

Avraham Weiss

# Holistic Prayer

A Guide to Jewish Spirituality

Maggid Books

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# Part One

## *Goals of Prayer*

*In the book of Psalms, King David declares: אֶחַת שְׁאַלְתִּי מֵאֵת ה', אוֹתָהּ אֲבַקֵּשׁ – “I ask for one thing of the Lord, this do I request.” David could have asked God for help in overcoming his numerous challenges: conflict with his predecessor, King Saul; confronting the Philistines; the anguish of having lost an infant child; the pain of his son Absalom’s rebellion. Yet, with all these challenges, what David asks for is שְׁבִתִּי שָׁבָתִי – “to live in the House of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord, to frequent His Temple” (Ps. 27:4). The one thing David asks is that he be able to feel the presence of God.*

*This yearning constitutes the very essence of prayer.*

## Chapter One

# Responsibility

Two friends were discussing some of the more difficult issues of life. One said, “Sometimes I would like to ask God why He allows poverty, famine, and injustice, when He could do something about it.” The other replied, “Well, why don’t you ask Him?” The response came quickly: “Because I am afraid that God might ask me the same question.”<sup>1</sup>



### GOD’S IMAGE – TZELEM E-LOHIM

Citing the biblical phrase **וְלָעֲבֹדוֹ כְּכֹל לְבַבְכֶם** – “and to serve Him with all your heart” (Deut. 11:13), the Talmud asks and then answers its own question:

**אִיזוֹ הִיא עֲבוּדָה שֶׁבִּלְבָב? זוֹ תְּפִלָּה.**

What is the service of the heart? This is prayer.<sup>2</sup>

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1. The origin of this anecdote is unclear.
  2. Ta’anit 2a. See also *Sifrei, Devarim* 41, s.v. *ule’avdo*.

Basing himself on this talmudic statement, Maimonides elaborates:

מִצְוֹת עֲשֵׂה לְהִתְפַּלֵּל בְּכָל יוֹם, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: "וַיַּעֲבֹדְתֶם אֶת ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם." מִפִּי  
הַשְּׁמוּעָה לְמַדּוֹ שֶׁעֲבוּדָה זֶה הִיא תְּפִלָּה. וְנֶאֱמַר: "וַיִּלְעָבְדוּ בְּכָל לִבְבָבְכֶם,"  
אָמְרוּ חֻקִּים: "אֵי זֶה הִיא עֲבוּדָה שְׁבִלִיב? זֶה תְּפִלָּה."

It is an affirmative commandment to pray every day, as it says, "and you shall serve the Lord your God" [Ex. 23:25]. From tradition, we have learned that "service" is prayer, as it says, "and to serve Him (*ule'ovdo*) with all your heart" [Deut. 11:13]. The sages commented, "What is the service of the heart? This is prayer."<sup>3</sup>

Here, Maimonides reaffirms the Talmud's assertion that prayer is fundamentally a function of *avodat Hashem*, wherein the limited and finite person serves God – the unlimited and infinite Source of all creation. How is this achieved?

In Genesis, the Torah records that God created the human being in His image (*tzelem E-lohim*): בְּצַלְמֵם בְּצַלְמוֹ, בְּצֵלֶם וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הָאָדָם בְּצַלְמוֹ – "And God created Adam in His image, in the image of God He created him, male and female He created them" (Gen. 1:27). This means that when we look at each other, what we see is the surface of a human being. But if we look deeply into each other, we should see a little bit of God – *helek E-loa'h mima'al* – "a portion of God from above" (Job 31:2).

For Ben Azai in the Jerusalem Talmud, this is the most important principle in the Torah:

וְאֵהָבֶת לְרֵעֶךָ כְּמוֹךָ ר' עֲקִיבָא אָמַר זֶהוּ כָּלֵל גְּדוּל בְּתוֹרָה. בֵּן עֲזַאי אָמַר  
זֶהוּ כִּפּוּר תּוֹלָדֹת אָדָם זֶה כָּלֵל גְּדוּל מְזֵה.

"Love your fellow as yourself" [Lev. 19:18] – R. Akiva says this is

3. Maimonides, *Code*, Laws of Prayer 1:1. *Kesef Mishneh* ad loc., s.v. *mitzvat aseh lehitpallel*, asks why Maimonides quotes "and you shall serve the Lord your God" (Ex. 23:25) as the source of the biblical obligation to pray, and not "and [you shall] serve Him with all your heart" (Deut. 11:13). The *Kesef Mishneh* suggests that the verse from Deuteronomy may be understood as offering advice rather than mandating a requirement, or that it may refer to the "service" of learning Torah as well as the "service" of prayer.

the great principle of the Torah. Ben Azai says, “This is the record of the descendants of Adam” [Gen. 5:1] is a greater principle.<sup>4</sup>

The verse from Genesis quoted by Ben Azai goes on to mention that the human being was created in the likeness of God. As the Torah states, וַיֵּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֱדָם בְּיָוֶם בְּרָא אֱלֹהִים אָדָם בְּדְמוּת אֱלֹהִים עָשָׂה אֹתוֹ – “This is the record of the descendants of Adam, on the day God created the human being; He made him in the likeness of God” (Gen. 5:1).

We must remember that it was not Abraham, the first Jew, who was created in the image of God, but Adam, the first human being, from whom all peoples are descended. Bearing in mind that all human beings are endowed with a piece of the Divine, it follows that all human beings are of equal value. Just as God is of endless value, every human being is of endless value. Just as God is unique, every human being is unique. No two people have the same fingerprint, the same consciousness, or the same soul.

The Mishna in Sanhedrin asks why the world began with one person. Why did it begin with Adam?<sup>5</sup> The Mishna gives us three reasons:

לְפִיכֵךְ נִבְרָא אָדָם יְחִידִי לְלַמְדֵךְ שְׁלוֹם הַבְּרִיּוֹת שֶׁלֹּא יֵאמַר אָדָם לַחֲבִירוֹ  
אָבָא גְדוֹל מֵאֲבִיךָ....  
וְשֶׁכֵּן הִמְאִיד נֶפֶשׁ אַחַת מֵעֵלָה עָלָיו הַכְּתוּב כְּאִילוֹ אֵיבַד עוֹלָם  
מְלֵא וְכֵן הִמְקִיִּים נֶפֶשׁ אַחַת מֵעֵלָה עָלָיו הַכְּתוּב כְּאִילוֹ קִיִּים עוֹלָם מְלֵא....  
וְלִהְיִיד גְּדוּלָתוֹ שֶׁל הַקְּדוּשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא שֶׁאָדָם טוֹבֵעַ בָּמָה מִטְּבָעוֹת  
בְּחֹתָם אֶחָד וְכוּלֵן דּוֹמִין יְהִי לְזֶה וּמְלֵךְ מַלְכֵי הַמַּלְכִּים הַקְּדוּשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא  
טָבֵעַ בָּל אָדָם בְּחֹתָמוֹ שֶׁל אָדָם הָרֵאשׁוֹן וְאִין אֶחָד מִהֶן דּוֹמָה לַחֲבִירוֹ  
לְפִיכֵךְ כָּל אֶחָד וְאֶחָד חַיִּיב לֹמַר בְּשִׁבְלֵי נִבְרָא הָעוֹלָם.

Therefore, Adam was created as a single entity, to create peace amongst humanity, lest one say, “My ancestor is greater than yours.”...

4. Jerusalem Talmud, Nedarim 9:4.

5. The Talmud suggests that Adam was born male and female, with one side being male and the other female. The rib story, according to this opinion, is really the bifurcation of Adam into two distinct people – one male, the other female. See Ketubbot 8a.

And to demonstrate that if one destroys a single soul, it is as though he has destroyed the entire world. And if one saves a single soul, it is as if he has saved the entire world...<sup>6</sup>

And to show the greatness of God. For a human being imprints many coins with one mold, and all the coins look the same, while the Ruler of rulers, the Holy One, Blessed Be He, created all of humanity from the mold of Adam, and not one is similar to the other. Therefore, everyone is obligated to say, “The world was created for me.”<sup>7</sup>

The world began with Adam to teach us three consequences of the reality of *tzelem E-lohim*. First, because we all come from the same source, we are equal in value. Second, because Adam was of infinite worth (as the only human being, the future of the world depended on him), every human being is of infinite worth. Saving one person, says the Mishna, is tantamount to saving the world; destroying a person means destroying the world. Finally, just as Adam was unique (he was then the only living person), all human beings – Adam’s descendants – are unique. In a world of imitation, the Torah emphasizes individual creativity. It teaches us to do our best to tap into our divine spark and find our unique voice.

It must be remembered, however, that *tzelem E-lohim* is potential. When God created Adam, He breathed His spirit into him – **וַיִּפַּח בְּאַפָּיו נְשֵׁמַת חַיִּים** (Gen. 2:7). We, Adam’s descendants, have the choice to use or abuse our *tzelem E-lohim*. Like God, the human being has freedom of choice.

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6. Some texts in the Mishna read, “a single soul of Israel.” Perhaps this is so because the Mishna deals with Jewish jurisprudence, specifically with Jewish capital punishment. The principle, however, that one who saves a single person has saved the world applies to all human beings.

The flow of the Mishna underscores the text as quoted here, as it deals with why the world started with Adam, who represents the universal human being. See Mishna Sanhedrin 4:5, *Shinuyei Nusḥaot*, s.v. *aḥat miYisrael*.

See also Ephraim E. Urbach, “*Kol HaMekayyeim Nefesh Aḥat ...*’: Development of the Version, Vicissitudes of Censorship, and Business Manipulations of Printers” [Hebrew], *Tarbiz* 40 (1971), pp. 268–284.

7. Sanhedrin 4:5. I’ve quoted the first two reasons of the Mishna in reverse order to parallel our explanation of the fundamental values derived from *tzelem E-lohim*.



Not coincidentally, after every creation, the Torah records that **וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים כִּי טוֹב** – “And God saw that it was good” (Gen. 1:10, 12, 18, 21, 25). After the creation of the human being, however, this declaration no longer appears. This is because whether a human being is good or not depends on his or her deeds. *Ki tov* – “it was good” – is a more appropriate refrain after the human being has lived a wholesome life, after having made the proper choices.<sup>8</sup> But no matter what we do or how we act, there is a profound Jewish belief that all human beings have the power to return to their inner true self, to the part of God in all of us.

Throughout history, there have been those who have defiled the values of *tzelem E-lohim*. But Judaism insists that goodness will prevail. Rabbi Irving (Yitz) Greenberg elegantly makes this point:

The central paradigm of Jewish religion is redemption. According to the Bible, the human being is created in the image of God. According to the rabbis, this means that every single person is unique and equal, endowed with the dignity of infinite value. But in history most humans have been degraded or denied their due. Judaism affirms that this condition should never be accepted; it must and will be overcome.<sup>9</sup>

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8. Nehama Leibowitz, *New Studies in Bereshit (Genesis)* (Jerusalem: Hemed Press, 1995), p. 14. She writes: “The phrase ‘it was good’ was omitted from man’s creation, because his good was dependent on his own free choice.”

See Rashi, Genesis 1:26, s.v. *veyirdu vidgat hayam*. Rashi notes that *veyirdu* (וַיֵּרְדוּ) may imply dominion as well as descending – this because *veyirdu* comes from one of two roots: **ר.ד.ה** (R-D-H) or **י.ר.ד** (Y-R-D). It all depends on human beings making the right choices. In Rashi’s words:

In the word *veyirdu* there is the language of dominating and descending. If he [man] is worthy he dominates over the beasts and cattle; if he is not worthy he will sink lower than them, and the beast will rule over him.

Translation from Rev. M. Rosenbaum and Dr. A. M. Silbermann, *Pentateuch with Targum Onkelos, Haphtaroth and Rashi’s Commentary* (New York: Hebrew Publishing Company, 1934).

9. Rabbi Irving Greenberg, *The Jewish Way* (New York: Summit Books, 1988), p. 18. While my thoughts on *tzelem E-lohim* have developed over the years, at their core they were inspired by Rabbi Greenberg. I am deeply grateful to him.

The belief that the inner godliness of the human being can always be tapped, as we shall see, is a primary function of prayer in the Jewish tradition.

### REACHING IN

The idea of *tzelem E-lohim* is crucial to understanding the Jewish approach to *teshuva* (repentance) and prayer. For Rabbi Abraham Isaac HaKohen Kook, *teshuva* does not deal with a specific wrong. Rather, it has to do with a general feeling of despondency and estrangement from God. *Teshuva* means a return to the self, to the godliness inherent in every human being. Of course, we must assume responsibility for our actions, but on a spiritual level, the human being possesses inner purity. *Teshuva*, whose root is **ש.ו.ב** (SH-U-V), to return, means to remember that *tzelem E-lohim* makes us who we are.

Rabbi Kook describes *teshuva* this way:

אֵין חֲטָא אוֹ חֲטָאִים שֶׁל עֶבֶר עוֹלִים עַל לְבוֹ, אֲבָל בְּכֹלל הוּא מְרַגֵּשׁ בְּקִרְבוֹ  
שֶׁהוּא מְדַכָּא מְאֹד, שֶׁהוּא מְלֵא עֵוֹן, שֶׁאֵין אוֹר ה' מְאִיר עָלָיו, אֵין רוּחַ נְדִיבָה  
בְּקִרְבוֹ, לְבוֹ אֵטוּם....

הַתְּשׁוּבָה הֶרְאֵתָה, שֶׁהִיא מְאִירָה אֶת הַמּוֹחַשׁוּכִים מִיָּד, הִיא שׁוֹשֶׁב  
הָאָדָם אֶל עֲצָמוֹ, אֶל שְׂרֵשׁ נִשְׁמָתוֹ, וּמִיָּד יָשׁוּב אֶל הָאֱלֹהִים.

A person does not conjure up the memory of a past sin or sins, but in a general way he feels terribly depressed. He feels himself pervaded by sin; that the divine light does not shine on him; that there is nothing noble in him; that his heart is unfeeling....<sup>10</sup>

The primary role of penitence, which at once sheds light on the darkened zone, is for the person to return to himself, to the root of his soul and [from there] immediately return to God.<sup>11</sup>

10. Rabbi Abraham Isaac HaKohen Kook, *Orot HaTeshuva* (Jerusalem: Yeshivat Or Etzion, 1992), ch. 3.

11. *Ibid.*, ch. 15, p. 52.

Not coincidentally, the instrument used to rally us to repent is the shofar. The sound of the shofar comes from the inner breath; it is a reversal of the breath God breathed into Adam, וַיַּפֶּחַ בְּאַפֵּי נְשָׁמַת חַיִּים – “and He breathed into his nostrils the breath of life” (Gen. 2:7). The shofar sound releases the breath of God breathed into Adam, breathed into all of us. In the words of the *Sefat Emet*:

מִצְוַת שׁוֹפָר ... וְעַל יְדֵי תְּשׁוּבָה יִכּוּלֵּן לְעוֹרֵר הַקּוֹל הַפְּנִימִי שֶׁנִּמְצָא בַּנַּפְשׁוֹת  
בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל.

The mitzva of shofar [is the following]...through *teshuva* we can stir the inner voice found in the souls of the Jewish people.<sup>12</sup>

Our tradition maintains that anybody, no matter who he is or how far she has strayed, can always return to his or her true, incorruptible goodness. The Talmud tells the story of Elisha b. Abuya, a devout and gifted scholar who had gone astray. Elisha's student, Rabbi Meir, implored him to repent. Elisha, who had become known as *Aḥer*, which literally means “other” or “stranger,” responded, “I cannot repent, because I heard a *bat kol* (heavenly voice) exclaim, ‘Repent, wayward children, except for Aḥer.’”<sup>13</sup> Rabbi Ahron Soloveichik explains that Elisha was called *Aḥer*, as he was a stranger to his true being. He did not repent because he was “laboring under the erroneous conviction that he was corrupt, basically evil. But this was not true. *Aḥer* had failed to understand when he heard the *bat kol* that its message was: *Aḥer* cannot repent, but Elisha b. Abuya can.”<sup>14</sup>

12. *Sefat Emet*, Rosh HaShana 5651, s.v. *Mitzvat shofar*.

13. The Talmud in *Hagiga* 15a records the story of Elisha b. Abuya:

Our rabbis taught: Once *Aḥer* was riding on a horse on Shabbat, and R. Meir was walking behind him to learn Torah at his mouth. Said [Aḥer] to him, “Meir, turn back, for I have already measured by the paces of my horse that thus far extends the Shabbat limit [two thousand cubits in all directions].” He replied, “You, too, go back [do *teshuva*].” [Aḥer] answered, “Have I not already told you that I have already heard from behind the veil: ‘Return, you backsliding children’ [Jer. 3:22] – except *Aḥer* (ח׳יץ מֵאַחֵר – שׁוֹבֵי בָּנִים שׁוֹבְבִים – ח׳יץ מֵאַחֵר)?”

14. Rabbi Ahron Soloveichik, “*Jew and Jew, Jew and Non-Jew*,” in Soloveichik, *Logic of the Heart, Logic of the Mind: Wisdom and Reflections on Topics of Our Times* (Jerusalem:

Rabbi Soloveichik adds that every time the Talmud records an individual who speaks of doing something wrong, the third person singular is used – *hahu gavra*, “that person” – as if the individual had been overtaken by an outer evil force. When the individual recalls having acted righteously, however, the first person singular – *ana* – is used, as righteousness is one’s true essence.

Once a person returns to his or her inner godliness, Rabbi Kook explains, **וּמִיָּד יָשׁוּב אֶל הָאֱלֹהִים** – “one can immediately return to God.”<sup>15</sup> The primary role of penitence is return to oneself, to the root of one’s soul. It is only from that place that the individual can then return to God.

A beautiful legend reinforces this idea:<sup>16</sup>

A short apple tree grew beside a tall cedar. Every night, the apple tree would look up and sigh, believing that the stars in the sky were hanging from the branches of its tall friend. The little apple tree would lift its branches heavenward and plead, “But where are my stars?”

As time passed, the apple tree grew. Its branches produced leaves, passersby enjoyed its shade, and its apples were delectable. But at night, when it looked to the skies, it still felt discontented, inadequate; other trees had stars, but it did not.

It happened once that a strong wind blew, hurtling apples to the ground. They fell in such a way that they split horizontally instead of vertically (the way apples are normally cut). At the very center of each apple was the outline of a star. The apple tree had possessed stars all along; it just required a different approach to find them. The inner core had always contained the celestial.

If this is true for apples, it is all the more so for human beings, who are created in the image of God. Every person has an inner star, a

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Genesis Jerusalem Press, 1991), pp. 69–91.

See Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik’s analysis of the Aher story in *Hamesh Derashot* (Jerusalem: Mekhon Tal Orot, 5734), pp. 124–128, and the English translation in Soloveitchik, *The Rav Speaks* (Jerusalem: Tal Orot Institute, 5743), pp. 193–199.

15. Kook, *Orot HaTeshuva*, ch. 15, p. 52.

16. I do not know the author of this legend. I first heard it at a Marriage Encounter seminar that my wife, Toby, and I attended more than thirty years ago. It has been popularized by the gifted storyteller Peninnah Schram. I have reshaped it here in my own way.

*nitzotz* (inner spark). If we could only find the way to ignite the light, fanning its flames upward, we could reach higher and higher.

Thus, *teshuva* contains two steps: the move inward, the return to one's inner goodness and godliness, which then catapults him or her upward to God, to encounter Him. This idea is based on a passage from Deuteronomy:

וְהָיָה כִּי יָבֹאוּ עֲלֵיךָ כָּל הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה הַבְּרָכָה וְהַקְּלָלָה אֲשֶׁר נָתַתִּי לְפָנֶיךָ  
וְהִשְׁבַּת אֶל לְבָבְךָ... וְשָׁבַת עַד ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ וְשָׁמַעְתָּ בְּקוֹלִי כְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר אֲנֹכִי  
מְצַוֶּךָ הַיּוֹם אֶתָּה וּבְנֶיךָ בְּכֹל לְבָבְךָ וּבְכֹל נַפְשְׁךָ.

When all these things befall you – the blessing and the curse that I have set before you – and you take them to heart... And you will return to the Lord your God, and you and your children will heed His voice and all that I command you on this day, with all your heart and soul. (Deut. 30:1, 2)

Note that the first part of the sequence of *teshuva* describes how one returns inward to one's heart. Only then does the Torah speak of returning to God.

Prayer as a function of *ule'ovdo*, of serving God, operates in a similar fashion. The first prayer accepted by God was in the form of a sacrifice that Abel brought to Him.<sup>17</sup> One wonders why Abel's sacrifice, unlike Cain's, was accepted. The *Sefat Emet* suggests an answer based on an insightful reading of the text. After Cain brings his sacrifice, the Torah states, **וְהֵבֵל הֵבִיא גַם הוּא** – “And Abel also brought [an offering]” (Gen. 4:4). The *Sefat Emet* understands the text this way:

וְזֶהוּ שְׁפָתַיב הֵבִיא גַם הוּא. גַּם אֶת עֵצְמוֹ עִם הַקֶּרְבָּן. וְלָכֵן נִתְקַבַּל לְפָנֵי ה'  
יְתִפְרֶךָ.

Abel brought himself [his inner I] with the sacrifice, and therefore it was accepted before the Lord, Blessed Be He.<sup>18</sup>

17. While there are no sacrifices today, many insights concerning prayer can be learned from the sacrificial service.

18. *Sefat Emet*, Genesis, *Bereshit* 5635, s.v. *BeSefer Kol Simḥa*.

Cain's sacrifice was external; it had no inner depth, and was therefore rejected. Abel's sacrifice emanated from his inner purity and was therefore received.

From this perspective, prayer is counterintuitive. It begins not by reaching up, but by reaching in. If prayer is about transcendence, it is first and foremost about inner transcendence. Once the inner soul is revealed, we are in a better position to relate to the infinite God. This idea is expressed in the writing of Shem Tov Ibn Falaquera, who posits that by knowing one's true self, one can come to know God:

וְאָמְרוּ מִי שִׂידַע נַפְשׁוֹ יֵדַע בְּרָאוֹ, וְכֹל מִי שֶׁהוּא סָכַל בִּידְעֵת נַפְשׁוֹ כָּל שֶׁבֶן  
שֶׁהוּא סָכַל בִּידְעֵת בּוֹרְאוֹ. וְאִיךְ יֵאֱמָן בְּאָדָם שֶׁהוּא חָכֵם בְּזוּלָתוֹ וְהוּא  
סָכַל בְּנַפְשׁוֹ... וְעַל כֵּן אָמְרוּ כִּי יְדִיעַת הַנֶּפֶשׁ קוֹדֶמֶת לִידְעֵת הָאֱלֹהִים יִתְבָּרַךְ.

They said that whoever knows his soul knows his Creator, and whoever is ignorant of knowing his soul is ignorant of the knowledge of his Creator. How can one believe that a person is wise concerning something else when he is ignorant concerning himself? ... Therefore, they said that the knowledge of the soul is prior to the knowledge of God.<sup>19</sup>

Joseph Ibn Ṣaddiq echoes this idea:

וּמִיִּדְעֵתוֹ נַפְשׁוֹ יֵדַע עוֹלָם הָרוּחָנִי וְיִגִיעַ מִמֶּנָּה לִידְעֵת בּוֹרְאוֹ כְּמוֹ שֶׁכָּתוּב  
בְּאִיּוֹב "וּמִבְּשָׂרִי אֶחֱזֶה אֱלֹהִים."

By man knowing his own soul, he will know the spiritual world from which he can attain some knowledge of the Creator, as it is written, "From my flesh I shall perceive God" [Job 19:26].<sup>20</sup>

This, writes Rabbi Kook, is the gift of prayer:

19. Shem Tov Ibn Falaquera, introduction to *Sefer HaNefesh*, in Raphael Jospe, *Torah and Sophia: The Life and Thought of Shem Tov Ibn Falaquera* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1988), pp. 276, 321.

20. Joseph Ibn Ṣaddiq, *HaOlam HaKatan*, in Saul Horovitz, *The Microcosm of Joseph Ibn Ṣaddiq* (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 2003), p. 77.

הַתְּפִלָּה הַיָּא מְלֻמְטָה לְמַעְלָה. בֵּי צֶדֶד? מִתּוֹךְ אוֹתוֹ הַמַּעֲיָן הַמְּלֵא קְדוּשָׁה טְבִיעִית שְׁבֻלְבְּנוּ הָרִינוּ דוֹלִים, מוֹצִיאִים אֶת הַרְגֵּשׁוֹתָיו הָעֲדִינּוֹת מִן הַכַּח אֶל הַפְּעֵל....

וּכְשָׂאנוּ עוֹלִים, עוֹלִים עִמָּנוּ כָּל שְׂרָשֵׁי הַיּוֹתֵינוּ, כָּל עֲנֵפֵי נִשְׁמוֹתֵינוּ, כָּל קְוֵי הַחַיִּים הַשׁוֹפְעִים מִמְהוּתֵנוּ וְכָל מְקוֹרוֹת הַחַיִּים הַמְּפִכִים עָלֵינוּ, עַד הַבִּיאָם אוֹתָנוּ אֶל הַמְהוּתֵי הַפְּרֻטִית שְׁלֵנוּ. וְהַכֹּל מִתְבַּרֵךְ, הַכֹּל מִתְעַלֶּה, הַכֹּל מִתְקַדֵּשׁ וּמִתְרוֹמֵם, הַכֹּל שְׂמֵחַ שְׂמֵחַת יִשְׂרָאֵל, הַכֹּל עָלוּ עֲלֵי צִוֵּת קוֹדֵשׁ.

Prayer rises up from down below to high above. How does this come about? From that source in our hearts which is filled with natural holiness, we draw out, we transform our refined feelings from potentiality to actuality....

And as we elevate ourselves, all the very sources of our existence – all the ramifications of our soul, all the life that pours out from our inner selves, and all the life sources that gush over us – become elevated with us until they make us reach the level of our own true selves. All becomes blessed; all becomes elevated; all becomes holy and exalted – all rejoices with righteous joy, all exults in holy gladness.<sup>21</sup>

In kabbalistic thought, the goal of humankind is to achieve an all-encompassing sense of *tikkun*. According to Lurianic Kabbala, the world is in a state of *shevirat hakelim*, broken vessels. In this state of brokenness, the human being is under stress, often feeling disconnected from all that surrounds him or her. The purpose of Torah, according to this perspective, is *tikkun*, which literally means “fixing” but figuratively refers to “repairing” or “uniting” the world on all levels.<sup>22</sup> The concept of *tikkun* calls on us to unite with our planet in the spirit of ecological peace, to unite with each other in warm camaraderie, and to unite with God in absolute harmony. True *tikkun* occurs when the godly part inside of us

21. Rabbi Abraham Isaac HaKohen Kook, “Introduction to the Siddur,” in *Seder Tefilla im Peirush Olat Re’iya* (Jerusalem: Aguda LeHotza’at Sifrei HaRa’aya Kook, 5699 [1939]), p. 19. Translation from B. S. Jacobson, *Meditations on the Siddur* (Tel Aviv: Sinai, 1966), p. 27.

22. See Daniel C. Matt, *The Essential Kabbalah* (New York: HarperCollins, 1995); Matt, *Lev HaKabbala* (Jerusalem: Olam Katan, 2011).

## Part One: Goals Of Prayer

unites with the God above. When the soul is kindled, it begins to soar like a flame, leaping to connect to God. Without that rendezvous, the soul feels forlorn, like a lover bereft of his or her beloved. Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel poetically captures this encounter:

As a tree torn from the soil, as a river separated from its source, the human soul wanes when detached from what is greater than itself. Without the holy, the good turns chaotic; without the good, beauty becomes accidental. It is the pattern of the impeccable which makes the average possible. It is the attachment to what is spiritually superior: loyalty to a sacred person or idea, devotion to a noble friend or teacher, love for a people or for mankind, which holds our inner life together. But any ideal, human, social, or artistic, if it forms a roof over all of life, shuts us off from the light. Even the palm of one hand may bar the light of the entire sun. Indeed, we must be open to the remote in order to perceive the near. Unless we aspire to the utmost, we shrink to inferiority.

Prayer is our attachment to the utmost. Without God in sight, we are like the scattered rungs of a broken ladder. To pray is to become a ladder on which thoughts mount to God to join the movement toward Him, which surges unnoticed throughout the entire universe. We do not step out of the world when we pray; we merely see the world in a different setting. The self is not the hub, but the spoke of the revolving wheel. In prayer we shift the center of living from self-consciousness to self-surrender. God is the center toward which all forces tend. He is the source, and we are the flowing of His force, the ebb and flow of His tides.<sup>23</sup>

As the kindled soul soars to connect to God, God comes toward the human being. In the words of Rabbi Heschel, “Our seeking Him is not only man’s but His concern and must not be considered an exclusively human affair. His will is involved in our yearnings.”<sup>24</sup> For

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23. Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Man’s Quest for God* (New York: Scribner, 1954), pp. 6–7.

24. Abraham Joshua Heschel, *God in Search of Man* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1955), p. 136.



Rabbi Heschel, the human being's inner search for God is reciprocated: "God is in search of man."<sup>25</sup>

The prayer service is punctuated with examples of God reaching out to the human being. The most poignant example is, perhaps, found in the concluding prayer service of Yom Kippur, *Ne'ila*. There, one calls out, אֶתָּה נֹתֵן יָד לְפוֹשְׁעִים – "You, O Lord, reach out Your hand to transgressors." As Yom Kippur ends, there is concern that perhaps the prayers have not been heard. Precisely then, the petitioner cries out, "O God, please, please take an active step by reaching out to save us." One wonders who takes the first step – God or the human being. In the end, there may be a simultaneous yearning – the human being and God come closer and closer, never "touching," but in their approach toward one another, the encounter takes place.<sup>26</sup>

## REACHING OUT

Once kindled, the soul not only soars upward to connect with God, but outward to connect with other souls, other people – all created in God's image. Like lovers longing to embrace, sparks of the Divine seek to rendezvous. In this sense, prayer is not only vertical, but horizontal; it is an encounter not only with God, but with our fellow human being.

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25. Ibid.

26. This theme is repeated on Monday and Thursday mornings in the *Tahanun* prayer as we recite בְּיַמִּינְךָ פְּשׁוּטָה לְקַבֵּל שׁוֹבִים – "Your right hand is outstretched to receive those who return." See chapter 8 and the book's conclusion for further discussion of this mutual encounter.

See Pinchas H. Peli, *On Repentance: The Thought and Oral Discourses of Rabbi Joseph Dov Soloveitchik* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 1984), pp. 84–88.

See also *Sefat Emet*, Genesis, *Vayetzeh* 5634, s.v. *BeRashi vayifga*, which argues that as we yearn for God, God reaches for us. The author makes this point in his discussion of Jacob "encountering the place" (*vayifga bamakom*) as he flees from his parents' home (Gen. 28:11).

*Vayifga* is a term for prayer (Berakhot 26b). The Talmud points out that the Torah uses the word *vayifga* and not *vayitpallel* (and he prayed) to denote that "the place [referring to Mount Moriah] leapt toward him [Jacob]" (Hullin 91b).

In the words of the *Sefat Emet*, "Because our forefather Jacob greatly desired to come to Mount Moriah, although it was far away, Mount Moriah leapt to him."

Hence, when commencing prayer, many recite the formula **הָרִינִי מִקְבֵּל עַל עַצְמִי מִצֹּת עֵשָׂה שֶׁל וְאַהֲבַת לְרַעַךְ כְּמוֹךְ** – “Behold, I accept upon myself the commandment of ‘love your fellow as yourself’ [Lev. 19:18].” As the *Magen Avraham* codifies, “Before the morning service, one should accept the affirmative commandment of ‘love your fellow as yourself.’”<sup>27</sup>

A Hasid once asked his rebbe (teacher), “When standing before God in prayer, shouldn’t one open with the declaration ‘I love you, God’? Why begin with a formula that expresses our love for other human beings?”<sup>28</sup> The rebbe responded that the greatest expression of love children can show their parents is the expression of love for their siblings. Similarly, the rebbe explained, the greatest love we can express to God is our expression of love for each other.<sup>29</sup>

Not only does the prayer service begin with a call to love our fellow person, it ends in a similar vein. The conclusion of the *Amida* (Silent Meditation), the central part of the service, is a blessing for peace and loving-kindness:

שִׁים שְׁלוֹם טוֹבָה וּבְרָכָה  
חַן וְחֶסֶד וְרַחֲמִים עָלֵינוּ וְעַל כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל עַמְּךְ....  
בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה', הַמְבָרֵךְ אֶת עַמּוֹ יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּשָׁלוֹם.

Grant peace, goodness, and blessing,  
grace, loving-kindness, and compassion  
to us and all Israel, Your people....  
Blessed are You, Lord,  
who blesses His people Israel with peace.<sup>30</sup>

27. *Magen Avraham*, introductory comment on *Shulhan Arukh, Orah Hayyim* 46.

28. There are two major loves in the Torah: love of God, **וְאַהֲבַת אֵת ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ** (Deut. 6:5); and love of one's fellow, **וְאַהֲבַת לְרַעַךְ כְּמוֹךְ** (Lev. 19:18).

29. It has been noted that the verses “Love the Lord your God” (**וְאַהֲבַת אֵת ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ**) and “love your fellow as yourself” (**וְאַהֲבַת לְרַעַךְ כְּמוֹךְ**) share the same numerical value (907).

30. The paragraph is preceded by the Priestly Benediction, which ends with **יְשָׂא ה' פָּנָיו וְיִשָּׂא לְךָ שָׁלוֹם** – “May the Lord turn His face toward you and grant you peace.”

In between these bookends is a picturesque prayer about angels paying homage to God. But which angel is privileged to speak first? One would expect cut-throat competition for this honor. Yet the liturgy records that each angel steps back, declaring, you go first:

וְכֹלֵם מִקְבָּלִים עֲלֵיהֶם עוֹל מַלְכוּת שָׁמַיִם זֶה מִזֶּה  
 וְנֹתְנִים רְשׁוּת זֶה לְזֶה  
 לְהַקְדִּישׁ לְיוֹצֵרָם בְּנִתְת רֹחַ  
 בְּשִׁפָּה בְרוּרָה וּבִנְעִימָה  
 קְדֻשָּׁה בְּלֵם בְּאֶחָד  
 עוֹנִים וְאוֹמְרִים בְּיִרְאָה  
 קְדוֹשׁ, קְדוֹשׁ, קְדוֹשׁ ה' צְבָאוֹת  
 מְלֵא כָּל הָאָרֶץ כְּבוֹדוֹ.

All [the ministering angels] accept upon themselves,  
 one from another,  
 the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven,  
 granting permission to one another  
 to sanctify the One who formed them.  
 In serene spirit,  
 pure speech, and sweet melody,  
 all, as one, proclaim His holiness,  
 saying in awe:  
 “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts;  
 the whole earth is full of His glory” [Is. 6:3].

The formula of קְדוֹשׁ, קְדוֹשׁ, קְדוֹשׁ – “Holy, holy, holy” – is repeated during the repetition of the *Amida*. It is introduced with the words –

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In the afternoon and evening services, in some congregations, שִׁים שְׁלוֹם is replaced by שְׁלוֹם רַב עַל יִשְׂרָאֵל עַמְּךָ תְּשִׁים לְעוֹלָם – “Grant great peace to Your people Israel forever.”

*Kaddish* and Grace After Meals (*Birkat HaMazon*) end with a similar call for peace: עֲשֵׂה שְׁלוֹם בְּמִרוֹמָיו הוּא יַעֲשֶׂה שְׁלוֹם עֲלֵינוּ וְעַל כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמְרוּ אָמֵן – “May He who makes peace in His high places make peace for us and all Israel, and say: Amen.”

נְקַדְשׁ אֶת שְׁמֶךָ בְּעוֹלָם  
בְּשָׁם שְׁמֵי־שָׁמַיִם אוֹתוֹ בְּשָׁמַיִם מְרוֹם  
בְּכַתּוּב עַל יַד נְבִיאֶיךָ  
וְקָרָא זֶה אֶל זֶה וְאָמַר ...

We [human beings] will sanctify Your name on earth,  
as they sanctify it in the highest heavens,  
as it is written by Your prophet,  
“And they [the angels] call to one another, saying...” [Is. 6:3].<sup>31</sup>

Here we pray to acknowledge God as the angels do, without competitiveness, reaching out to each other in peaceful, loving coexistence. In a world too often consumed with causeless hatred, this posture of stepping back and making space for others is desperately needed.

Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach tells the story of Rabbi Levi Yitzhak of Berditchev and the Mitteler Rebbe (the second Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Dov Ber of Lubavitch) walking to a wedding. They found the doorway leading to the *huppa* (wedding canopy) too narrow. Each implored the other to go first, to no avail. Finally, the Berditchever, a rebbe of fire who was often most assertive, said, “No problem, we’ll break through the wall and have room to walk in together.” The Mitteler, a much gentler man, responded, “No, that’s unnecessary. What we’ll do is widen the doorway.”

Thus, prayer is not limited to encountering God; it also involves expressing love for our fellow person. And built into love is responsibility to care for the other. For this reason, virtually all our prayers are in the plural. When beseeching God, we speak not only for ourselves, but for the community. Indeed, during the service, there is a custom to give charity to the needy.

The *Keli Yakar*, written by Rabbi Ephraim Lunschitz, illustrates the intersection between laws governing our relationship with God and interpersonal ethics more broadly, by arguing that the Ten Commandments (or, which is probably a better translation, the Ten Declarations) can be divided into corresponding pairs, in which each com-

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31. This is from the Ashkenazic text of the *Kedusha*, recited during the repetition.

mandment related to God has a parallel commandment related to one's fellow human being.<sup>32</sup> For example, “You shall not murder” (לֹא תִרְצֹחַ – Ex. 20:13), the sixth of the Ten Commandments, is found aside the first, “I am the Lord your God” (אֲנֹכִי ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ – Ex. 20:2). For the author of the *Keli Yakar*, the two are interconnected: Killing another human being diminishes God, as the *tzelem E-lohim* within the human being has been destroyed. In his words:

“You shall not murder”: After completing the five declarations that concern the connection between God and the human being, the text lists another five corresponding declarations that concern interpersonal relationships, as mentioned in the *Mekhilta*. There, the *Mekhilta* explains the relationship between the parallel commandments. For example, the declaration “You shall not murder” parallels “I am [the Lord your God],” for if anyone sheds blood, it is as though one were diminishing the form and image of God.<sup>33</sup>

Prayer, then, begins by reaching in (to tap into our inner godliness). This involves contemplation of who we can become, and our responsibility to work on ourselves to become that person. Reaching up (toward God Himself) makes us realize we are connected and responsible to a Being far greater than we. Reaching out (to unite with our fellow person's *tzelem E-lohim*) establishes our relationship and our responsibility toward others. These three themes are fundamental motifs of prayer.

Assuming responsibility gives us a deeper insight into the phrase quoted by the Talmud and Maimonides as the source for prayer:

32. A good example of this phenomenon in Jewish ritual is Shabbat. On the surface, Shabbat deals exclusively with one's relationship with God. As God rested on the seventh day, we too step back, acknowledging God as the Source of all creation. In Exodus 23:12, however, the Torah states, שֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים תַּעֲשֶׂה מַעֲשֶׂיךָ וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי תִשָּׁבֵת, – “Six days you shall do your work, but on the seventh day you shall cease from labor, in order that your ox and your donkey may rest and that your bondman and the stranger may be refreshed.” Here, an added dimension of Shabbat is offered – one that is purely interpersonal.

33. *Keli Yakar*, Exodus 20:13. See *Mekhilta DeRabbi Yishmael, Yitro (BaHodesh)* 8.

לְעַבְדוֹ בְּכָל לִבְבְּכֶם – *le'ovdo bekhoh levavkhem* (Deut. 11:13).<sup>34</sup> *Le* is the prefix “to.” *Ovdo* is associated with *avoda*, work. And while *le'ovdo* is commonly viewed as a compound of *la'avod Oto*, “to serve Him,” it can also mean *la'avod Ito*, “to work with Him.”<sup>35</sup> This does not undercut the standard translation of לְעַבְדוֹ בְּכָל לִבְבְּכֶם – “to serve Him with all your heart.” Rather, it indicates that if prayer is deeply sincere, serving God can be transformed into a prayerful commitment to work with Him (*la'avod Oto* meshes with *la'avod Ito*). We do this in prayer by committing ourselves wholeheartedly (*bekhoh levavkhem*) to establishing a world that follows “the way of the Lord, by doing what is just and right” – וְשִׁמְרוּ יְדֵיכֶם לְעֲשׂוֹת צְדָקָה וּבְשֹׁפֵט דֶּרֶךְ ה' (Gen. 18:19).<sup>36</sup>

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch articulates this understanding of prayer based on a linguistic reading of the word “*tefilla*.” *Tefilla* is derived

34. Ta'anit 2a; Maimonides, *Code*, Laws of Prayer 1:1. See the beginning of this chapter.

35. See Rashi, Genesis 37:4, s.v. *dabbero*, who understands *dabbero* as a compound of *ledabber immo* – “to speak with Him.”

Note that *le'ovdo* is found in the flow of the second paragraph of *Shema* (“*Ve-Haya*”), which deals with listening to God’s commandments. Loving God is an emotion, while listening to Him is a commitment to action.

36. Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik understands Maimonidean prayer as reflecting the ever present feeling of human inadequacy and inner struggle. In his words:

[Maimonides regarded] daily life itself as being existentially in straits, inducing in the sensitive person feelings of despair, a brooding sense of life’s meaninglessness, absurdity, lack of fulfillment. It is a persistent *tzara*, which exists *bekhoh yom*, daily. The word *tzara* connotes more than external trouble; it suggests an emotional and intellectual condition in which man sees himself as hopelessly trapped in a vast, impersonal universe, desolate, without hope.

Rabbi Abraham R. Besdin, *Reflections of the Rav* (Jerusalem: World Zionist Organization, 1979), pp. 80–81.

For Rabbi Soloveitchik, life has no meaning if God is absent; one feels constant despair without God. Hence, one prays daily in constant search of the Lord, without whom life is impersonal, void, empty.

From Rabbi Soloveitchik’s perspective, the need to pray, according to Maimonides, comes from the petitioner as an expression of constant angst when God is not near. In our analysis, the desire to pray emanates from God. I may not feel like praying, yet there is a religious imperative to work with God daily.

Both approaches are necessary. Prayer from the petitioner expressing individual needs to God can be selfish. On the other hand, praying to God without listening to our soul minimizes our individual worth. The challenge is to find a balance of listening to ourselves and listening to God.

from the word *hitpallel*, whose root is **ל.ל.פ** (P-L-L) – to engage in a process of self-judgment. Commenting on this relationship between prayer and self-scrutiny, Rabbi Hirsch writes:

*Hitpallel*, from which “*tefilla*” is derived, originally meant to deliver an opinion about oneself, to judge oneself – or an inner attempt at so doing, such as the *hitpa’el* form of the Hebrew verb frequently denotes. In other words, an attempt to gain a true judgment of oneself. Thus it denotes to step out of active life in order to attempt to gain a true judgment about oneself, that is, about one’s ego, about one’s relationship to God and the world, and of God and the world to oneself. It strives to infuse mind and heart with the power of such judgment as will direct both anew to active life – purified, sublimated, strengthened. The procedure of arousing such self-judgment is called “*tefilla*”...

Accordingly, you should at times tear yourself loose from this existence which endangers your true life, and strive in *tefilla* to renew your strength for life and regain your right and your will for truth, righteousness and love, as well as the power and the courage for victorious battle.<sup>37</sup>

For Rabbi Hirsch, *tefilla* entails several steps. First, we must take a moment to separate from the humdrum of everyday existence and evaluate our standing in life. Second, we must evaluate our lives in all directions: inward, to examine our ego; upward, to contemplate our relationship to God; and outward, to appraise our relationship with the larger world. Finally, we are called upon to use these insights to spur us to improve our lives. This could include refining our thoughts, being more careful in ritual observance, improving our interpersonal relationships, and doing more to help redeem the Jewish people and the world.

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37. See Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, *Horeb* (New York: Soncino Press, 1962), pp. 472–473.

## BRIT AND PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

Redemption can be achieved only through a joint effort between God and humankind. In creating the world, God intentionally left it incomplete. One can give different rationales for this. Had God created a world of only good, there would be no good, as good is a relative term. Had God created a perfect world, we would be left with no challenges to overcome. Had God created a world where we could only do the right thing, we would be bereft of our freedom of choice, and hence, not be human.<sup>38</sup> Thus, the last word of the creation story in Genesis is *la'asot* – “to do” (Gen. 2:3). God is, in effect, telling us, “I have created the world imperfectly, and I leave it to you to finish that which I have started. In partnership we will redeem the world.”

How much the Jewish people and God each contribute to this partnership is part of the core idea of *brit* – the contractual arrangement between God and *Am Yisrael* (the Jewish nation).<sup>39</sup> The degree of input may depend on the historical maturity of the nation. God exercised unilateral authority over Jewish history when *Am Yisrael* was in its infancy. As we grow and develop, however, more is expected of us.

Here, covenant takes a counterintuitive turn. One would suspect that as *Am Yisrael* assumes more responsibility, God is felt to a lesser degree. The opposite is the case. When the Jewish people is first formed, God reveals Himself intensely at Sinai, soon afterward in the *Mishkan* (Tabernacle), and ultimately in the Temple. After the destruction of the Temple, the idea of *Mishkan* evolved into *Shekhina* (Indwelling); in fact, the noun *Shekhina* as a name for God never appears in the Bible. It's a postbiblical idea. The God who particularly appeared in the *Mishkan* manifests as *Shekhina* – the God who is omnipresent. As the Midrash

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38. Rabbi E. E. Dessler, *Mikhtav MeEllyahu* (Jerusalem: Yotzei LaOr al Yedei Hever Talmidav, 5723–5757 [1963–1997]), vol. 1, p. 36.

39. Sometimes *brit* is universal – a contract between God and the whole world. This surfaces in the aftermath of the Deluge in the time of Noah (Gen. 9:8–17). At other times, a *brit* is established with an individual, as it was with Abram, the first Jewish patriarch (Gen. 15:18). Still other times, a *brit* is established with the whole of the Jewish people, as occurred at Sinai (Ex. 24:7).



states, *אין מקום פְּנִי בְּלֵא שְׁכִינָה*, – “there is no place devoid of God.”<sup>40</sup> Thus, at this stage, God is not less present but more so. A parable sheds light on how the post-Temple era is in some ways more conducive to feeling the presence of God:

מִשָּׁל לַמֶּלֶךְ שֶׁבִּשְׂהוּא בְּבֵית מַלְכוּתוֹ קָשָׁה לָבוֹא אֵלָיו, מִה שָׂאִין בֶּן בִּשְׂהַמֶּלֶךְ  
 נֹסֵעַ בְּדֶרֶךְ אֹו יְכוּלִין כָּל בְּנֵי אָדָם אֶפְיָלוּ אָדָם פְּשׁוּט מְאֹד, לְדַבֵּר אֶל הַמֶּלֶךְ.  
 וְהֵינּוּ כִּי זְמַן זֶה... שְׁגָלְתָה הַשְּׁכִינָה מִמְּקוֹמָהּ הִרִי הוּא כְּמִי שֶׁהַמֶּלֶךְ מִלְכֵי  
 הַמְּלָכִים הַקְּבִי"ה הוּא בְּדֶרֶךְ וְלִכֵּן יֵת רִצּוֹן הִיא, וְכִי"א יְכוּל לְהִתְקַרֵּב וְלָבוֹא  
 אֶל הַמֶּלֶךְ.

A parable: When a king is in his palace, it is difficult to approach him. Once he leaves and mingles among his constituents, even the lowest of commoners can interact with him. Similarly in this time... when the *Shekhina* has been exiled from His Temple, it is as if the Ruler of rulers, the Holy One, Blessed Be He, roams among His subjects. This is a more favorable time for the average person to gain access to Him.<sup>41</sup>

Covenant works much like the parent-child relationship. As an infant, the human being is more helpless than any other species at birth. As a child matures, however, he or she becomes more accountable. This is the meaning of the *Barukh ShePetarani* blessing, recited by parents at their child's bar or bat mitzva. It's a statement of parental stepping back, empowering the young adolescent to assume more obligations. In time, the teenager grows to adulthood, taking on more and more commitments.

40. Exodus Rabba 2:5.

41. Rabbi Gedaliah Schorr, *Sefer Or Gedalyahu* (Brooklyn, NY, 5745–5746 [1985–1986]), vol. 3, *Matot–Masei*, s.v. *shabbatot*, p. 158. Rabbi Schorr attributes this parable to Reb Ber.

I have heard Rabbi Yitz Greenberg describe this phenomenon in a kind of populist way. In the Temple, God's "voltage" was high, as it was concentrated in one place (and more diffuse elsewhere), so one could never get close. In the post-Temple era, the voltage is lower, as God's presence is spread out more equally everywhere – making God more accessible, more present.

It can be suggested that if God – while less "visible" – is more present, then there is greater onus on humans to seek Him where they would least expect to find Him.

## Part One: Goals Of Prayer

In this phase, parents may be less vocal, less visible, but their influence can be greater – in this sense, they are more present.

Rabbi Ahron Soloveichik describes how *Am Yisrael* began to take on increased responsibility for its destiny, even as early as the Splitting of the Sea:

The word *hatzala* refers to an act of salvation during which the party being saved remains completely passive. *Yeshua*, however, implies a salvation in which the party being saved actively participates. In Egypt, the process through which God redeemed *Benei Yisrael* [the Children of Israel] involved *hatzala* – the people remained totally passive while God, so to speak, did all the work (see Ex. 6:6). At the Red Sea, though, God's salvation was a *yeshua* that required the nation's active participation (see Ex. 14:30).

Thus, the Midrash teaches that God did not split the sea until all the people entered the water.... Thus the *pasuk* [verse] says, ... “And *Benei Yisrael* went into the midst of the sea upon the dry ground” (Ex. 14:22).<sup>42</sup>

At the beginning of Jewish history, God acts unilaterally. As *Am Yisrael* matures, the onus shifts as the Jewish people assumes greater responsibility and acts to help itself. Perhaps for this reason, the Passover Haggada, which recounts the birth of the Jewish nation, contains only a single mention of Moses' name.<sup>43</sup> At the beginning of Jewish peoplehood, God and God alone plays the central role. In the words of the Haggada:

וַיִּצְיָאנוּ ה' מִמִּצְרַיִם: לֹא עַל יְדֵי מִלְאָךְ וְלֹא עַל יְדֵי שַׁרְף וְלֹא עַל יְדֵי שְׁלִיחַ  
אֱלֹהֵי הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא בְּכִבּוּדוֹ וּבְעֶצְמוֹ.

42. Rabbi Ahron Soloveichik, *The Warmth and the Light: Illuminating Approaches to the Weekly Torah Portion* (Jerusalem: Genesis Jerusalem Press, 1992), pp. 128, 129.

43. The name Moses is found in a relatively minor paragraph quoting R. Yose HaGelili's view that the Egyptians suffered fifty plagues at the Red Sea. Some versions omit Moses' name.

“The Lord brought us out of Egypt” [Deut. 26:8]: Not by an angel, not by a seraph, not by a messenger, but the Holy One, Blessed Be He, in His own glory, Himself.

Similarly, in the book of Esther, which records the Jewish people’s victory over Haman, God’s name is not mentioned at all. Having matured, the Jewish nation takes an active role in determining its fate.<sup>44</sup>

Passover, of course, commemorates the Exodus from Egypt, while Purim commemorates the victory over Haman. In general, the biblical holidays (Passover, Shavuot, and Sukkot) celebrate God’s intervention in history, while the rabbinical ones (Purim, Hanukka, and Yom HaAtzma’ut), established later, involve greater human initiative. In this sense, the holidays follow the pattern of the *brit*, which demands that over time we become more proactive. The *Sefat Emet* formulates this idea as follows:

הג' מועדות שנתן לנו הקב"ה הם תורה שבכתב שמפורשין בתורה והקב"ה נתן לנו זמני קודש אשר נתקדשו בעת הבריאה שהכל בתורה נברא. והם יעדות שהקב"ה בחר בישראל ויש לו התקרבות אליהם שהרי מסר לנו מועדות שלו וזהו שם מועד מלשון עדות.

והנובה ופורים הם מועדות שזכו להם בני ישראל במעשיהן נקרא תורה שבעל פה והם יעדות שהם בוחרים בהקב"ה ומיוחדים אליו ושמעשיהן מעוררין אותו יתברך שהרי חידשו במעשיהם זמנים מקודשים.

The three festivals God gave us are commanded expressly in the Written Torah. God gave us those holy times, sanctified since Creation, for all was created through the Torah. They bear witness that the blessed Holy One has chosen Israel and is close to them, giving them His holy testimony. The word *mo'ed* used for these festivals is related to *eidut* (testimony).

But Hanukka and Purim are special times that Israel merited by their own deeds. These are called Oral Torah; they are

44. Some suggest that the term *hamelekh* (the king) as found in the Megilla, which on the surface refers to King Ahasuerus, really points to God (*HaMelekh* – the King of kings), who plays a hidden role – working through people and the natural world – to save *Am Yisrael*. While externally God is less manifest, internally God is more present.

testimony that Israel chose the blessed Holy One. Israel are joined to God and their deeds arouse God, for here they are capable of creating new sacred times by their deeds.<sup>45</sup>

#### EXAMPLES FROM THE PRAYER SERVICE

The prayer service is replete with instances when we recall our responsibility to ourselves, the Jewish people, and the world at large.<sup>46</sup> At the outset of the morning service, we list our interpersonal obligations in the text *Eilu Devarim*. It reads:

אֵלֹהֵי דְבָרִים שְׂאֲדָם אוֹכֵל פְּרוֹתֵיהֶם בְּעוֹלָם הַזֶּה  
וְהִקְרוֹן קִימַת לוֹ לְעוֹלָם הַבָּא  
וְאֵלֹהֵי הַזֶּן  
כְּבוֹד אָב וְאָם, וְגַמְלֵיּוֹת חֲסָדִים  
וְהַשְׁפָּמַת בֵּית הַמְדַרְשׁ שְׁחָרִית וְעֶרְבִית  
וְהַכְנָסַת אוֹרְחִים, וּבִקּוּר חוֹלִים  
וְהַכְנָסַת בְּלָהּ, וְלוֹיֹת הַמַּת  
וְעֵינֵי תַפְלָה  
וְהַבְּאֵת שְׁלוֹם בֵּין אָדָם לְחֵבְרוֹ  
וְתַלְמוּד תּוֹרָה כְּנֶגֶד כָּלֶם.

45. See *Sefat Emet*, Hanukka 5636, s.v. *Adoni mori*; translation from Professor Arthur Green, *The Language of Truth: The Torah Commentary of the Sefat Emet* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1998). See also *Sefat Emet*, Hanukka 5641, s.v. *Hanukka u'Furim*. There, this commentary links Shavuot and Purim. On Shavuot, God revealed the Torah; on Purim the Torah was reaccepted (see Shabbat 88a). The *Sefat Emet* goes on to connect Sukkot and Hanukka. Both are eight days; both focus on *hiddur mitzva*, beautifying the mitzva (see Shabbat 21b and *Sefat Emet*, Hanukka 5640, s.v. *Amar avi zekeni*). The *Sefat Emet* then suggests that Passover, the holiday of redemption, will one day have its counterpart. In the author's words, "And we hope that from Passover [a rabbinic holiday] will emerge." Religious Zionists read this point as the *Sefat Emet's* belief that one day a holiday celebrating the establishment of Israel will be observed.

46. The great basketball player Bill Walton quotes his coach, John Wooden, as having said, "There is no way you can have a perfect day unless you do something to help someone." USA Today, November 4, 2010, p. 36.

These are the things whose fruits we eat in this world  
 but whose full reward awaits us in the World to Come:  
 honoring parents; acts of kindness;  
 arriving early at the house of study morning and evening;  
 hospitality to strangers; visiting the sick; helping the needy bride;  
 attending to the dead; devotion in prayer; and bringing peace  
 between people – but the study of Torah is equal to them all.

Moreover, in the introductory psalms (*Pesukei DeZimra*) we say:

עֲשֵׂה מִשְׁפָּט לְעֹשׂוֹקִים, נָתַן לֶחֶם לְרַעֲבִים, ה' מְתִיר אֲסוּרִים;  
 ה' פּוֹקֵחַ עֲוֹרִים, ה' זוֹקֵף בְּפוֹפִים, ה' אוֹהֵב צְדִיקִים;  
 ה' שׁוֹמֵר אֶת גְּרָם, יְתוֹם וְאֶלְמָנָה יְעוּדָד, וְדֹרֵךְ רְשָׁעִים יַעֲוֶת:

He [the Lord] secures justice for the oppressed; He gives food  
 to the hungry; the Lord sets captives free.

The Lord gives sight to the blind; the Lord raises those bowed  
 down. The Lord loves the righteous.

The Lord protects the stranger; He gives courage to the orphan  
 and widow; He thwarts the way of the wicked. (Ps. 146:7–9)

The *Amida* is the classic prayer of standing humbly before God, con-  
 trite and subdued as we pour forth our hope for healing and redemp-  
 tion – and much more. It is also the time to ask ourselves whether we  
 are doing our part to realize these goals. Thus, the *Amida* is the classic  
 reverberating prayer.

A story is told of a hasidic rebbe before the establishment of the  
 State of Israel, who – contrary to the sentiments of his community –  
 was a religious Zionist, doing all he could to promote the Zionist cause  
 by encouraging Jews to go to *Eretz Yisrael*. Some of his disciples were  
 critical: “Doesn’t the *Amida* say that God and God alone will gather  
 in the exiles?” To make this point, they slowly read him parts of the  
 ingathering request: תִּקַּע בְּשׁוֹפָר גָּדוֹל לְחֵרוֹתֵנוּ... וְקַבְּצֵנוּ יַחַד מֵאַרְבַּע כְּנַפּוֹת  
 הָאָרֶץ – “Sound the great shofar for our liberty... and gather us together  
 from the four corners of the earth.”

## Part One: Goals Of Prayer

The rebbe thought for a moment and then replied, “In the *Amida* we seek health, we ask for healing: **וְרַפְּאוּנוּ ה' וְנִרְפָּא** – ‘Heal us, Lord, and we shall be healed.’” Looking at his critics, the rebbe went on, “Even as we ask for God’s help, do we totally rely upon Him? Clearly this blessing is not meant to prohibit our seeking out medical advice. Similarly, in the blessing of redemption, when we invoke God’s help to redeem Zion, we commit ourselves to actively take part in that process.” So too, in all the “request” blessings, as we call out to God for relief we challenge ourselves to assume responsibility to join in this effort.

The theme of responsibility is present throughout the prayer service, particularly toward the end, when we say the second paragraph of *Aleinu – Al Ken Nekaveh*. Note that the prayer is written in the future tense, expressing hope for a time to come:

עַל בֵּן נִקְוָה לְךָ ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ,  
לְרֵאוֹת מְהֵרָה בְּתַפְאֵרֶת עֵינֶיךָ...  
לְתַקֵּן עוֹלָם בְּמַלְכוּת שְׂדֵיךָ.  
וְכָל בְּנֵי בָשָׂר יִקְרְאוּ בְשִׁמְךָ...  
וְנֹאמַר,  
וְהָיָה ה' לְמֶלֶךְ עַל כָּל הָאָרֶץ  
בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא יִהְיֶה ה' אֶחָד  
וְשִׁמוֹ אֶחָד.

Therefore, we place our hope in You, Lord our God,  
that we may soon see the glory of Your power...  
To perfect the world under the reign of the Almighty,  
when all humanity will call on Your name...  
As it is said:  
“Then the Lord shall be King over all the earth;  
on that day the Lord shall be One  
and His name One” [Zech. 14:9].

In this paragraph, when we declare “On that day the Lord shall be One,” we are saying that at present, God’s rulership, God’s Oneness, has not yet been acknowledged by the larger world. Whether this dream will be

achieved is dependent upon people assuming responsibility “to perfect the world under the reign of the Almighty.”<sup>47</sup>

*Kaddish*, perhaps more than any other prayer, expresses the mission of Judaism to bring ethical monotheism into the world. It reads:

וְתִגְדַּל וְיִתְקַדַּשׁ שְׁמֵהּ רַבָּא  
 בְּעֵלְמָא דְּיָ בְּרָא כְּרַעוּתָהּ,  
 וְיִמְלִיךְ מַלְכוּתָהּ  
 בְּחַיֵּינוּ וּבְיוֹמֵינוּ  
 וּבְחַיֵּי דְּכָל בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל  
 בְּעֵגְלָא וּבְזִמְן קָרִיב, וְאָמְרוּ אָמֵן.

Magnified and sanctified may His great name be,  
 in the world He created by His will.  
 May He establish His kingdom  
 in your lifetime and in your days,  
 and in the lifetime of all the House of Israel  
 swiftly and soon – and say: Amen.<sup>48</sup>

יְהֵא שְׁמֵהּ רַבָּא מְבֹרָךְ לְעֵלְמָא וּלְעֵלְמֵי עֵלְמֵינָא

May His great name be blessed for ever and all time.<sup>49</sup>

47. See Rashi, Exodus 17:16, s.v. *ki yad*. Note also that *Al Ken Nekaveh* is preceded by the first paragraph of *Aleinu*, which is particularistic: *שְׁלֵא עָשָׂנוּ כְּגוֹי הָאֲרָצוֹת* – “Who has not made us like the nations of the lands.” The flow indicates that the goal of the Jewish particularistic mission is universal redemption.

48. The opening words of *Kaddish* are taken from God’s prophecy through Ezekiel, *וְהִתְגַּדַּלְתִּי וְהִתְקַדַּשְׁתִּי וְנֹדַעְתִּי לְעֵינֵי רַבִּים* – “Thus will I manifest My greatness and My holiness and make Myself known in the sight of many nations” (Ezek. 38:23). Ezekiel prophesied during the destruction of the First Temple. Although God’s presence was diminished, Ezekiel declares that one day God’s greatness and holiness will be fully manifest.

49. The central words of *Kaddish* are recorded in Berakhot 3a. There, the prophet Elijah, the harbinger of messianic redemption (Mal. 3:23, 24), is quoted as saying:

At the time that the people of Israel enter synagogues and houses of study and respond, “May His great name be blessed” (*יְהֵא שְׁמֵהּ הַגְּדוֹל מְבֹרָךְ*), the Holy One, Blessed Be He, shakes His head and says, “Blessed be the Ruler who is praised in His house in this way.”

יְתַבְרַךְ וְיִשְׁתַּבַּח וְיִתְפָּאֵר וְיִתְרוֹמַם וְיִתְנַשֵּׂא  
וְיִתְהַדָּר וְיִתְעַלֶּה וְיִתְהַלַּל  
שְׁמֵהּ דְקֻדְשָׁא בְרִיךְ הוּא  
לְעֵלָא מִן כָּל בְּרֻכְתָּא וְשִׁירָתָא, תְּשַׁבַּחְתָּא וְנַחֲמָתָא  
דְאִמְרִין בְּעֻלְמָא,  
וְאִמְרוּ אָמֵן.

Blessed and praised, glorified and exalted, raised  
and honored, uplifted and lauded be  
the name of the Holy One, Blessed Be He,  
beyond any blessing, song, praise, and consolation  
uttered in the world –  
and say: Amen.

In each paragraph of *Kaddish*, the word *Shmeh* (name) is prominently featured. *Shmeh* can homiletically be read as a compound of the words *Shem Hashem* – “the Name of the Lord,” the code term for bringing God and God’s system of ethics into the world.<sup>50</sup> The opening words of *Kaddish* – *Yitgadal veyitkadash Shmeh rabba* – can be understood, “May we do our share to magnify and sanctify God’s great name by bringing ethical monotheism into the world.” When the leader of the service recites *Kaddish* and the congregation responds, “Amen,” we declare our intention to partner with God to fulfill this mission. *Kaddish* concludes each section of the service as a refrain, reminding us over and over that

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Elijah makes this statement after the destruction of the Second Temple. At this time of estrangement, Israel calls out that one day God will rendezvous with His nation, and His name will return to its full greatness. The words *יְהֵא שְׁמֵהּ הַגְּדוֹל מְבוֹרָךְ* – “May His great name be blessed” became the centerpiece of the *Kaddish* prayer.

See *Arukh HaShulhan, Oraḥ Ḥayyim* 55:1, which quotes Elijah in *Berakhot* as saying, *יְהֵא שְׁמֵהּ רַבָּה מְבוֹרָךְ* – an alternate formulation of “May His great name be blessed.” See also *Tosafot, Berakhot* 3a, s.v. *ve’onin*. The words *יְהֵא שְׁמֵהּ רַבָּה מְבוֹרָךְ* first appear in the book of Daniel, where Daniel says, *יְהֵא שְׁמֵהּ דֵי אֱלֹהֵא מְבוֹרָךְ מִן עֵד עֻלְמָא* – “Let the name of God be blessed for ever and ever” (Dan. 2:20).

50. Literally, *Shmeh* means His Name. *Shem Hashem* echoes that historic moment when Abram and Sarai arrive in Canaan, build an altar, and “call out in the name of the Lord” – *וַיִּקְרָא שֵׁם בַּיֶּשֶׁת ה'* (Gen. 12:8).



prayer is about the assumption of this responsibility.<sup>51</sup> The words of the *Kaddish* are cast in the future tense, indicating that this responsibility continues into the future.<sup>52</sup>

While many people associate prayer with what God does for us, prayer is also a way to access our inherent goodness and increase our personal commitment to God, our people, and humankind. In this way, prayer is multidimensional. As much as we seek God in prayer, God, through prayer, seeks us, encouraging us to partner with Him in redeeming Israel and the world.

Thus, prayer includes aspects of commitment. This is “prayer as responsibility.”

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51. The Half Kaddish is recited after each sub-section. The Whole Kaddish is said after the completion of the entire service. It ends with a prayer for peace:

תִּתְקַבֵּל צְלוֹתָהוֹן וּבְעוֹתָהוֹן דְּכָל יִשְׂרָאֵל קִדְּם אַבּוּהוֹן דִּי בְּשָׁמַיָא. וְאָמְרוּ אָמֵן.  
 יְהֵא שְׁלָמָא רַבָּא מִן שְׁמַיָא וְחַיִּים, עָלֵינוּ וְעַל כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל, וְאָמְרוּ אָמֵן.  
 עֲשֵׂה שְׁלוֹם בְּמִרְמֵיּוּ הוּא יַעֲשֵׂה שְׁלוֹם עָלֵינוּ וְעַל כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמְרוּ אָמֵן.

May there be acceptance of the prayers and supplications of all Israel before their Father in heaven – and say: Amen.

May there be great peace from Heaven and life for us and all Israel – and say: Amen.

May He who makes peace in His high places make peace for us and all Israel – and say: Amen.

In this section, too, we allude to the name of God when saying, “May there be great peace from Heaven (*Shemaya*).” The word *Shemaya* (literally, “heaven,” the symbolic abode of God) sounds like *Shmeh* (שְׁמֵה). Ultimately, great peace comes when we integrate God into our lives.

52. In time, *Kaddish* was also said by mourners (*Kaddish Yatom*), perhaps as a means of declaring that their beloved helped make life more meaningful by bringing the principles of ethical monotheism into the world. The *Kaddish* is in the future tense, as the influence of the deceased is still felt, and mourners commit themselves to act on his or her teachings. Its text is the same as the Whole Kaddish without the paragraph of *תִּתְקַבֵּל צְלוֹתָהוֹן* – “May there be acceptance of the prayers.” For an analysis of the Rabbis’ Kaddish (*Kaddish DeRabbanan*), see chapter 9.