

The Concise Code of Jewish Law

Volume One A Guide to Daily Prayer and Religious Observance

REVISED EDITION



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לאור ספר החינוך ורבותינו הראשונים

Rabbi Gersion Appel

**THE
CONCISE CODE
OF JEWISH LAW**

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**A GUIDE TO DAILY PRAYER
AND RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCE**

Compiled from
Kitzur Shulchan Aruch and Traditional Sources

With Halachic Annotations
Based on
Contemporary Responsa

REVISED EDITION
EDITED BY
Rabbi Daniel Goldstein

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Volume One: A Guide to Daily Prayer and Religious Observance

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ספר זה מוקדש לזכר נשמת
הרב ד"ר גרשון בן הרב יהודה אפפעל זצ"ל

גדול בתורה ובמחשבה
רב קהלות ומורה הוראה
שלם במדותיו ותמים בהליכותיו
ולמען ציון הקדיש מעשיו
נחקק בלב אשתו, בניו, ונכדיו

יהי זכרו ברוך

*This series is dedicated to the memory of
our dear father/grandfather*

זצ"ל רבי דר. גרשון אפל

*A beloved community rav, erudite professor of Jewish
studies and Jewish philosophy, and prolific author,
who taught and influenced young and old
throughout the Jewish community*

*And in memory of our dear mother/grandmother,
his aishet chayil of 66 years*

ע"ה מירימ אפל
מרים בת ר' שלמה הכהן ע"ה

*Shlomo and Mimi (ע"ה) Appel
Michael and Robin, Yehuda and Michelle
Daniel and Karen, Lauren*

In loving memory of my dear wife

ע"ה Mimi

מרים שרה בת הרב חיים זאב ע"ה

*whose encouragement and devotion made the
publication of this sefer possible.*

Shlomo Appel

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Publisher's Preface



OU Press is proud to publish this new revised and updated edition of Rabbi Gersion Appel's classic, *The Concise Code of Jewish Law: A Guide to Daily Prayer and Religious Observance*. Originally published in 1977, this edition has been updated both in style and content by Rabbi Daniel Goldstein to reflect the halachic issues and literature of the last fifty years. This follows upon the well-received *The Concise Code of Jewish Law: A Guide to the Observance of Shabbat*, in which Rabbi Goldstein similarly updated Rabbi Appel's work on Hilchot Shabbat, published by OU Press, Yeshiva University Press, and Maggid Books in 2016. Together, these two volumes cover all the major topics of halachah relevant to everyday life.

Rabbi Appel, a leader in the American Orthodox rabbinate in the mid-twentieth century,¹ perceived the need for English works of *halachah* which are comprehensive and organized, as well as up-to-date in their applications of the *halachah*. In *The Concise Code*, Rabbi Appel

1. For a fuller biographical treatment, see Dr. David Shatz's essay, "The Life and Work of Rabbi Dr. Gersion Appel" in *The Concise Code of Jewish Law: A Guide to the Observance of Shabbat* (2016), pp. xxi-xxxiv.

was remarkably successful in achieving these goals. He took as his starting point the *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch*, the immensely popular halachic work written by Rabbi Shlomo Ganzfried in the mid-nineteenth century. Rabbi Ganzfried intended the *Kitzur* for use as a practical guide for everyday halachic observance, and it has retained a central role down to our own time. Elaborating on the *Kitzur*'s treatment where necessary, using modern *poskim*, and presenting his discussion in an engaging fashion, Rabbi Appel offered the Jewish community, in two volumes, a modern, accessible, and enlightening treatment of *halachah*.

Continuing in Rabbi Appel's footsteps and following his approach, this new edition of *The Concise Code* brings Rabbi Appel's work to the twenty-first century. This has been a large and multi-faceted project, and we acknowledge the efforts of those who contributed to its success. Rabbi Daniel Goldstein, the editor of this volume, worked diligently and tirelessly in preparing this excellent updated version of Rabbi Appel's original work. Rabbi Eliyahu Krakowski and Rabbi Yaakov Hoffman reviewed the manuscript and provided numerous editorial comments. Mrs. Yocheved Goldberg meticulously reviewed drafts of the manuscript. Rabbi Gil Student provided the initial impetus for the overall project. Our gratitude goes to Rabbi Shlomo Appel and the members of the Appel family; they provided the financial support for this revised edition of *The Concise Code* and so fittingly dedicated it to the memory of Rabbi Dr. Gersion and Mrs. Miriam Appel. Heartbreakingly, shortly before the completion of this project, Rabbi Shlomo Appel's wife, Mimi, passed away. This book is dedicated in her memory as well.

Menachem Genack
General Editor, OU PRESS

Editor's Introduction

In 1977, Rabbi Gersion Appel presented his *Concise Code of Jewish Law* to the world of halachic literature. In his introduction, Rabbi Appel observed:

The continuing discourse and creativity in Halachah, throughout the ages up to our own day, bear witness to the living quality of Torah as *Torat Chayyim*, a Torah of life. Addressing itself to every area, personal and social, sacred and worldly, and to every dimension of human experience, its influence is all-pervasive, its authority paramount in Jewish life.

This impulse—to make Torah speak to every generation—is deeply embedded in the Jewish spirit. As Rabbi Gil Student has noted, Rabbi Appel's goal was to transplant Halachah from the context of pre-war Europe, where halachic literature was written for learned, observant men, to a new landscape. "Rabbi Appel's readership would undoubtedly include, among others, American suburbanites with little Jewish education. When writing the *Concise Code*, Rabbi Appel had the novice in mind, explaining the inner beauty of the laws. His is the rare halachic

book whose bibliography includes works such as Rabbi Yehuda Halevi's *Kuzari* and Rav Hirsch's *Horeb*.”

Torat Chayyim is not a slogan but a charge: to draw the timeless truths of Halachah into the lived realities of each generation. That was Rabbi Appel's guiding vision—and it is the spirit in which this revised edition has been prepared.

These words are being written in Eretz Yisrael, during a time of war and uncertainty. As the conflict with Iran intensifies, we are reminded that *בְּכָל דּוֹר וָדוֹר עוֹמְדִים עָלֵינוּ לְלֹחֶמְנוּ*—in every generation, they rise against us. Yet just as the threats recur, so too does the unmistakable presence of *Yad Hashem*, the Hand of God.

His faithfulness to His people in every generation runs parallel to our own enduring commitment to His Torah. These parallel tracks—divine constancy and human devotion—each affirm the other's place in the unfolding story of Jewish life. *הִנֵּה לֹא יָנוּם וְלֹא יִישָׁן שׁוֹמֵר יִשְׂרָאֵל* (“The protector of Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps”) is complemented by *לֹא יָמוּשׁ סֵפֶר הַתּוֹרָה הַזֶּה מִפִּיךָ וְהִגִּיתָ בוּ יוֹמָם וְלַיְלָה* (“This book of the Torah shall not leave your mouth; you shall meditate on it day and night”).

This book focuses on the *halachot* of daily living—the practices that shape the rhythms of a Torah life. It is in the quiet consistency of *erev, boker, v'tzaharayim*—evening, morning, and afternoon, day in and day out—that our bond with Hashem is forged and sustained. *Mitzvah* by *mitzvah*, detail by detail, we bind ourselves to Him—not only in moments of crisis, but in the steady cadence of a life where faith is practiced, not only proclaimed.

Rabbi Appel's work—now updated for a new generation—remains a guide not only to what *halachah* demands, but to what it means to live a life anchored in Torah, purposeful in action, and deeply connected to Hashem, who is with us *erev, boker, v'tzaharayim*—then, now, and always.

It is my *tefillah* that this *sefer* accomplish two goals. First, may the memory of Rabbi Gersion Appel be perpetuated by this *sefer*, and may his work continue to instruct and inspire. And second, may those who open its pages find a vehicle to enhance their understanding and appreciation of what it means to be a consistent Torah observing Jew, day in and day out.

בְּכַנִּיסְתּוֹ מָהוּ אוֹמֵר? יְהִי רְצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ ה' אֱלֹהֵי, שֶׁלֹּא יֵאָרֶע דְּבַר תִּקְלָה
עַל יָדִי, וְלֹא אֶכְשַׁל בְּדַבְרֵי הַלָּכָה וְיִשְׂמְחוּ בִּי חֲבֵרֵי, וְלֹא אוֹמֵר עַל טָמֵא
טָהוֹר וְלֹא עַל טָהוֹר טָמֵא

Upon entering, what does he say? May it be Your will, Lord my God, that no mishap occur by my hand, and that I not stumble in *halachah*, and that my friends rejoice in me, and that I do not call something impure pure, and something pure impure.

Daniel Goldstein

Neve Daniel

Sivan 5785

Original Preface to the First Edition

The essence of Judaism, as taught by our Sages, is *kabbalat malchut shamayim*, acknowledgment of the sovereignty of God, and *kabbalat mitzvot*, acceptance of the commandments ordained by God. Judaism requires a total commitment to Torah as the divine blueprint for a life of holiness in the service of God and of human concern for fellow man, and observance of its laws as defined and explicated by the *Halachah*.

The continuing discourse and creativity in *Halachah*, throughout the ages up to our own day, bear witness to the living quality of Torah as *Torat Chayyim*, a Torah of life. Addressing itself to every area, personal and social, sacred and worldly, and to every dimension of human experience, its influence is all-pervasive, its authority paramount in Jewish life.

In its root meaning *Halachah* is the way of the Jew, who stands committed to live his life in accord with Torah law and the Oral Tradition, as expounded by our Sages in the Talmud and by our halachic authorities in the later codes and responsa. While the great code of Jewish law, the *Shulchan Aruch*, written in the sixteenth century by Rabbi Joseph Karo, has served, and continues to be regarded, as the major resource for determining the law and for rendering definitive decisions in *Halachah*, it is the abridged *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch*, written by Rabbi Shlomo

Ganzfried about one hundred years ago, to which the traditional Jew has generally turned for daily guidance in Jewish practice and conduct.

The present work is designed to meet the current need for a concise, contemporary compendium of the traditional laws in the basic areas of Jewish life. The laws are compiled from the *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch*, and augmented where necessary from the *Shulchan Aruch* and other traditional codes, such as *Chayyei Adam*, *Chochmat Adam*, and *Mishnah Berurah*. The material selected from these primary sources has been translated by the author and arranged in a logical topical order, following that of the *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch* as closely as practicable. The basic laws are supplemented by relevant halachic annotations, with particular regard to present-day problems and modern conditions, derived from and based on contemporary responsa by universally recognized halachic authorities. The halachic annotations are meant to be generally informative and are intended essentially as a guide. The reader is advised to consult his Rabbi or appropriate halachic authority for a definitive decision, particularly where the factors in a given case must be examined and evaluated individually.

Volume I endeavors to present the laws, customs, and traditions that pertain to prayer and religious observance in the daily life of the Jew. The Introduction, intended as an overview of the four units which comprise this first volume, provides the reader with halachic and aggadic material bearing upon the subject areas covered. The section on sources and references at the end of the book contains additional halachic notations, as well as divergent opinions, but serves mainly to direct the reader to the sources in the codes and responsa from which the basic laws and the individual rulings are drawn.

This work is, in large measure, the result of a concern and involvement over the years with questions of *Halachah* and religious practice, while serving as Rabbi of several congregations and teaching courses in Jewish law and liturgy at Stern College of Yeshiva University. It is, therefore, for my congregants and my students that it was primarily conceived. The book is presented, however, with a broader objective in mind, namely, to make the knowledge of our laws more widely and more readily accessible, especially for our young people today. It is my hope that it will help to direct them in their daily living in accord with

Original Preface to the First Edition

Jewish law, and enable them to identify with the Jewish people and the Jewish faith through the totality of the religious experience as encountered in the world of *Halachah*.

I wish to acknowledge my indebtedness to those who have had a part in the preparation of this volume: to Nachum Kornfeld and Abraham Walzer for typography and design; to Robert Milch for proofreading and preparing the Index; to Israel Paretzky for reading the galley proofs and checking the references. I am especially indebted to the publisher, Bernard Scharfstein, but for whose initiative and enthusiasm it would not have come to be. I wish to thank Rabbi David Mirsky for the thoughtful and valued counsel which he has always been ready to extend to me.

This book is dedicated to the blessed memory of my wife's departed parents, Samuel and Dora Cohen, whose spiritual legacy my dear wife, Miriam, and I have been privileged to share and to transmit to our children.

Gersion Appel

1977

Introduction

I. COMMITMENT OF FAITH

Judaism begins with a commitment of faith upon which everything rests. “The basic principle of all basic principles and the pillar of all sciences,” Rambam states, “is to know that there is a First Being who brought every existing thing into being.... This Being is the God of the universe, the Lord of all the earth” (*Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Yesodei HaTorah* 1:1, 5).

Constant Awareness of God

A Jew must ever be mindful of this fundamental belief, and he must strive to live in constant awareness of God’s presence. Awareness of the Divine Presence will bring one to reverence for God and humble obedience to His laws. Indeed, as Rambam notes, when one is alone he does not conduct himself in the same manner as when he is in the presence of a great person. Nor does one speak to the members of his family as he would in the council of elders. How much more considerate of his proper conduct and speech ought one to be, knowing that he is constantly in the presence of God, Who is mindful of his ways and knows his innermost thoughts (Rambam, *Guide of the Perplexed* 111, 52; Rama, *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayyim* 1:1).

The following are excerpts from the *Chayyei Adam*'s exposition of the six commandments designed to assure a man's awareness of the presence of God and cultivation of a spiritual outlook upon life.

The Torah commands that one should cleave to God, as it is written, "To Him shall you cleave" (*Devarim* 10:20). But is it possible for man to cleave to the Holy One, blessed be He? What it means to say is that he should cleave to Him constantly in his thoughts.

When one thus concentrates his thoughts on God, his deeds will surely be for the sake of heaven, as it is written, "In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will direct your paths" (*Mishlei* 3:6). The Sages explain this to mean: Let all your deeds be for the sake of heaven, so that even your ordinary activities are directed to serving your Creator.

Six commandments are deemed to be "*mitzvot* of the heart" that entail principles of which a Jew must be mindful every moment of his life. They are the following:

1. To believe that there is One God in the world, Who brought all existing things into being; that whatever is or will come to be is dependent upon His will; and that He brought us out of Egypt and gave us the Torah. This is a positive commandment, as it is written, "I am the Lord your God, Who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage" (*Shemot* 20:2).
2. Not to believe in any gods besides Him, as it is said, "You shall have no other gods before Me" (*Shemot* 20:3). We must believe that the Holy One, blessed be He, alone exercises His providential care over all the world.
3. To affirm His unity, as it is said, "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One" (*Devarim* 6:4). This means: Hear, O Israel, and know that God, Who by His will brought everything into being, and Who is our God, and Who exercises His providence over all the world, is one God, there being no other besides Him.
4. To love God, as it is said, "And you shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might" (*Devarim* 6:5). Love of God, the Sages state, can be attained through study of the Torah, since contemplation of

Torah will lead to recognition of the greatness of God and thus to love of Him.

5. To fear God, as it is written, “You shall fear the Lord your God” (*Devarim* 10:20). This means: To know that God is aware of our deeds and discerns our thoughts, for He searches the heart and knows all hidden things, as it is written, “Can a man hide himself in secret places that I shall not see Him? says the Lord” (*Yirmiyahu* 23:24).
6. Not to stray after the waywardness of the heart and eyes, as it is said, “And that you go not about after your own heart and your own eyes, after which you go astray” (*Bamidbar* 15:39).

In affirming these principles at all times, one also observes the command of cleaving constantly to God (*Chayyei Adam*, *Hilchot Berachot U’Tefillot* I, 5; see *Sefer HaChinnuch*, Introduction).

Reminders of God’s Presence

Three *mitzvot*—*tzitzit*, *tefillin*, and *mezuzah*—are ordained by the Torah as outward signs, reminding us of God’s presence and our commitment to His laws. We are enjoined to surround ourselves with these guardians, moreover, to keep from straying after the waywardness of our eyes and the evil inclinations of our hearts. The Talmud states, “He who has *tefillin* on his head and arm, *tzitzit* on his garment, and a *mezuzah* on his door may be presumed not to sin,” for he has many monitors to remind him constantly of his responsibilities as a Jew (*Menachot* 43a).

Tzitzit

The commandment concerning *tzitzit* is given in the Bible as follows: “And the Lord spoke unto Moses, saying: Speak unto the children of Israel, and bid them that they make them throughout their generations fringes in the corners of their garments, and that they put with the fringe of each corner a thread of blue. And it shall be unto you for a fringe, that you may look upon it and remember all the commandments of the Lord, and do them; and that you go not about after your own heart and your own eyes, after which you go astray; that you may remember and do all my commandments, and be holy unto your God” (*Bamidbar* 15:37–40).

Accordingly, one who has a garment requiring *tzitzit* must first attach the *tzitzit* before wearing it, in compliance with the Biblical command. The *mitzvah* is, furthermore, observed by having two kinds of four-cornered garments provided with *tzitzit*, a small one called the *tallit katan* or *arba kanfot*, which is worn under the upper garments all day, and a larger one, known as the *tallit*, which is worn over one's garments during prayer. Generally, the worshiper wears the *tallit* at the morning service, and the *chazan* wears it at every prayer service.

The thread of blue referred to in the passage is viewed by the Rabbis as a symbolical reminder of God's sovereignty: "The blue resembles the sea, the sea resembles the heavens, and the heavens resemble the Throne of Glory" (*Menachot* 43a). When the blue dye made from the blood of the *chilazon*, a rare kind of fish or snail, became unobtainable, the blue color was no longer required, and the *tallit* had to be made with *tzitzit* of a natural white color. Traditionally, Jews have worn the *tallit* with a feeling of honor and reverence. The Sages say, "Whoever is diligent in the observance of this commandment will merit the presence of the *Shechinah*" (*Menachot* 43a).

Tefillin

The *tefillin* consist of two cube-shaped leather cases, known as *batim*, made from the skins of kosher animals which have been prepared and processed for the sake of the *mitzvah*. Each of the *batim* contains four sections (*parshiot*) from the Torah, namely, קְדָשׁ (*Shemot* 13:1–10); וְהָיָה כִּי יִבְרָאֶךָ (*Shemot* 13: 11–16); שְׁמַע (*Devarim* 6:4–9); and וְהָיָה אִם שָׁמַע (*Devarim* 11: 13–21). These four sections embrace the fundamental doctrines of Judaism, expressing belief in God, His unity, divine providence and retribution, and God's deliverance of Israel from Egyptian bondage, and teaching love of God and obedience to Him.

The *tefillin* placed on the arm, known as *shel yad*, has the four *parshiot* written on one piece of parchment. The one placed on the head, known as *shel rosh*, has four compartments into which are placed the four *parshiot* written on four separate pieces of parchment. The parchment must be properly prepared, and the *parshiot* written by a competent scribe (*sofer*) with great care, according to halachic requirements, as in the writing of a *mezuzah* and a *Sefer Torah*. The *tefillin shel rosh* also has

the letter *shin* (ש) impressed upon two sides of the case. Attached to the *batim* are leather straps, called *retzuot*, by which loops are formed to hold the *tefillin* on the head and on the arm. The knot formed by the strap of the *shel rosh* has the shape of a *dalet* (ד) and that of the *shel yad* has the appearance of a *yod* (י). Together the letters spell out the name of the Almighty. Indeed, the Talmud considers the *tefillin*, which bear the name of the Almighty, to be the strength of Israel, citing the verse, “And all the peoples of the earth shall see that the name of the Lord is called upon you, and they shall be in fear of you” (*Devarim* 28:10).

Tefillin are of an exceedingly high degree of sanctity, even higher, the Talmud intimates, than that of the golden plate that the High Priest wore on his forehead. On the latter the name of God was engraved only once, while each of the *tefillin* contains the name of God twenty-one times (*Menachot* 36b; Rambam, *Hilchot Tefillin* 4:14). Wearing them in observance of the commandment is deemed to be of great merit. In this regard, Rambam writes, “*Tefillin* are of a high degree of holiness. As long as the *tefillin* are on a man’s head and arm, he is humble and God-fearing, and is not drawn into frivolity and idle talk. He does not dwell on evil thoughts, but occupies his mind with thoughts of truth and righteousness.... Whoever wears *tefillin* regularly will be blessed with long life, as it is said, ‘The Lord is upon them; they shall live’ [*Yeshayahu* 38:16].”

Mezuzah

The *mezuzah* is a small parchment scroll inscribed with the first two paragraphs of the *Shema* (*Devarim* 6:4–9, and 11:13–21) and placed in a case that is fixed to the doorpost. The Biblical verses must be handwritten in Hebrew by a scribe in accordance with the laws that apply to the writing of the scrolls of *tefillin* and a *Sefer Torah*. One who observes the commandment acknowledges thereby his belief in God, God’s unity, divine providence and retribution, love of God, and obedience to His law, as set forth in the *Shema*.

The *mezuzah* is thus intended as a constant reminder of God’s presence and commitment to our faith. Rambam writes concerning the *mezuzah*, “Whenever one enters or leaves his home, he will encounter the name of the Holy One, blessed be He, and will be reminded of His unity and the love due Him. He will rouse himself from his lethargy and

absorption in temporal vanities, and realizing that nothing endures forever but the knowledge of God, he will be restored to his senses and will walk in the path of righteousness” (*Hilchot Mezuzah* 6:13).

The name *Shaddai*, the Almighty, which is written on the reverse side of the parchment, is taken to signify the words שׁוֹמֵר דְּלֶתוֹת יִשְׂרָאֵל, “Guardian of the houses of Israel.” Although the *mezuzah* is not to be viewed as an amulet possessing magical power, it is, however, traditionally considered to be the sign of a Jewish home, sanctified by the observance of God’s commandments and ennobled by the practice of lovingkindness, and hence under the protection of the Almighty (see *Menachot* 33b).

II. PRAYER AND DIVINE WORSHIP

Addressing God in Prayer

Man’s recognition of God as master of his fate and destiny, and of his dependence upon Him, leads him to turn trustfully to God in prayer. Judaism teaches that God, in His concern for human beings, renders Himself approachable as man addresses Him in prayer.

“He who prays,” say the Rabbis, “must consider himself as standing before the Divine Presence” (*Sanhedrin* 22a). To pray, therefore, is to meet God, and to commune with Him. Prayer bids man lift his gaze and envision God in His transcendence as the Creator, awed by the majesty of His wondrous creations. It also enables man to withdraw into the quiet recesses of his soul, to contemplate God in His immanent Being, and to reflect upon the deeper meaning of life as it is touched and molded by a Divine Providence. In prayer man extols God, and entreats Him for compassion, for blessing, and for divine grace. One who is in particular need or in distress is, in the opinion of all authorities, duty-bound to pray to God for assistance. Indeed, this is of the very essence of religion, to place our faith and trust in God.

The Origin of Prayer

To pray daily is a Biblical command, as it is said, “And you shall serve the Lord, your God” (*Shemot* 23:25). According to tradition, the service referred to is prayer, as it is said, “And to serve Him with all your heart” (*Devarim* 10:12), on which the Sages comment, “What is service of the

heart? It is prayer” (*Sifre*, *ibid.*; *Ta’anit* 2a). The obligation prescribed by the Torah, according to Rambam, is that everyone must offer up supplication and prayer daily, first praising God, then petitioning for all that he needs, and finally offering thanksgiving for the bountiful benefits bestowed upon him (*Hilchot Tefillah* 1:2).

The Talmud states that Ezra and his *Beit Din* ordained the Eighteen Benedictions (*Shemoneh Esreh*) in their present order (*Megillah* 17b). They also instituted three daily prayer services, Morning (*Shacharit*), Afternoon (*Minchah*), and Evening (*Maariv*), corresponding to the sacrifices offered, and the ritual performed daily in the Temple. Additional services, corresponding to the additional sacrificial offerings, were likewise instituted for Shabbat, *Rosh Chodesh*, and *Yamim Tovim*.

While the daily prayers were intended to correspond to the divine service, they were also designed to accord with the three natural changes of the day occasioned by sunrise, sunset, and nightfall, at which times man would be moved to pray. The three prayer services are, moreover, in keeping with an ancient tradition of prayer, which originated with the patriarchs at the very dawn of Jewish life. Abraham prayed in the morning, Isaac in the afternoon toward evening, and Jacob at night (*Berachot* 26b, *Y. Berachot* 4:1).

Prayer is thus a continuing historical tradition in Judaism. But it is also, as we have indicated, institutional and statutory, and as such is subject to the requirements of *Halachah*. It is precisely its statutory and obligatory character that raises prayer from the level of an emotional, psychological, or intellectual exercise to that of a meaningful religious experience.

The Prayer Book and the Order of the Daily Service

The *Siddur* is the traditional book of prayer, the devotional classic which has rightly been called the daily companion of the Jew. It contains the prayers and blessings recited by a Jew in private and in public worship, on weekdays and on Shabbat and Festivals, and on all of life’s occasions. It also embraces a wealth of religious literature and Jewish learning, and is thus a veritable treasury of the Jewish spirit.

Daily prayer starts with individual blessings recited at home. In the synagogue the service customarily begins with the recitation of the

Morning Blessings, followed by private devotional prayers and readings. The next section of the service consists of the Verses of Song (*P'sukei D'zimrah*). These are psalms in praise of God and other selections of a similar nature, which are preliminary to, and serve as an introduction to, the Morning Service. The latter, beginning with *Barechu*, the invocation to prayer, consists of the *Shema* and the blessings that precede and follow it, and the Eighteen Benedictions, known as the *Shemoneh Esreh* or *Amidah*. The *sh'liach tzibur* then repeats the *Shemoneh Esreh*, a procedure originally established for the benefit of those who do not know how to pray. This has remained the practice until the present day.

The service continues with *Tachanun*, the daily petition for pardon. Additional elegies and supplications are said on Mondays and Thursdays, as these are considered to be special days of divine grace (*Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayyim* 134:1). When Moses ascended Mount Sinai a second time to pray for God's pardon of the Jewish people, following their worship of the molten calf, he ascended on a Thursday and, after again receiving the Tablets of the Law, he descended on a Monday. These are also considered days of judgment because the *Beit Din* would meet in judgment on Mondays and Thursdays. Because of their special nature, some are accustomed to fast on these days. The Morning Service is concluded with *Aleinu* and the Psalm of the Day.

The Afternoon (*Minchah*) service, corresponding to the daily sacrifice offered in the Temple toward evening, consists of *Ashrei*, *Shemoneh Esreh*, *Tachanun*, and *Aleinu*. Its particular significance is taken to lie in the special effort that it requires. The morning prayer is offered upon arising, before one becomes involved in his daily affairs. Likewise, the evening prayer is said when the day is done and one is free of his daily tasks. But *Minchah* is recited during the day, while one is still occupied with his daily activities, and he must stop whatever he is doing and turn to God in prayer (*Tur, Orach Chayyim*, chap. 232).

The Evening (*Maariv*) service consists of reading the *Shema*, which, as the Torah prescribes, must be read morning and evening. The *Shema* is preceded by two blessings and followed by two blessings. The service continues with the *Shemoneh Esreh* and concludes with *Aleinu*. Rambam notes that although the evening service instituted by the Men of the Great Assembly was not considered as obligatory as the morning

and afternoon services, Jews everywhere adopted it as obligatory. However, in view of its originally optional nature, the *Shemoneh Esreh* is not repeated by the *sh'liach tzibur*.

Several of the prayers, such as the *Shema*, the *Shemoneh Esreh*, and the *Kaddish*, and certain elements of the service bear closer study and analysis.

***Shema*: Affirming the Unity of God**

While the *Shemoneh Esreh* is central to the whole structure of prayer, the preceding recitation of the *Shema*, which comprises three passages from the Torah (*Devarim* 6:4–9; 11:13–21; *Bamidbar* 15:37–41), constitutes the pivotal point of the service, inasmuch as it is the affirmation of Israel's belief in God and in His unity and the commitment to observance of His commandments.

Reciting the *Shema* in the morning and in the evening is Biblically commanded. The first verse of the *Shema* is to be said with special concentration, as it signifies acceptance of the sovereignty of God. As expounded by Bachya Ibn Pakuda in his ethical treatise, *Duties of the Heart*, it gives expression to three fundamental concepts. “Hear, O Israel, the Lord” attests to the reality of God's existence. We are further enjoined to believe that He is “our God,” and then commanded to affirm His unity as we proclaim “the Lord is one” (*Duties of the Heart*, Preface to Treatise 1).

The verse “Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one” is followed by the statement, “Blessed be the name of His glorious majesty forever and ever.” The latter is said quietly, the Talmud intimates, because it is not in the Biblical passage (*Pesachim* 56a). Interpolation of the phrase is explained by Rambam, who cites a Midrash as follows.

The patriarch Jacob gathered his sons in his dying hour and charged them concerning the unity of God and the way of the Lord which Abraham and Isaac had walked. Anxiously, he questioned them regarding their belief. They all answered, “Hear, O Israel...,” meaning, “Hear this, our father Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.” When he heard their confession of faith, the aged patriarch exclaimed, “Blessed be the name of His glorious

majesty forever and ever” (*Bereishit Rabbah* 98:4; Rambam, *Hilchot Keriat Shema* 1:4).

Another Midrash depicts Moses ascending to heaven and hearing the angels extol God with these words of praise, which he later taught the children of Israel. During the year they say the phrase quietly, but on the holy day of Yom Kippur, when the people of Israel are as pure as the angels, they say it aloud (*Devarim Rabbah* 2:25).

The meaning of the *Shema* is enhanced by the blessings said before and after, which invoke belief in Creation and Revelation, and hope in the coming Redemption, principal doctrines of Judaism.

Shemoneh Esreh: The Silent Prayer

The *Shemoneh Esreh*, or the *Amidah* as it is termed by the Sefardim since it is recited in a standing position, serves as the basis for every prayer service. The Rabbis emphasize that it must be immediately preceded by the plea for Israel’s deliverance, because our hope for redemption is, in great measure, contingent upon our prayers.

The *Shemoneh Esreh* is referred to by the Sages simply as *Tefillah*, the Prayer, to be said silently by the worshiper with intense devotion. As composed by the Men of the Great Assembly under the leadership of Ezra, it contained eighteen benedictions. An additional benediction, the prayer for the suppression of slanderers and wickedness, was appended later by Rabban Gamliel II of Yavneh after the destruction of the Second Temple, bringing the total to nineteen (*Berachot* 28b). The original name, *Shemoneh Esreh* (Eighteen Benedictions), was retained, nonetheless, evidently because of the great currency that it had already gained among the people.

Paralleling the natural pattern of prayer indicated by Rambam, as noted above, the first three benedictions consist of praises of God, and the last three of thanksgiving to Him. The intermediate benedictions are petitions to God on behalf of the individual and the community. The opening benedictions of praise and the concluding benedictions of thanksgiving are constant and form a part of every prayer service, even on Shabbat and Festivals, when the intermediate benedictions recited on weekdays are replaced by special benedictions on the holiness of the day.

The benedictions of the *Shemoneh Esreh* follow a logical sequence, as indicated in the Talmud (*Megillah* 17b–18a), and embody certain fundamental principles of Judaism. The first three affirm the covenant between God and the patriarchs and the children of Israel, God’s omnipotence and the resurrection of the dead, and the sanctification of His name. The thirteen intermediate benedictions request provision for the spiritual and material needs of the individual and the needs of the community, and invoke divine favor for the salvation and redemption of the Jewish people. The last three benedictions consist of prayers for the restoration of the divine service in the Temple, thanksgiving for God’s mercies, and a final prayer for peace.

Kaddish: Sanctification of God’s Name

The *Kaddish* is the universally known and revered prayer of sanctification of the name of God. It takes several forms: *Kaddish Shalem* (or *Kaddish Titkabel*), the complete *Kaddish*, recited at the end of the service; *Chatzi Kaddish*, the *half-Kaddish*, recited between sections of the service; *Kaddish DeRabbanan*, the Rabbis’ *Kaddish*, recited after study of a selection from the Talmud; *Kaddish Yatom*, the mourner’s *Kaddish*, recited at the conclusion of the service and after saying the psalm of the day; *Kaddish HaGadol*, a special, longer form of the mourner’s *Kaddish*, recited after the burial.

The essence of the *Kaddish* is its glorification of God in the response, *יְהִי שְׁמִיהָ רַבָּא מְבָרַךְ לְעֵלָם וּלְעֵלָמִי עַלְמֵיָא*, “May His great name be blessed forever and to all eternity.” The Talmud indicates the importance of this doxology in recounting the story of the encounter of Rabbi Yosi and the prophet Elijah at the entrance to one of the ruins of Jerusalem. “What did you hear in the ruin?” the prophet asked. “I heard a voice,” the Rabbi answered, “crying mournfully like a dove: ‘Woe unto My children for whose sins I destroyed My House and burned My Temple, and exiled them among the nations.’” Whereupon Elijah said, “Not only at this time, but three times daily does the voice repeat this lament. Moreover, whenever Jews enter their synagogues and their houses of learning and respond, ‘May His great name be blessed,’ the Holy One, blessed be He, nods His head and says, ‘Happy is the King who is thus praised in His house’ “ (*Berachot* 3a).

The origin of the *Kaddish* is unknown, but it is believed to be of a very early period. Equally obscure is its origin as a mourner's prayer, which the mourner recites for eleven months after the death of a parent, and on the anniversary of the death, the *Yahrzeit*. According to Jewish tradition, the soul of the deceased is redeemed when his children recite the *Kaddish* and publicly sanctify God's name. This is alluded to in the remarkable Aggadah, variously recounted in rabbinical literature, concerning Rabbi Akiva, who encountered a sinful, forlorn soul, condemned to wander the face of the earth. When Rabbi Akiva inquired whether there was any way of rescuing him, he answered that he could be redeemed if his son would say the *Kaddish* and glorify God's name. Rabbi Akiva went in search of the boy, and when he finally found him, he taught him the prayers. He then sent him before the congregation to say the *Kaddish*, whereupon the father appeared to Rabbi Akiva in a dream and said, "You have rescued me from Gehinnom; may your soul have peace in Gan Eden."

The *Kaddish* is not to be viewed merely as a prayer for the dead. Indeed, it contains no reference to the dead. The true meaning of the prayer is, rather, in the proclamation of faith, linking the living with the departed in a continuing commitment to sanctify God's name.

Although saying *Kaddish* is of great benefit for the deceased, it is more essential that children bring merit to their departed parents by observing the *mitzvot* and by walking in the path of righteousness. Children are obligated to provide for and honor parents in their lifetime, and to honor them even more after their deaths. The Zohar states, "It is written, 'Honor thy father.' If a son walks in a crooked path, he dishonors his father. But when the son walks in a righteous path and his deeds are upright, he honors his father in this world in the eyes of his fellow men, and he honors him in the other world before the Holy One, blessed be He" (*Zohar, Parashat Bechukotai; Kitzur Shulchan Aruch* 26:22). A man should, therefore, charge his children to do righteous deeds and to observe God's commandments after he is gone. Reciting the *Kaddish* will then be deemed an act of reverence toward parents, when it is in keeping with a righteous and God-fearing life. The significance of the *Kaddish*, thus, lies in hallowing God's name in life as it is hallowed in prayer.

Devotional Prayer in Hebrew

Prayer requires concentration of mind and heart. The Talmud states, “He who prays must direct his heart toward heaven” (*Berachot* 31a). Indeed, this is implied in the designation of prayer by the Sages as “service of the heart.” If prayer is to be a service of the heart, it must be accompanied by true, inner devotion, which the Rabbis call *kavanah*. This entails freeing oneself of extraneous thoughts, and realizing that one is standing before the Divine Presence (Rambam, *Hilchot Tefillah* 4:16). Moreover, when uttering the name of God, one should think of His sovereignty and dominion over all (*Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayyim*, chap. 5). Particular concentration and devotion are required in reciting the first verse of the *Shema* and the first benediction of the *Shemoneh Esreh* (Rambam, *Hilchot Keriat Shema* 2:1, *Hilchot Tefillah* 10:1). However, in all the prayers the words should not be spoken in a mechanical way, but thoughtfully and with due attention to their meaning, so that one’s prayer may be a moving, spiritual experience (*Shulchan Aruch*, loc. cit.; Halevi, *Kuzari* III, 5; Bachya, *Duties of the Heart* VIII, 3; Rambam, *Guide of the Perplexed* III, 51).

Prayer is in Hebrew, Israel’s historic and sacred language. While the law allows for prayer in another language, under certain circumstances, tradition prescribes that Hebrew be preserved as the language of prayer (*Mishnah Berurah* 101:4, note 13; *Beur Halachah*, *ibid.*). The Hebrew prayers are a rich and beautiful tapestry woven of phrases from the Holy Scriptures, inherently sacred, and passages composed by prophets and by men who were divinely inspired. Apart from this innate element of *kedushah*, the Hebrew prayers provide a continuity with Israel’s glorious past and constitute, as well in the present, a bond of unity with Jews the world over.

The Synagogue and Congregational Prayer

While prayer is a deeply personal religious experience, nonetheless one does not pray by himself, or for himself alone. Indeed, the plural form is characteristic of most of our prayers, because true prayer arises from a feeling of fellowship, and of human sympathy and solidarity. The Jew does not stand before God alone, but as a member of the covenanted community of Israel. Even in prayer the Jew is bound up with

the Jewish people, sharing its past history, its fate in the present, and its future destiny.

In Judaism prayer presumes a sense of community, because the individual fulfills his duties, and sanctifies God, as a part of the community of Israel. The Bible states, “I will be hallowed among the children of Israel” (*Vayikra* 22:32). The Rabbis infer from this that any sanctification, and summons to sanctify God, requires an assembly of ten, which represents the community of Israel (*Berachot* 21b). Hence, such prayers as *Kaddish*, *Barechu*, and *Kedushah* are recited only when there is a *minyan* of worshipers present.

“When ten people pray together,” says the Talmud, “the *Shechinah* rests among them” (*Berachot* 6a). Judaism, therefore, attaches great importance to public worship (*tefillah betzibur*). Not only is there greater assurance of genuine devotion, but the prayers of the individual are enhanced when they are joined with the prayers of others in a communal expression of divine worship and supplication. The Sages derive this from the verse, “But as for me, I direct my prayer unto You, O Lord, in a time of favor” (*Tehillim* 69:14), which they expound as follows: “When is it a time of favor? In the time that the congregation is in worship” (*Berachot* 8a).

Congregational prayer and the institution of the synagogue are the great, historical contributions of Judaism in the area of divine worship. Through the ages they have served to maintain the religious consciousness and the unity of the Jewish community. Prayer with a congregation is obligatory, according to *Halachah* (*Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayyim* 90:16). Indeed, a Jewish community may impose sanctions compelling the members of the community to build a synagogue where it is needed, and to join the congregation in prayer, when it is necessary in order to maintain daily services (*Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayyim* 55:22, 150:1). Rambam summarizes the obligations of a Jew in this matter in the following words: “Congregational prayer is always heard by the Lord. Even if there are sinners among them, the Holy One, blessed be He, does not reject the prayer of a multitude. Hence, a person should associate himself with the congregation, and never recite his prayers in private when he is able to pray with the congregation. One should always attend the synagogue morning and