esreh*, שְׁמוֹנֶה עֶשְׂרֵה, “Eighteen” (because the early compilation of the prayer consisted of eighteen benedictions). The term *Amidah* derives from the Hebrew word meaning “standing,” because the prayer is recited while standing.

Kavvanah. [כַּוְּנָה]. Direction or intention in prayer or action through which one offers words or deeds coupled with a strong sense of inner devotion and purpose.

Keva. [קֶבַע]. Fixed aspects of liturgy, this refers to the fixed prayers to be recited at specific times of the day or year.

Maariv. [מַעְרִיב]. The daily evening prayer service.

Minchah. [מִנְחָה]. The daily afternoon prayer service, the title derives from the name of the daily afternoon offering, the *tamid shel bein haArbayim*, brought in the Temple.

Shacharit. [שַׁחֲרִית]. The daily morning prayer service, the title derives from a Hebrew word meaning “morning” and also corresponds to the morning offering, the *tamid shel shachar*, brought daily in the Temple. It is the longest of the three daily services.

Shemoneh Esreh. See *Amidah*.

Siddur. [סִדּוּר]. Lit. order, i.e., of prayer. Pl. *siddurim*) The Jewish prayer book, it contains the regular synagogue and home services, as well as prayers for special occasions. There are many different *siddurim* used today, reflecting the various ideologies and customs of Jews from diverse geographic and ethnic backgrounds and denominations.

Tefillah. [תַּפִּלָּה]. Prayer. Jewish prayer is comprised of three main elements: praise, petition, and thanksgiving. It is written primarily in the first person plural, reflecting Jewish collective responsibility. The preeminent Jewish prayer is the *Amidah*.

Tekhinah. [תְּחִינָה]. (pl. *tekhinot*). Personal supplication prayer written by and/or for women.

KEY NAMES

Aguz, Aaron David. (1865–1943) Russian American journalist and member of the editorial staff of the *Jewish Morning Journal*. Translator of both religious and secular books into Yiddish, he was commissioned to write prayers for the immigrant generation in the United States.

Berkovits, Eliezer. (1908-1992). A major Jewish religious thinker of the 20th century who employed classical rabbinic teaching in tandem with serious philosophical reasoning to address contemporary challenges to Jewish faith and law. A “Modern” Orthodox rabbi, he was born in Romania, studied in Germany, taught for years in the United States, and moved to Israel late in life. Among his many works are *God, Man and History*, *Faith after the Holocaust*, and *Not in Heaven: The Nature and Function of Halakhah*.

Chernov, Claudia. The senior editor of the National Department of Jewish Education at Hadassah, she is the author and editor of many study guides on Judaism and women.

Diament, Carol. Director of the National Department of Jewish Education at Hadassah from 1986 to 2004. She served as Professor of Jewish History at Queens College before joining Hadassah, and was the first woman to have completed a doctorate in Jewish Studies at Yeshiva University . She received the Simon Rockower Award for Excellence in Journalism and edited numerous Hadassah books and study guides.

Rabbi Eliezer [son of Hyrkanus]. (1st–2nd century CE). *Tanna* in the Land of Israel, he is also known as Eliezer HaGadol and Eliezer Rabbah. He was a disciple of Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai, rival of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananyah, and teacher of Rabbi Akiva. He served on the *sanhedrin* at Yavneh until he was excommunicated as a result of the debate over the “oven of Akhnai” (Tractate *Bava Metzia* 59b). He established an academy in Lod.

Ezra. Scribe and scholar, he came to Jerusalem with the second wave of returnees after the destruction of the First Temple in approximately 457 BCE, and publicized knowledge of the Torah’s text and laws among the Jews in the Land of Israel.

Falk, Marcia. Professor of Hebrew and English literature, Jewish studies, Tanakh, and creative writing at Stanford, the State University of New York at Binghamton, and the Claremont Colleges. Her groundbreaking prayerbook, *The Book of Blessings: New Jewish Prayers for Daily Life, the Sabbath, and the New Moon Festival* re-creates Hebrew and English liturgy in poetic forms from a contemporary, gender inclusive perspective.

Heschel, Rabbi Abraham Joshua. (1907–1972). A religious philosopher, he served as professor of Jewish ethics and mysticism at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America. Author of numerous books on philosophy, Tanakh, *kabbalah*, and Hassidism including *The Prophets*, *A Passion for Truth*, *The Earth Is the Lord's*, *Man's Quest for God*, *The Sabbath*, and *God in Search of Man*.

Rabbi Yaakov ben Idi. (3rd century CE). An *amora* in the Land of Israel.

Kram, Rabbi Mark. American Rabbi, he was ordained by the Hebrew Union College. He currently coaches and consults.

Lavie, Aliza. Israeli academic and politician, she served as a member of the Knesset, and is a senior lecturer at the School of Communication at Bar-Ilan University. She is a well-known author, publicist, media personality, and social activist.

Maimonides. (1135–1204). Also known as Rambam, an acronym for Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon, he was born in Spain, but lived most of his life in Egypt, where he served as a physician and leader of the Jewish community. He is one of the pre-eminent Jewish philosophers and codifiers of all time. His *Mishneh Torah* became one of the central works of halakhic literature and his *Guide for the Perplexed* (*Moreh Nevukhim*) is one of the most important Jewish philosophical treatises ever written.

Ochs, Carol. (b. 1939). Served as Director of the Graduate School and Adjunct Full Professor of Jewish Religious Thought at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, New York. Her area of expertise is in Jewish spirituality, comparative religion, and Jewish feminism.

Olitzky, Kerry M. (b. 1954). Served as the Executive Director of the Jewish Outreach Institute, a national independent organization dedicated to bringing Judaism to interfaith families and the unaffiliated. Formerly, he served as vice president of the Wexner Heritage Foundation, the premier adult Jewish learning and Jewish leadership program in North America. Previously, he was national Dean of Adult Jewish Learning and Living of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion.

Rabbi Oshaya. 4th-century *amora* born in Babylonia, he studied there in Nehardea, and moved to the Land of Israel together with his brother Chananiyah. He is often mentioned together with the great teachers of that generation, Rav Assi and Rav Ami.

Solovy, Alden. American Israeli liturgist, poet, author, and educator, as well as the Liturgist-in-Residence for the Pardes Institute of Jewish Studies in Jerusalem. He is the author of five books, including a trilogy of contemporary prayer from CCAR Press:

SUGGESTED READINGS

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APPENDIX



A PRAYER UPON SENDING A CHILD TO SERVE IN THE ISRAEL DEFENSE FORCE (IDF)

Prayer composed by *Tzohar*, an advocacy organization in Israel providing Jewish programs and services. It aims to bridge the gaps between religious and secular Jews in Israel.

Master of All Worlds, the King to whom peace belongs, on this day on which we escort our child to serve the Jewish people and all who dwell in Israel through army service, we throw before You our pleas that You will spread Your canopy of peace upon him/her and upon all soldiers of the IDF.

5

Grant them the energy, agility, and joy to fulfill the commandment, “the help of Israel from the hands of the enemies,” and give them courage, insight, and strength.

Protect them from all danger or peril, injury or obstacle, and return them to their homes and families safe and whole, in body and in spirit, and through them may the verse be fulfilled: “It is God who girds me with valor, who makes my path perfect.”

10

And may it be manifest through our son/daughter and through all of the IDF: “God will protect you from all evil, God will protect your being; God will protect your comings and goings from now through eternity.

15

(One may add)

May God bless and protect you.

May God shine His light upon you and favor you.

May God place His face toward you and grant you peace.

20

ENDNOTES

- 1 M. Falk. 1999. *The Book of Blessings: New Jewish Prayers for Daily Life, the Sabbath, and the New Moon Festival*. Boston: Beacon, 421.
- 2 L. F. Joffe. 2017. “New Historical and Socio-Legal Perspectives on Jewish Divorce.” *Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women’s Studies & Gender Issues* 31(1): 146–168.