



ROSH HASHANA

'DIY' EXPLANATORY MACHZOR



To enter into a covenant... is to take a risk, an act of faith in an unknown, unknowable future.



RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל
SHEMA YISRAEL





WHAT'S JUDAISM'S OBSESSION WITH THE SHEMA?



Rabbi Dovid Lichtig

The Shema defines our Jewish identity and purpose in this world. It reaffirms our knowledge that we are Jews and live our lives in accordance with that. It's essentially a contract between the Jewish people and God and encapsulates in one sentence the basis for our survival as a people and the reason we exist.



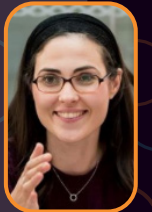
Rebbetzen Aimee Sandler

The Shema has always reminded us who we are and what we stand for; the oneness of God. This not only refers to there being one God as opposed to many, but implies the oneness of all existence lies in God Himself; and so by extension Godliness lives in each and every one of us too.



Rebbetzin Shalvie Friedman

The proclamation of God's Oneness can be perceived as somewhat archaic. After all, we don't live in a world of polytheism anymore. And so it seems absurd for the foundational motto of Judaism to be the eradication of a now-nonexistent belief system. But One is not just the opposite of many. One is also the inclusion of everything. When we say the Shema we are recognizing the interconnectivity of all that is created and how it can all be traced back to its Source- God.



Rabbi Eli Birnbaum

There is something profound and powerful about a having a national declaration. Perhaps even more elemental than the meaning and content of the text itself is the very fact that we join together as a community – as a nation – an affirm our commitment to a set of ideals, goals and aspirations. I find this incredibly 'anchoring' in an increasingly rootless world.



Shema Yisrael – To Hear God's Voice

The first verse is recited aloud with the right hand covering the eyes

Listen, Israel, Hashem is our God, Hashem is One

The second verse is recited in an undertone

Blessed is the Name of His honoured kingdom forever.

Love Hashem your God with all Your heart, with all your being, and with all that you have. These words that I command you today, place them on your heart. Repeat them to your children and discuss them, whether you are settled at home or travelling on a journey; when you lie down and when you wake up. Bind them as a sign on your arm and let them be an emblem between your eyes. Write them on your doorposts of your house and upon your gates.

If you would only listen to my commandments that I instruct you today, to love Hashem your God and to serve Him with all your heart and soul, then I will provide rain for your land at the proper time, the early and the late rains, so you can gather your grain, wine and oil. I will make the grass grow in your field for your cattle and you will eat and be satisfied. Beware, in case your heart is tempts you to stray, serving other gods, bowing to them, for then Hashem will direct anger towards you. He will close the heavens, leaving no rain. The earth will not provide wealth, and you will be rapidly exiled from the good land Hashem is giving you. Therefore set these words of Mine on your hearts and souls; bind them as a sign on your arm and let them be an emblem between your eyes. Teach them to your children to talk about all this whether sitting at home, or traveling on a journey; when you lie down and when you wake up. Write them as signs on the doorposts of your houses and upon your gates in the land that Hashem promised to give your ancestors – like the days of the heavens upon the earth.

The Shema represents an expression of the core beliefs of Judaism. The first paragraph focuses on God's Oneness. The second paragraph explores the concepts of cause and effect, action and consequence. The third paragraph speaks of God's providence and involvement as demonstrated through the Exodus from Egypt.



שמע ישראל

The first verse is recited aloud with the right hand covering the eyes

שמע ישראל יהוה אלהינו יהוה אחד:

The second verse is recited in an undertone

ברוך שם כבוד מלכותו לעולם ועד:

ואהבת את יהוה אלהיך בכל לבבך ובכל נפשך ובכל מאדך: והיו הדברים האלה אשר אנכי מצוך היום על לבבך: ושוננתם לבניך ודברת בם בשבתך בביתך ובילכתך בדרך ובשכבך ובקומך: וקשרתם לאות על ידך והיו לטטפת בין עיניך: וכתבתם על מזוזות ביתך ובשעריך:

והיה אם שמעו תשמעו אל מצותי אשר אנכי מצוה אתכם היום לאהבה את יהוה אלהיכם ולעבדו בכל לבבכם ובכל נפשכם: ונתתי מטר ארצכם בעתו יורה ומלקוש ואספת דגגה ותירשך ויצהרך: ונתתי עשב בשדה לבהמתך ואכלת ושבעת: השמרו לכם פן יפתה לבבכם וסרתם ועבדתם אלהים אחרים והשתחיתם להם: וחרה אף יהוה בכם ועצר את השמים ולא יהיה מטר והאדמה לא תתן את יבולה ואבדתם מהרה מעל הארץ הטבה אשר יהוה נתן לכם: ושמעתם את דברי אלה על לבבכם ועל נפשכם וקשרתם אתם לאות על ידכם והיו לטטפת בין עיניכם: ולמדתם את בניכם לדבר בם בשבתך בביתך ובילכתך בדרך ובשכבך ובקומך: וכתבתם על מזוזות ביתך ובשעריך: למען ירבו ימיכם וימי בניכם על האדמה אשר נשבע יהוה לאבותיכם לתת להם כימי השמים על הארץ:

The first paragraph began with the request 'Listen Israel...', the second tells us the consequences of 'if you listen...'. It is an excerpt from one of Moses' speeches before he died. The theme is that Israel as a nation lives in a relationship with God in the land of Israel. If we stay faithful to that relationship, the land is welcoming and productive.



Hashem spoke to Moses saying: Speak to the Israelites and tell them to make Tzitzit [tassels] on the corners of their clothes for all generations. They should attach to each corner-Tzitzit a blue thread. The Tzitzit will be for you such that you shall see them and be aware of all of Hashem's mitzvot and keep them, not straying after your heart or after your eyes that might tempt you astray. Thus you will be reminded to keep all My mitzvot, and be holy for your God. I am Hashem your God who brought you out of Egypt to be for you as God. I am Hashem, your God. It is True.

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר: דַּבֵּר אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם וַעֲשׂוּ לָהֶם צִיצִית עַל־כַּנְּפֵי בְגָדֵיהֶם לְדֹרֹתָם וּנְתַנּוּ עַל־צִיצִית הַכָּנָף פֶּתִיל תְּכֵלֶת: וְהָיָה לָכֶם לְצִיצִית וּרְאִיתֶם אֹתוֹ וּזְכַרְתֶּם אֶת־כָּל־מִצְוֹת יְהוָה וַעֲשִׂיתֶם אֹתָם וְלֹא תִתּוּרוּ אַחֲרַי לְבַבְכֶם וְאַחֲרַי עֵינֵיכֶם אֲשֶׁר־אֲתֶם זָנִים אַחֲרֵיהֶם: לְמַעַן תִּזְכְּרוּ וַעֲשִׂיתֶם אֶת־כָּל־מִצְוֹתַי וְהִיִּיתֶם קְדוֹשִׁים לֵאלֹהֵיכֶם: אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִי אֶתְכֶם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לִהְיוֹת לָכֶם לֵאלֹהִים אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם: אָמֵן



Clothing can be used to signal power and hierarchy. The Torah speaks to this concept when it asks us that our clothing should have a built-in reminder. Tzitzit - signifying God breaking our bondage in Egypt - are a visual reminder that humans can only have limited power over each other; that in truth every human is a servant of God, not of other people. The ideas of redemption, and of God's Sovereignty, prepare us to let go of dependency on humans, and to turn to God in prayer.



Turn to p.xx for an in-depth discussion

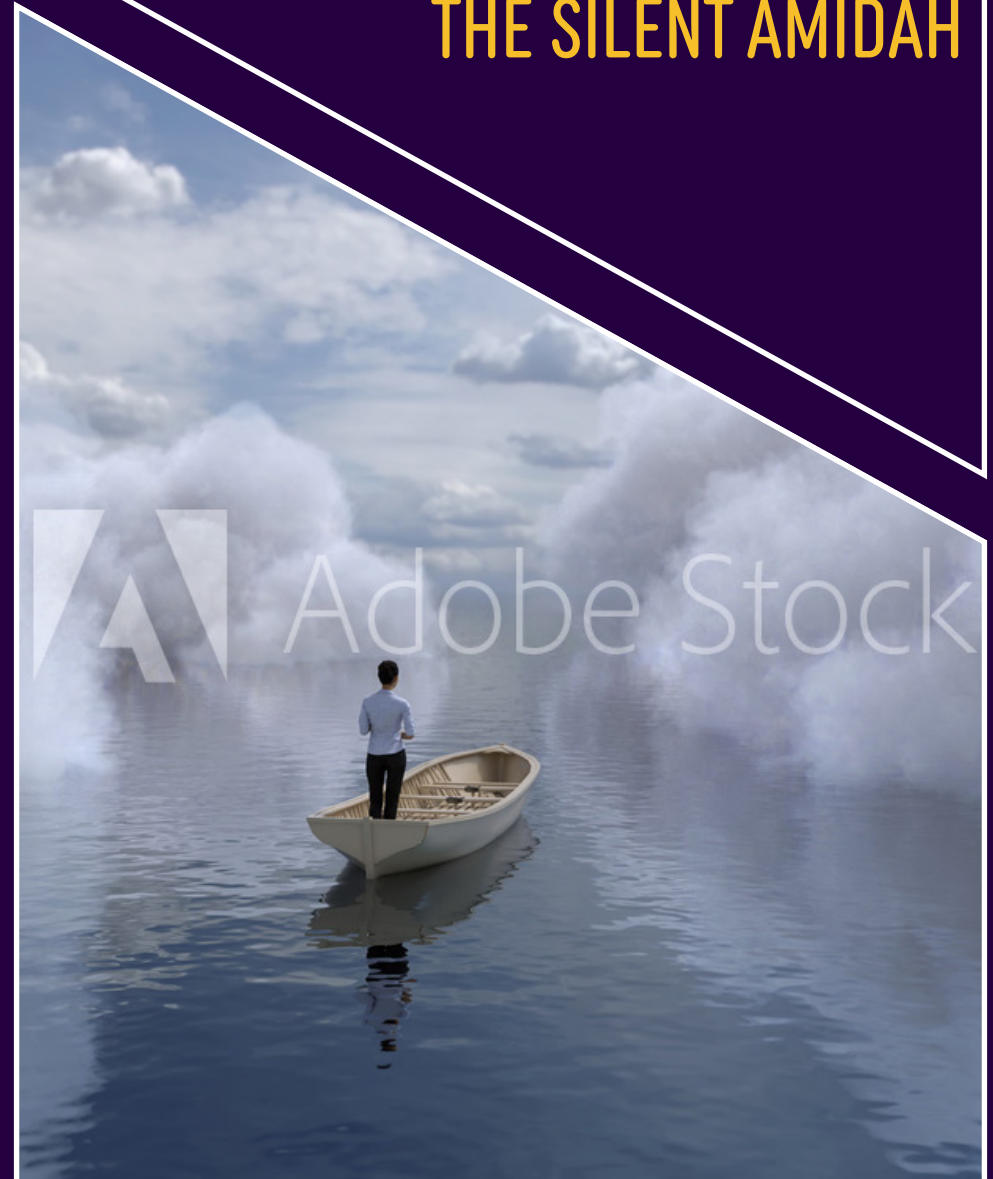


The awareness that we stand in the presence of the Living God is one of the most important realisations we can install in our operative consciousness. God is always present. The question is, how present are we?

RABBI ZALMAN SHACHTER-SHALOMI



שמונה עשרה THE SILENT AMIDAH





WE DO THIS THREE TIMES A DAY, RIGHT? SOUNDS QUITE IMPORTANT. ANY RECOMMENDATIONS?



Rabbi Ari Kayser

We take three steps back and forward before starting our Amidah to remind us that we are stepping into a different place in our mind. A place that is unaffected by our surroundings, where we are zoned-in and allowing us to sharpen our focus for our silent meditation/conversation with the Almighty.



Rebbetzen Adina Strom

The Silent Amida is the pinnacle of the prayer process! We stand in a personal audience with God Himself. We have metaphorically been working our way through the palace, through the many ante chambers, with our previous prayers, for the sake of this moment.



Rabbi Daniel Rowe

The Silent Amidah is about entering a realm beyond that of ordinary speech. In place of audible language, we reach for the language of the soul as we articulate the dreams of humanity and our longing for a perfect world. We take three steps backwards, creating our own space, followed by three steps forward to enter that space. We stand before God alone and yet at the same time – together with the community and indeed the entire Jewish world.



Rabbi Moshe Friedman

While the conventional wisdom says you must "clear your mind" of all thoughts before prayer, there is a beautiful *chassidic* teaching that says you should in fact acknowledge the random thoughts swirling in your head. Once you have given yourself acceptance to have those thoughts, they will be less likely to distract you as you begin to read the words on the page with an open mind.



Shemoneh Esrei – Conversations with God

When I proclaim Hashem's Name attribute greatness to our God.
Hashem, open my lips, that my mouth may declare Your praise.

Bend the knees at 'blessed'; bow at 'You'; straighten up at 'Adonai'

Blessed are You Adonai, Our God and the God of our ancestors, God of Abraham, God of Isaac, and God of Jacob.

[Almighty Father who created this whole Universe; who created time, space and matter. You love us with a love that is beyond the love of any parent for their child. Your love has been a love of 4,000 years and is not dependent on our actions. You love us because of who we are, not what we do.]

A Power that expands [to give and to create] holds back [to let us exist, have free will and to tolerate our mistakes] and inspires awe. The Ultimate Power; who bestows beneficial kindness, and owns all, Who recalls the ancestors' loving-kindness To bring redemption to their children's children For the sake of His Name with love.

[You take personal interest in each aspect of your creation. You redeem us for the sake of Your revelation in this world, because You have faith in our ability to serve as ambassadors for You, and live lives that make this world a more Godly place.]

Remember us for life, King who wills life, and write us in the book of life, for Your sake, God of life.

*If you forgot to say this, and became aware of your omission before saying the blessing, you should recite it.
If you have already said "Blessed are you, Hashem" you must continue the prayers without saying "Remember."*

King who assists, saves and shields.

[Every human being makes mistakes and, like a good parent, you don't condemn us for our mistakes, You support us through them. You 'assist' – when we are struggling, 'save' – when we have real problems 'and shield' – to ensure that future problems do not arise.]

Bend the knees at 'blessed'; bow at 'You'; straighten up at 'Adonai'

Blessed are You Adonai Shield of Abraham.

The first blessing focuses on the 4,000 year old relationship between Hashem and Israel stretching back to Abraham. When we stop to think of the incredible nature of Jewish survival against formidable odds, we start to recognise the subtle hand that guides history and each of our lives. God is not just the 'First Cause' of existence, but a presence that cares and can be spoken to.



שמונה עשרה

כִּי שֵׁם יְהוָה אֶקְרָא הָבוּ גֹדֶל לְאֱלֹהֵינוּ:
יְהוָה, שְׁפָתַי תִּפְתָּח וּפִי יַגִּיד תְּהִלָּתְךָ:

Bend the knees at 'ברוך'; bow at 'אתה'; straighten up at 'יהוה'

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ אֱלֹהֵי אַבְרָהָם אֱלֹהֵי יִצְחָק וְאֱלֹהֵי יַעֲקֹב הָאֵל הַגָּדוֹל הַגִּבּוֹר וְהַנּוֹרָא אֵל עֲלִיוֹן גּוֹמֵל חֲסָדִים טוֹבִים וְקוֹנֵה הַכֹּל וְזוֹכֵר חֲסֵי אֲבוֹת וּמְבִיא גּוֹאֵל לְבְנֵי בְנֵיהֶם לְמַעַן שְׁמוֹ בְּאַהֲבָה:

זְכַרְנוּ לַחַיִּים מִלֶּךְ חַפֵּץ בַּחַיִּים וְכַתְּבֵנוּ בְּסֵפֶר הַחַיִּים לְמַעַן אֱלֹהֵי חַיִּים:

*If you forgot to say this, and became aware of your omission before saying the blessing, you should recite it.
If you have already said "ברוך אתה ה'" you must continue the prayers without saying "זכרנו."*

Bend the knees at 'ברוך'; bow at 'אתה'; straighten up at 'יהוה'

מִלֶּךְ עוֹזֵר וּמוֹשֵׁיעַ וּמַגֵּן: בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה מֶגֶן אַבְרָהָם:

NOTES ON THE TRANSLATION OF THE AMIDAH

1. Rather than a word-by-word literal translation, we try to capture the intention and ideas behind the prayers. Literal translation is rarely possible since languages have different grammatical structures, different connotations and so forth. Instead we have tried to capture the meaning in the closest equivalent English expressions. Our hope is that the result is as faithful a translation as can be done in English.
2. We have provided an accompanying 'conceptual train-of-thought'. The actual translation is in a larger font. The accompanying elaborations are parenthesised and in a slightly different font style. Many find it difficult to relate to the language and style of the Siddur, and these notes are designed to help bridge that gap. They are not intended to be said; merely thought.
3. The four letter name of God: The full pronunciation is not permitted outside the Temple in Jerusalem. Instead throughout the Amida we use the word "Adonai" (lit. "my Master"). Elsewhere it is translated as "Hashem" (lit. "The Name"). The latter is traditionally used when texts are studied. The former is used for direct prayer.

The Second Blessing – Omnipotent Creator

You have the power to do anything Adonai. You give life to the dead and have immense power to save. He sustains the living with loving-kindness, and with great compassion revives the dead.

[You constantly breathe life into the dead flesh that is our bodies. You are the force that holds together every molecule in this Universe. You can bring the dead back to life as easily as you can sustain the living.]

He supports the fallen, heals the sick, sets the imprisoned free, and stays faithful to those who lie in the ground. Who is like You, Source of all power Who is comparable? King who brings death and gives life, and makes salvation grow.

[Although every life ends, and every moment goes, You hold each moment forever, and will let us relive it forever in the world to come.]

Who is like You, loving Father, who remembers His creations, in compassion, for true-life?

If you forgot to say this, the same law applies as above concerning "Remember."

You are faithful to the dead to bring them back to life Blessed are you Adonai
You are the source of all goodness, who brings life to the dead.

Do not bend the knees or bow at the conclusion of this blessing.



The second blessing continues to focus us on what it means to be talking to the Creator of the universe. We acknowledge that we are not in control. God is. We often labour under the illusion that being independent is being more powerful. But someone who was 'independent' of electricity would be left powerless. Likewise by recognising that God has all the power to change the world, we prepare to hand the direction of our lives over to God and to put Him in control. The result will help turn us into better people and our prayers into more effective prayers.

אתה גבור לעולם אדני מחיה מתים אתה רב להושיע: מכלל חיים בחד
מחיה מתים ברחמים רבים סומך נופלים ורופא חולים ומתיר אסורים
ומקים אמונתו לישני עפר, מי כמוך בעל גבורות ומי דומה לך מלך וממית
ומחיה ומצמיח ישועה:

מי כמוך אב הרחמים זוכר יצוריו לחיים ברחמים:

If you forgot to say this, the same law applies as above concerning "זכרנו."

ונאמן אתה להחיות מתים: ברוך אתה יהוה מחיה המתים:

Do not bend the knees or bow at the conclusion of this blessing.



Turn to p.xx for an
in-depth discussion



Second or Third Person? Often the Amida switches between second person ('You..') and third person ('He..'). We alternate between talking directly to God, and reflecting what that means The Amida allows us to talk to God, then to pause and reflect just how privileged we are to be able to do so. Amida captures a delicate dance between speech and thought, as it guides our conversation with God.

SHEMA YISRAEL:

The Secret to Love?

Whitney Houston's 1992 re-recording of Dolly Parton's "I Will Always love you", the title track of the hit movie 'The Bodyguard', stayed at the top of the UK charts for 10 weeks and 14 weeks at the top of the US Billboard Hot 100. It is one of the most popular songs in the record books but perhaps its message needs re-jigging.

Over the years, Hollywood has helped cement two unhelpful myths about relationships. One that love only exists when we feel a completely overbearing feeling of having fallen for someone, and two that if it is true love, this feeling will automatically last forever.

Perhaps these ideas are so engrained that we are hesitant to begin a relationship without a hint of this slightly obsessive infatuation and if we do find it, begin to sweat buckets if these feelings don't endure.

So what does the Torah have to say about all of this?

The Hebrew word for love is 'ahava' and at its heart is the word 'hav' which means to give. This is the first indication that true love is not necessarily connected to a feeling we have but to what we are actually prepared to give to another.

The word 'hav' first appears in the Book of Genesis, the family tree of the Jewish People, in a conversation between our ancestral great grandparents Jacob and Rachel. Rachel who is unable to fall pregnant pleads with Jacob, 'hava -li banim', which loosely translates as 'give me children'.

Let's start by understanding the context of these words. Jacob, (the son of Isaac and grandson of Abraham) had fallen in love with Rachel, one of two sisters. After being tricked by the girls' father Laban into marrying Rachel's older sister Leah, he was then also given the hand of Rachel. However, neither was able to bare children.

After a short period of time, Leah succeeded in falling pregnant and subsequently gave birth to six of Jacob's twelve sons while Rachel who had been Jacob's first love waited many painful years before she was able to bring her first son Joseph into the world. After Leah had given birth to her third son, the Torah captures Rachel's emotion as she turns to her husband and cries out to him "hava -li banim , 'give me children!'.

The reason Rachel's words raise an eyebrow is that there are other words in the Torah meaning 'to give', the most common being "ten". So why create a new word - unless, Rachel's words are trail-blazing a brand new kind of giving. Let's look closer at what is actually going on here.

Rachel and Jacob had not given up on trying to fall pregnant with a child, so what was Rachel asking of her husband?

The Talmud teaches that all of the matriarchs were originally infertile until their deep prayer granted them the gift of motherhood. The Torah teaches that Jacob's own parents Isaac and



Rabbi Adam Ross

Rebecca had not yet conceived until both of them stood separately and prayed deeply to G-d. Understanding this, Rachel surely reasoned that if only Jacob would pray harder to G-d, she too would be blessed to conceive. Jacob must somehow unknowingly be holding something back from her - and so she approached him and pleaded with him.

Although Jacob's reply was for Rachel to pray harder herself, we learn an amazing truth that the word 'hav' should be understood not only 'to give,' but rather to give something which you didn't even know you could give. Rachel says to Jacob, 'There must be more you can do.'

This is the Torah's definition of love, to give to another way beyond your bounds, more than you thought was even possible.

So many relationships don't even get off the ground because we are looking for this magic feeling from the get go. Hollywood has trained us to think that love has to start with the incredible connection yet the Torah come to teach us, true love is one which is built through acts of giving, from the deepest part of you, so deep in you didn't even know it was there.

The reality of this teaching means a radical shift in our understanding of where we give and take in our relationships. The most painful and difficult moments become the most amazing moments where something truly profound takes place between two people.

To love means to set continuous personal records in patience, kindness, affection and support. It means to hold back from a harsh word even when you so, so, so much want to say it.

This is love. Knowing nothing would stop you from seeing your favourite band perform and then painfully giving away your tickets because a friend or family member needs your help. This is love. Coming home exhausted and collapsing down on the sofa after the longest day but then realising how much it would mean to your wife if the overflowing rubbish sack was taken out. You know it is love when you break through your glass ceiling, put your shoes back on and give just a little bit more of yourself.



Perhaps we can now understand why the Torah commands us in the words of the Shema not just to love, but 'to love with all of your heart.' And this is the amazing thing - our hearts have such depth, they will always continue to surprise us.

This is the true secret of love we learn from Rachel. Not only to give, but to give precisely when you think you've given all you have - this way our love is truly eternal and is drawn from the deepest, deepest of wells.

THE SILENT AMIDAH: Stairway to Heaven?

Prayer is one of the most primal, most universal and most obvious of all religious acts. Yet it seems philosophically deeply problematic. Can we really change the mind of God? If God is Infinite, all knowing and all powerful then isn't God's plan the best plan there can be?

The question is not a new one. It has been asked since the beginning of prayer. The longest prayer recorded in the Torah is that of Abraham asking God to consider saving Sodom. It takes the form of a dialogue. Abraham asks God if he would save the city for the sake of fifty righteous people. God responds that He would indeed. Abraham then asks if forty could suffice, all the way down to ten. Each time God responds in the affirmative. Abraham began the exercise by assuming that God would destroy the city even if it had ten good people. By the time he finished he had learned two great lessons. One that Sodom did not in fact have even ten good people. Two that God would be willing to forgo judgement in favour of mercy were there any warrant for it whatsoever. Abraham began the dialogue questioning God: 'Would the Judge of the whole world not act justly?' he concluded with the realisation that it was not God who had judged wrongly but Abraham himself.

At first it seems like Abraham's exercise was futile. Perhaps it could be justified as belonging to a naive era. Abraham had discovered that there is One God, but was not aware that God was all powerful, all knowing and all good. If that were the case then the lesson of Abraham ought to be that we should never bother to try to tell God what to do; that we should never pray.

That is clearly not the conclusion that Torah itself draws. Prayer continues throughout Torah and throughout the Biblical canon. From Abraham through Moses to Esther and Ezra the Biblical narratives are full of prayer. The readings of Rosh Hashana we go through the prayer Hannah begging for a child. God Himself teaches Moses prayer. King David describes himself as 'I am prayer'.

To learn from Abraham's prayer that prayer achieves nothing would be to misread the story in two crucial ways. The first is that there is a very profound change: the exercise of prayer changes the mind of Abraham. He learns from the experience much about God and the relationship between God and the world. He learns that there is a time for justice, and that God's justice is far deeper than meets the eye. His life was transformed forever.

The second is that although Sodom is destroyed, Abraham's nephew and family members are spared. Whilst the 'good people' were too few in number to save the whole city, they themselves were nevertheless able to be saved.

So prayer can work if it transforms us.

This insight is not obvious but it is deeply profound. Prayer does not change God's mind but it can change ours. And if it can change us then we may start to deserve something that we did not deserve until now.

By way of analogy, if a child of an incredibly wealthy parent asks for a gift and gets a 'no' they may be shocked or hurt. But a loving parent will not give a child everything the child asks for. Indeed there may be times where the child does not realise it but it would actually be destructive for them to receive the gift. Perhaps it might make them more selfish, more lazy, more gluttonous, or otherwise be a terrible 'gift'. So the loving parent resists their desire to give to the child for the greater good of their child.

Now suppose the child turns to their parent and starts by humbly recognising that they are not the centre of the universe that they thought they were. Suppose they genuinely express the fact that they recognise that their parent has greater wisdom and experience than they do. Suppose that they start to realise that their goals in life should not be superficial self-centred goals but to develop themselves and serve a greater good. If in the process of the dialogue the child came to genuinely recognise these things then it would be a different child asking for the gift. And this newly refined child might indeed deserve what they had previously not.



"If Rosh Hashana is the day that probes the depths of our being, and offers us a chance to recreate ourselves, then the service is our vehicle for the self-reflective and inner transformative work to construct the new self."



Rabbi Daniel Rowe

THE SILENT AMIDAH: Stairway to Heaven?



So prayer is indeed a means of accessing blessing, but through transforming ourselves into beings who are deserving of that blessing. The English word 'prayer' derives from the Anglo-Norman 'preier', which itself derives from the Latin 'pricari' and possibly from an earlier Indo-European 'prek' all of which mean 'to ask' or 'to petition'. In the Jewish tradition there is indeed an ability to cry out to God whenever the need arises, but Jewish prayer does not assume we just cry and click our fingers and God comes to our service.

To be sure we also can and do cry out to God in times of difficulty, and express gratitude when things feel good. Spontaneous outpourings are a part of the overall mitzva of prayer. But that is not what the communal prayer is about

and it is not what the prayers in the siddur (prayer book) are about. It is certainly not what the prayers of Rosh Hashana are about.

Rabbi Shimshon b. Refoel Hirsch points out that the verb we most commonly use for prayer in Hebrew, in particular for the communal siddur based services, is 'lehitpallel'. It does not mean to 'pray' in the sense of asking. Rather it is a reflexive verb whose root is 'to judge'. Literally, the word means 'to judge oneself'. Indeed the source in Torah for prayer is the verse that describes prayer as 'to serve [Hashem] with all your heart'.

When we stand face to face with Hashem Himself, and articulate the dreams and prayers of the people of Israel, we find ourselves engaging in self judgement: 'do I really mean all of this? Is this really what I am living for?' Face to face with our very Creator and aware that life is in His hands, we suddenly realise that many of the things we spend so much time prioritising, obsessing over, fearing and resenting, are not what life is all about.

Jewish prayer focuses us on the fact we are not a god, and life is not about our shopping lists and desires. It is about the vision and Will of the Creator of all mankind who constantly Wills the world into existence.

The more we surrender our superficial ambitions for the vastly greater vision and Will of the Infinite Creator, the more humble we become, and the more focused our life becomes on what is really important. That is a transformative experience that can change us into a vessel better able to receive the blessing.

If Rosh Hashana is the day that probes the depths of our being, and offers us a chance to recreate ourselves, then the service is our vehicle for the self reflective and inner transformative work to construct the new self.

On the first ever Rosh Hashana in the Garden of Eden, just before the creation of Adam, the Torah describes an unformed realm without its vegetation; one in which Edenic rain had not yet fallen. Reality was suspended in an unrecognisable phase like a virtual reality world whose graphical presentation was only partly illuminated. 'For there was no man to work the ground.'

At first glance things seem simple enough. There was no one to farm so there was no vegetation. But that cannot be the meaning. For one thing farmers do not create vegetation. They select and cultivate from within the preexisting grasses trees and vegetables. For another, in the Torah's depiction of a pre-sin Eden, the work was negligible. Even more problematic, when God did decide to project greenery, man's work was unnecessary.

For this reason the Rabbis offer a crucial insight: the Hebrew word 'to work' 'לעבוד' is based on the word 'עבודה' – the very word used when Torah wants to tell us to pray: 'Serve Him (לעבודו) with all your heart...'. What Torah is saying is that God would not complete the realm of Eden until it was ready for a being who could pray. In Eden food was not yet produced by the 'sweat of your brow'. It was a response to the inner work of man. The more man turned himself into a vessel to receive blessing the more blessing God would bring into the world. Man is created to grow and develop through the self reflective work on Tefila.

On Rosh Hashana we step back into the world of Eden. We step back into our inner core. We were created to turn ourselves into vessels for God's blessing. We were created for Tefila. And it is through Tefila through the work of the siddur on Rosh Hashana that we can rediscover a pure deeper self so often obscured by the polluting dust layers of every day struggling.

"Prayer can work if it transforms us."

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