

Psalms [Tehillim] 13

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

Psalms [Tehillim] 8

O Lord, our Lord,
 How majestic is Your name throughout the earth,
 You who have covered the heavens with Your splendor!
From the mouths of infants and sucklings
 You have founded strength on account of your foes,
 to put an end to enemy and avenger.
When I behold Your heavens, the work of Your fingers,
 the moon and stars that You set in place,
 what is man that You have been mindful of him,
 mortal man that You have taken note of him,
 that you have made him little less than divine,
 and adorned him with glory and majesty;
 You have made him master over Your handiwork,
 laying the world at his feet,
 sheep and oxen, all of them, and wild beasts, too;
 the birds of the heavens, the fish of the sea,
 whatever travels the paths of the seas.
O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is Your name throughout the earth!

Psalms [Tehillim] 100

Raise a shout for the Lord, all the earth;
 worship the Lord in gladness;
 come into His presence with shouts of joy.
Acknowledge that the Lord is God;
 He made us and we are His,
 His people, the flock He tends.

Enter His gates with praise,
His courts with acclamation.

Praise Him!

Bless His name!

For the Lord is good;

His steadfast love is eternal;

His faithfulness is for all generations.

Rambam, *Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Tefillah 1:2*

This commandment [of prayer] obliges a person to offer supplication and prayer daily. This is accomplished by first recounting the praise of the Holy One blessed be He, then by stating one's needs in the form of request and supplication, and, finally by expressing praise and gratitude to God for all that He has bestowed, every person according to their ability.

Babylonian Talmud, *Berakhot 32a*

Rabbi Simlai expounded: a person should always state praise of God and only afterwards utter his prayers. From where do we know this? From Moshe, as it states: "I offered supplication to God at that time," (Deut. 3:23). Concerning this prayer, it then states: "God, Lord you have begun to show your servant your greatness and strength" (Ibid. 3:24), [this being an expression of praise]. Only afterwards it says: "Allow me to cross over [the River Jordan] so that I might see the good land" (Ibid, 3:2), [this being Moshe's request].

The Essence of Prayer, 1

Joseph B. Soloveitchik, "Redemption, Prayer, Talmud Torah" [20th century philosopher and Talmudic scholar; leader of Modern Orthodoxy in America]

[Soloveitchik explains that modern man is "unaware" of his own needs—surrounded by and immersed in so many problems, we often "lose" ourselves when we identify with the wrong image and adopt the "wrong table of needs [to] gratify."] Judaism wants man to cry out aloud against any kind of pain, to react indignantly to all kinds of injustice or unfairness. For Judaism held that the individual who displays indifference to pain and suffering, who meekly reconciles himself to the ugly, disproportionate, and unjust in life, is not capable of appreciating beauty and goodness. Whoever permits his legitimate needs to go unsatisfied will never be sympathetic to the crying needs of others. A human morality based on love and friendship, on sharing in the travails of others, cannot be practiced if the person's own need-awareness is dull, and he does not know what suffering is. Hence Judaism rejected models of existence which deny human need. . . . For Judaism, need-awareness constitutes part of the definition of human existence.

Therefore, prayer in Judaism, unlike the prayer of classical mysticism, is bound up with the human needs, wants, drives and urges, which make man suffer. Prayer is the doctrine of human needs. Prayer tells the individual, as well as the community, what his, or its genuine needs are, what he should, or should not, petition God about. Of the nineteen benedictions in our Amidah,

thirteen are concerned with basic human needs, individual as well as social-national. Even two of the last three benedictions . . . are of a petitional nature. The person in need is summoned to pray. Prayer and “*Tsarah*” (trouble) are inseparably linked. Who prays? Only the sufferer prays. If man does not find himself in narrow straits, if he is not troubled by anything, if he knows not what “*Tsarah*” is, then he need not pray. To a happy, contented man, the secret of prayer was not revealed. God needs neither thanks nor hymns. He wants to hear the outcry of man, confronted with a ruthless reality. He expects prayer to rise from a suffering world cognizant of its genuine needs. In short, through prayer man finds himself. Prayer enlightens man about his needs. It tells the story of his hidden hopes and expectations. It teaches him how to behold the vision and how to strive in order to realize this vision, when to be satisfied with what one possesses, when to reach out for more. In a word, man finds his need-awareness, himself, in prayer. Of course, the very instant he finds himself, he becomes a redeemed being. [In *Tradition*, Vol. 17, no. 2, 62-63, Spring 1978]

The Essence of Prayer, 2

Abraham J. Heschel, “An Invitation to God”

The drive toward practical consequences is not the force that inspires a person at the moment of his chanting praise to God. Even in supplication, the thought of aid or protection does not constitute the inner act of prayer. The hope of results may be the motive that leads the mind to prayer, but not the content which fills the worshiper’s consciousness in the essential moment of prayer. . . . [An artistic masterpiece is the product of the artist’s “intense concentration” and “wholehearted devotion . . . and love of the work for its own sake.”] Prayer, too, is primarily **kavanah**, the yielding of the entire being to one goal, the gathering of the soul into focus.

The focus of prayer is not the self. A man may spend hours meditating about himself, or be stirred by the deepest sympathy for his fellow man, and no prayer will come to pass. Prayer comes to pass in a complete turning of the heart toward God, toward His goodness and power. It is in the momentary disregard of our personal concerns, the absence of self-centered thoughts, which constitute the art of prayer. Feeling becomes prayer in the moment in which we forget ourselves and become aware of God. When we analyze the consciousness of a supplicant, we discover that it is not concentrated upon his own interests, but on something beyond the self. The thought of personal need is absent, and the thought of divine grace alone is present in his mind. Thus, in beseeching Him for bread, there is *one* instant, at least, in which our mind is directed neither to our hunger nor to food, but to His mercy. This instant is prayer.

Prayer is an invitation to God to intervene in our lives, to let His will prevail in our affairs; it is the opening of a window to Him in our will, an effort to make Him the Lord of our soul.

This is why in Jewish liturgy praise rather than petition ranks foremost. It is the more profound form, for it involves not so much the sense of one’s own dependence and privation as the sense of God’s majesty and glory. In praising Him, all that is specious, all that is false, is dispelled. We rise to a higher level of living. [In *Man’s Quest for God*, 14, 15, 63-64. New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1954.]

Babyloniann Talmud, *Sanhedrin 22a* [compilation of teachings of 3rd-6th century scholars in Babylonia; final redaction in the 6th-7th centuries)

One who is praying must see himself as though he stands before the Divine Presence, as the verse states: “I place God before me at all times” (Psalms 16:8)

Rambam, *Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Tefillah 4:15-16*

What is the requirement of proper intent? Any prayer that is uttered without intent is not considered to be a prayer. . . . What is meant by proper intent? That a person must clear his mind of all other concerns and imagine himself to be standing in God’s presence. Therefore a person must pause a little before commencing prayer in order to focus his thoughts, and only afterwards should he pray, in a relaxed and sincere manner. His prayer should not be like a burden that is dispensed with and left behind, and therefore he must pause a little after having finished his prayer, and only then take his leave. The pious ones of ancient time would prepare for an hour before commencing their prayers, and pause for an hour afterwards, and the prayer itself would last for an hour.

The Amidah

[*Avot / Forefathers*] Praised be our God, the God of our fathers *and our mothers*: God of Abraham, God of Isaac, and God of Jacob; *God of Sarah, God of Rebekah, God of Leah and God of Rachel*; great, mighty, and awesome, God supreme.

Ruler of all the living. Your ways are ways of love. You remember the faithfulness of our ancestors, and in love bring redemption to their children's children for the sake of Your Name.

[*Gevurot / Power*] Eternal is Your might, O God; all life is Your gift; great is Your power to save!

With love You sustain the living with great compassion give life to all. You send help to the falling and healing to the sick. You bring freedom to the captive and keep faith with those who sleep in the dust.

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

[*Kedushah / Holiness*] You are holy, Your name is holy, and those who strive to be holy declare Your glory day by day.

[*Daat / Knowledge*] By Your grace we have the power to gain knowledge and to learn wisdom. Favor us with knowledge, wisdom, and insight, for You are their Source.

[*Teshuvah / Repentance*] Help us, Our Creator, to return to Your Teaching; draw us near, our Sovereign, to Your service; and bring us back into Your presence in perfect repentance.

[*Selichah / Forgiveness*] Forgive us, O Creator for we have sinned; pardon us, O Sovereign, for we have transgressed; for You are One who pardons and forgives. *We praise You, O God, gracious and quick to forgive.*

[*Geulah / Redemption*] Look upon our affliction and help us in our need; O mighty Redeemer, redeem us speedily for Your name's sake. *We praise You, O God, Redeemer of Israel.*

[*Refuah / Healing*] Heal us, O God, and we shall be healed; save us, and we shall be saved; grant us a perfect healing for all our infirmities. *We praise You, O God, Healer of the sick.*

[*Mevarech Hashanim / Blesses the Years*] O Lord, our God, bless this year and all the varieties of its harvest which sustain our lives. Be praised, O God, who blesses the years.

[*Kibbutz Galuyot / Gathering of the Exiles*] Blow the shofar for the freedom of our people. Lift up a banner and gather our exiled people from the four corners of the earth. Be praised, O Lord, who gathers the exiled of the people Israel.

[*Tzedakah Umishpat / Righteousness and Justice*] O Lord, our God, rule over us in loving kindness and energy. May our deeds always be just, and our relationships with others always righteous. Be praised, O God, who loves righteousness and justice.

[*Machnia Zedim* / Humbling the Arrogant] Let there be no hope for those who slander others. May arrogant governments be quickly uprooted, destroyed, and humbled. Be praised, O Lord, who destroys the wicked and humbles the arrogant.

[*Al Hatzadikim* / For the Righteous] Grant mercy, O Lord our God, to those who are righteous. May all who are faithful to You by pursuing truth be given a good reward. Be praised, O Lord, the strength and support of the righteous.

[*Boneh Yerushalayim* / Rebuilding Jerusalem] Return, O God, to Jerusalem, Your city, in mercy. May it be built and established in our days as an eternal symbol. May the seat of David be there. Be praised, O Lord, who gives us faith to rebuild Jerusalem.

[*Keren Yeshuah* / The Messianic Hope] May the Messiah, a descendant of David, come speedily, for we long each day for Your salvation. Be praised, O Lord, who brings forth salvation.

[*Shomea Teflah* / Who Hears Prayer] Hear our voice, O Lord our God, and be loving and merciful to us. Accept our prayer in mercy and favor, for You hear our prayers. May we not be turned away from Your presence feeling empty. O Hear the prayer of Your people, Israel. Be praised, O Lord, who hears prayer.

[*Avodah* / Sacrifices] Be gracious, O Lord our God, to Your people Israel, and receive our prayers with love. O Lord our God, may our worship always be acceptable to You

Fill us with the knowledge that You are near to all who seek You in truth. Let our eyes behold Your presence in our midst and in the midst of our people in Zion.

Blessed is the Lord, whose presence gives life to Zion and all Israel.

[*Hodaah* / Thanks] We are grateful to You, O Lord, our God and God our ancestors, for ever and ever.

You are the Rock of our life and the Shield of our help for ever. We give thanks and praise to You for our lives which are in Your hands, and for our souls which are in Your keeping, for Your miracles and wonders that are with us each day, and for all Your goodness which we experience evening, morning, and noon.

O God of goodness, Your mercies never fail, and Your loving kindness never ceases. Therefore, we put our hope in You.

Let all that lives give thanks to You. Let all faithfully praise Your name, O God, our salvation and help. Be praised, O Lord, Your name is goodness, and it is pleasant to give thanks to You.

[*Birkat Shalom* / Blessing of Peace] Grant us peace, goodness, blessing, and loving-kindness, and mercy to us and to all who worship You.

Bless us and unite us, O Lord, in the light of Your presence. For in the light of Your presence, O Lord our God, You have given us a Torah to live by, and the power for loving-kindness, charity, blessing, mercy, life, and peace.

May it be Your will to bless Your people Israel and all humanity with great strength and peace.

We praise You, O Lord, Source of peace.

[*Elohai Netzor*] My God, keep my tongue from evil and lips from speaking falsehood. Let my soul be silent before those who slander me, and may I be humble before all that lives.

Open my heart to Your Torah, and let my soul pursue Your commandments. Upset and destroy the plans of those who plot against me. Do it for the sake of Your name, for sake of Your Torah, that Your beloved may be saved. With Your power save and answer me.

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

May the One who makes peace in the heavens grant peace to us and to all Israel.

[The texts that follow all focus on “communal” prayer or the importance of praying together. Not all of these texts were read and discussed during the session.]

Babylonian Talmud, *Berakhot* 29b

Rabbi Ya’akov said in the name of Rabbi Hisada: Anyone who embarks on a journey must offer the prayer for travel. What is it? “May it be Your will God my Lord to lead me forth towards peace, guide my steps towards peace, and cause me to be close to peace. Save me from enemy and ambush along the way, and send forth blessing in my endeavors, so that I might achieve grace, mercy, and compassion in Your eyes, and in the eyes of all those whom I will encounter. Blessed are You, God, Who listens to prayer.” Abaye said: A person should always include himself with the community. How should he therefore say the prayer? “May it be Your will God our Lord to lead **us** forth towards peace”

Babylonian Talmud, *Berakhot* 6a

How do we know that when ten people pray together the Divine Presence is with them? For the verse states: “The Lord stands among the congregation of the Lord. (*Psalms* 82:1)

Babylonian Talmud, *Berakhot* 8a

What is the meaning of the verse “I will offer my prayer to You, God, at a time of grace” (*Psalms* 69:14)? What is considered to be a time of grace? The time at which the congregation utters prayer.

Mishnah, *Megillah* 4:3

. . . One does not offer communal prayer nor do [the priests] lift their hands [to bless the people], nor is the Torah scroll read, nor is the *haftorah* read from Prophets . . . except when ten are present. . .

Mishnah, *Megillah* 4:3

What is the source for these rulings? Rabbi Hiyya ben Abba said in the name of Rabbi Yochaan: because the verse states “I will be sanctified among the people of Israel” (*Leviticus* 22:32). This means that every act of sanctification requires at least ten.

Eugene Borowitz, “The Individual and the Community in Jewish Prayer”

God’s kingdom-to-be is not a private matter between one individual and God. It must be accomplished with all men and be manifest in our lives, or it is unworthy of the Lord of the universe. The individual man cannot understand himself, cannot properly know his own life’s purpose unless he sees it within the context of all mankind and all of history. Isolated from his fellows, he isolates himself from God’s social goals.

To want to pray, but only alone and only for oneself, seems therefore to make too much of self, too little of God. Judaism commends communal prayer because God cares for all as He cares for each one, because, while God is the God of each private individual, He is the God of *all* individuals as well. The single self is indispensable. Without any *one*, mankind is incomplete. So, too, without *all other selves*, equally precious to God, the single self loses its context and hence

its final significance. Man cannot find himself only in others, but he also cannot find himself without them. If prayer is supposed to open man to the truth of his existence it must begin with self but it must reach out to all mankind.

Judaism values communal worship not for its specific Jewish purposes alone, but for all men. Group prayer, by confronting us with others, by asking us to link our prayers to theirs, reminds us immediately and directly that it is never enough to pray for ourselves alone. Speaking as “we,” the individual discovers, acknowledges, articulates the needs, desires, hopes, which he, though one man, shares with all men because he is not only a private self but a member of humanity. Besides, when we are conscious of those with whom we stand, what we may have wanted to pray by ourselves is generally made less selfish, more humble, and therefore more appropriate for utterance before God. . . . When we join *them* in prayer, when we must, to say “we,” link ourselves with them, we, and our prayer, are refined; and often exalted far beyond our own means, for *they are praying now*, lifting us, helping us, with their “we,” even as they silently reach out the toe congregation for compassion and understanding.

[Borowitz continues to explain that “the joy of others” affects our worship. In addition, “social worship is a sharp spur to ethical sensitivity”—communal prayer charges us “with a new sense of responsibility, not for our immediate synagogue neighbors alone, but for those of our city, our nation, and our world. . . .”]

Judaism, as the faith of a people, does not deny the individual’s right to freedom and judgment. It grants extraordinary liberty to the individual in matters of belief.

Nonetheless, religion for the Jew, as the traditionalist understands it, is not primarily a personal but a communal matter. The Torah was not given to Moses as an individual possession to share with others of a similar mind, but to the Jewish people as a whole. The Covenant at Sinai was made with Israel, the Jewish people, and thus, each Jew, as a Jew, shares this unique relation to God as an inheritor of his people’s Covenant.

Jewish worship is, classically, communal in character. Its Jewishness derives not from the external facts that Hebrew is used, traditional texts are recited, or Jewish symbols are displayed. The special language texts, symbols all stem from this root relationship [of the Covenant at Sinai and . . . Israel’s bond with its God]. Jewish worship, then, is the people of Israel, assembled before its God out of continuing loyalty to their Covenant, to acknowledge, praise, and petition Him. The group may be small, but [the assembled] constitute the Covenant folk in miniature. They represent all Israel, past and present, here and everywhere. . . . The man who prays in the synagogue prays as a participant in a Jewish history which continues into the living present, and his prayers, therefore, express the needs of the community in which he stands.