

SYNAPLEX LEARNER'S SERVICE

# THE POWER OF THE WORD

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*"Remember that there is a meaning beyond absurdity. Be sure that every little deed counts, **that every word has power.** Never forget that you can still do your share to redeem the world in spite of all absurdities and frustrations and disappointments."* - Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel



## HOW TO PRAY WITH OTHERS (p. 8-9)

Rabbi Yehudah said: This was the custom of Rabbi Akiba. When he would pray with the public he would shorten [his prayers] and arise in order not to become a burden to the congregation. But when he prayed by himself, a person would leave him [beginning] his prayer in one corner and find him in a different corner. And how was it that he moved about so much? Through [numerous] bowings and prostrations. (B. Berachot 31a)

## MODEH ANI

*Modeh ani lefaneicha melech chai v'kayam shehechezarta bi nishmati bechemlah - rabbah emunatecha*

*I gratefully thank you, O living and eternal King, for You have returned my soul within me with compassion - abundant is Your faithfulness!*

In the morning a person should say, I give thanks before You, my God and God of my ancestors that you have brought me from darkness to light.

In the afternoon a person should say, I give thanks before You, my God and God of my ancestors that just as you found me worthy to see the sun in the East so you have found that I merit seeing it in the West.

In the evening a person should say, May it be Your will, Merciful One, my God and God of my ancestors that just as I was in darkness and you brought me out of it to the light that you will bring me out of darkness to light again. (Y. Berachot 4:1, 29b)

## COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS (p.14)

Our Rabbis taught: It is forbidden for a person to enjoy anything of this world without a benediction, and anyone who enjoys anything of this world without a benediction, commits sacrilege. . .

Rav Judah said in the name of Samuel, "To enjoy anything of this world without a benediction is like making use of things consecrated to heaven, since it says, 'The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof. (Psalms 24:1)'" . . .

Rabbi Hanina bar Papa said, "Anyone who enjoys this world without a benediction, it is as if he robbed the Holy One, blessed be He, and the congregation of Israel. (B. Berachot 35a)

If they told someone his father died, he recites, "Blessed . . .the true judge."  
If someone's father died and he inherited his estate he [also] recites, "Blessed . . .  
who is good and does good." (*Y. Berachot* 9:2)

# BARUCH SHE'EMAR (P.48) and subsequent Psalms

## *MI HA-ISH....SUR MAYRA V'ASEH TOV – P.52*

### “TURN FROM EVIL AND DO GOOD”

If one sees that his evil inclination is gaining sway over him, let him go away where he is not known, let him put on sordid black clothes and do the sordid deed that his heart desires rather than profane the name of heaven openly. (*B. Moed Katan* 17a)

## *BAKESH SHALOM V'RADFAYHU – p.52*

### THE PURSUERS OF PEACE

In a city in which Jews and non-Jews live together the charity collectors raise money for the poor of Jews and non-Jews equally for the path of peace.  
They provide support for non-Jews and Jews for the path of peace.  
They greet non-Jews and Jews alike for the path of peace.  
They visit the sick non-Jews and Jews for the path of peace.  
They bury and lament for non-Jews and Jews for the path of peace.  
They express condolences to non-Jews and Jews for the path of peace.  
For Torah's ways are ways of pleasantness and all her paths are peace. (*M. Shevi'it* 5:9, *T. Gittin* 3:13-14, *B. Gittin* 61a, *Proverbs* 3:17)

## ASHREY (P. 58)

*R. Hama son of R. Hanina said: What does the text mean: "You shall walk after the way of the Lord your God" (Deut. 8:5)? Is it possible for a human being to [literally] walk after the way of God?... Rather [the meaning is] to walk after the attributes of the Holy Blessed One. Just as God clothes the naked... so must you clothe the naked. The Holy Blessed One visits the sick... so you must also visit the sick. The Holy Blessed One comforts mourners... so must you comfort mourners. The Holy Blessed One buries the dead... so must you bury the dead. (B. Sotah 14a)*

## It's that bad

Midrash Tanchuma, Metzora

Lashon hara is worse than bloodshed for whoever kills takes one life, but whoever speaks lashon hara takes three lives: the one who speaks, the one who listens and the one who is spoken about... Do not say: since I am able to speak, I can say whatever I want. The Torah has warned you already, as it is written: "Guard your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking guile" (Psalms 34:14)

## Warm words

Rabbi Nachman of Bratzlav,

Likutei Moharan 239

*All words come from warmth. Very warm people speak a lot while cold people cannot really speak. For speech is from heat, as it says "My heart is warm in me, in my thoughts burns fire! Then with my tongue did I speak" (Psalms 39), these are the flames of fire...*

PSALM 34

P. 52

## Extract from a letter the Vilna Gaon wrote to his family

...for every moment that a man holds his tongue, he merits the hidden light, beyond the imagination of any angel or creature, as it is written "Who is the man who desires life, and loves days? || ...keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking guile" || (Psalms 34) and through this all his sins will be forgiven and he will be saved from sheol (hell) as it is written "Who keeps his mouth (from overeating and drinking) and his tongue (from worthless words) keeps his soul from trouble." (Proverbs 21), and "Death and life are in the hand of the tongue" (Proverbs 18)

**Proverbs 18:21**

Death and life are in the hand of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its produce.

משלי יח

מוֹת וְחַיִּים בְּיַד-לִשָּׁן וְאֹהֲבֶיהָ יֹאכְל פְּרִיָּהּ:

**Concluding prayer of the Amidah**

O my God! Guard my tongue from evil and my lips from speaking guile...

סדור, עמידה

אֱלֹהֵי, נִצּוֹר לְשׁוֹנִי מִרָע, וּשְׁפָתִי מִדְּבַר מְרָמָה,

**Points to consider**

- Is the tongue independent of our will?
- Why is it so difficult to control?
- Why do we ask God to control our tongue?
- Whose responsibility is it?
- What are the purposes of speech in our life?

**Leading questions**

Is it better to stay silent?

**Source 1.2**

Can different types of speech be classified?

**Source 1.4**

How powerful is the tongue?

**Source 1.5**

Are words more powerful than actions?

**Source 1.6**

Rabbi Abraham  
HaCohen Kook,  
Commentary on  
Sayings of the Fathers  
(Olat Ra'aya)

*"Even though all my life I  
have grown among  
scholars..."* whose main  
vitality is the power of  
mind and breadth of  
thought, I have not

found the body, being body, receiving anything good from silence. For thought alone cannot act to perfect the body to its eternal level, but speech can... it is also not possible for the body to reach the desired perfection through words alone,  
*"for the learning is not the main thing but the action."*

רב אברהם יצחק הכהן קוק  
פירוש לפרקי אבות (עולת ראיה)

ואע"פ שכל

ימי גדלתי בין החכמים, שעיקר חיותם הוא כח השכל ואורך המחשבה, לא מצאתי לגוף, מצד שהוא גוף, טוב יוצא משתיקה, כי המחשבה לבדה אינה פועלת להשלים את הגוף למעלה נצחית, אלא הדבור... אמנם גם לא יתכן שבדברים לבדם ימלא הגוף חפץ שלמותו, כי לא המדרש עקר אלא המעשה.

My words fly up, my thoughts remain  
below. / Words without thoughts never to  
heaven go. SHAKESPEARE, *Hamlet* (1600),  
3.3.97.

### Points to consider

Is speech only valuable if it leads to action?

What are the positive and the negative values of both speech and silence?

### Leading questions

How can speech lead to action?

Source 1.8

**Sayings of the Fathers 1:17**

Shimon (Rabban Gamliel's son) used to say: Even though all my life I grew up among scholars, I discovered nothing more fitting for a person (lit. body) than silence. For the learning is not the main thing but the action. And whoever uses too many words brings on sin.

פרקי אבות - א'

(ח) שִׁמְעוֹן בֶּנוֹ אֹמֵר. כָּל־יָמַי גִּדְלָתִי  
בֵּין הַחֲכָמִים וְלֹא מָצָאתִי לְגוֹף טוֹב מִשְׁתִּיקָה. וְלֹא הַמְדָּרֵשׁ  
עָקָר אֶלָּא הַמַּעֲשֶׂה. וְכָל־הַמְרַבֵּה דְבָרִים מְבִיא חַטָּא:

**Sayings of the Fathers 3:17**

Rabbi Akiva said: Jest and levity lead a person to lewdness. Tradition is a safeguard for the Torah; tithes are a safeguard for wealth; vows are a safeguard for abstinence; a safeguard for wisdom is silence.

פרקי אבות - ג'

(ח) רַבִּי עֲקִיבָא אֹמֵר.  
שְׂחוק וְקלות ראש מְרַגְלִים אֶת־הָאָדָם לְעִרְוָה: מִסֶּפֶר  
סִיג לַתּוֹרָה מַעֲשָׂרוֹת סִיג לְעֵשֶׂר נְדָרִים סִיג לְפְרִישוֹת סִיג  
לַחֲכָמָה שְׁתִּיקָה:

**Points to consider**

How can speech lead to sin? Which sins?

Why were we granted the power of speech if it can be a barrier to enlightenment?

Is silence better than every kind of speech?

Is an introvert more moral than an extrovert?

**Leading questions**

Is there another way of reading this source?

Source 1.3



**Tosefta, Peah 1:2**

These are the things for which a person is punished in this world while the capital is laid up for them in the world to come: idolatry, forbidden sexual relations and the shedding of blood. And lashon hara (lit. evil tongue or speech) is equal to them all.

**תוספתא פאה א**

**ב** על אילו דברים נפרעין מן האדם בעולם הזה, והקין קיימת לו בעולם הבא: על עבודה זרה, ועל גלוי עריות, ועל שפיכות דמים, ועל לשון הרע כנגד כולם.

**Talmud Bavli: Arachin 15b**

Rabbi Yochanan said in the name of Rabbi Joseph ben Zimra: One who bears evil tales almost denies the foundation [of faith], as it is said: *"They say, 'By our tongues we will prevail; with lips such as ours, who can be our master?'"* (Psalms 12:5)

**ערכין ט"ז:ב**

אמר ר' יוחנן משום ר' זסי בן זימרא כל המספר לשון הרע כאילו כפר בעיקר שנאמר אשר אמרו ללשוננו נגביר שפחנו אתנו מי אדון לנו

**Points to Consider**

The Tosefta states that lashon hara is equivalent to the three 'cardinal' sins put together. (These are the sins concerning which we should be prepared to die rather than transgress). In what way is lashon hara related to these three sins?

Lashon hara treats a person as an object. How does this relate to the fact that people were created in the image of God?

Are we each others' mirrors?

**Leading questions**

Are there different kinds of lashon hara?

**Source 1.7**

When is lashon hara not lashon hara?

**Source 1.9**

Is there a way out?

**Source 1.10**

**Talmud Bavli: Arachin 15b**

But what will be a person's remedy so that they may not come to say lashon hara? If they are a scholar, let them engage in the Torah, and if they be an ignorant person, let them humble themselves, as it is said: "[A healing tongue is a tree of life], but a devious one makes for a broken spirit." (Proverbs 15:4)

**ערכין ט"ו: ב**

אלא מה תקנתו שלא יבא ליד לשון הרע  
אם תלמיד רבם הוא יעסק בתורה  
ואם ע"ה הוא ישפיל דעתו  
שנאמר וסלף בה שבר דוח

A villager who prayed at the house of prayer of the Ba'al Shem Tov on the High Holidays had a son who could not learn to read even one letter. Because the boy could not pray from a prayer book, his father never took him to services during the holidays. But when the boy turned thirteen, his father decided to take him to the house of prayer for the Day of Atonement.

Now, this young boy had a little pipe on which he used to play as he sat in the fields watching over his sheep. He took the pipe with him to services, and the father didn't notice.

Hour after hour, the boy sat in the house of prayer and said nothing. When the *Mussaf*, or Additional Service, began, he asked his father if he might play on his pipe. The father angrily forbade it, and when the boy continued to plead with him, he placed his hand over the youngster's pocket so that he could not take his pipe out.

Finally, the Closing Service of the day began. Suddenly the boy snatched his pocket away from his father's hand, pulled out his little pipe, and blew into it with all his might. The congregation was startled and confused by the sound. But the Ba'al Shem Tov went on with the service. At the end of the day the rabbi declared that the little boy's pipe music had carried all the congregation's prayers up to heaven.

—Tale about Rabbi Israel ben  
Eliezer Ba'al Shem Tov

**Points to consider**

What is the connection between the two remedies (i.e. study and humility)?

What is humility? How do we learn it and how do we put it into action?

Is humility only good for the ignorant?

Can you think of other remedies?

**Leading questions**

How do these remedies work?

Source 1.3

## THE SH'MA (P.110)

Rava said: When one is led in for judgment [after death] one is asked:

Were you honest in business?

Did you fix times for learning?

Did you engage in procreation?

Did you hope for salvation?

Did you engage in dialectics of wisdom?

Did you understand one thing from another? (*B. Shabbat 31a*)

## SIM SHALOM (p.132)

### CHARITY VS. DEEDS OF KINDNESS

Said Rabbi Elazar: Greater is the one who performs charity than [one who offers] all the sacrifices, for it is said, "To do charity and justice is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice. (*Proverbs 21:3*)."

And said Rabbi Elazar: Deeds of loving kindness (*gemilut chasadim*) are [greater] than charity for it is said, "Sow to yourselves according to your charity (*tsedakah*), and reap according to your kindness (*chesed*). (*Hosea 10:12*)" If a person sows, there is doubt as to whether he will eat [the harvest] or not, [but when] a person reaps, he will certainly eat.

And said Rabbi Elazar: *Tsedakah* is repaid only according to the kindness (*chesed*) in it, as it is said, "Sow to yourselves according to charity and reap according to your kindness. (*Hosheah 10:12*)"

Our Rabbis taught: In three ways is loving kindness (*gemilut chasadim*) superior to charity (*tsedakah*). Charity [can only be done] with one's money [but] acts of loving kindness can be done with one's person and one's money. Charity [can only be given] to the poor. Deeds of loving kindness can be performed for both the rich and the poor. Charity [can only be given] to the living. Deeds of loving kindness can be done for both the living and the dead.

And said Rabbi Elazar: Anyone who does charity and justice, it is as if he had filled all the world with kindness (*chesed*) for it is said, "He loves charity and justice, the earth is full of the loving kindness of the Lord. (*Psalms 33:5*)" And lest you say that whoever wishes to do good succeeds [in finding the opportunity to do so], Scripture says, "How precious [or, rare] is Your lovingkindness, O God, etc. (*Psalms 36:8*)" One might say that [this verse also applies] to one who fears Heaven, [so] Scripture says, "But the loving kindness of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear Him. (*Psalms 103:17*)" (*B. Sukkah 49b-50a*)

BRETTLER (BIBLE)

"Adonai, open my lips" Ps. 51:17, recited by David after being confronted by Nathan the prophet about his affair with Bathsheba. Its invocation here establishes the absolute dependence of human beings (who are fundamentally sinful) upon a beneficent God (see Ps. 51:7 — "I was brought forth in iniquity; my mother conceived me in sin") and the role of prayer as surpassing the efficacy of sacrifice (see v. 19: "True sacrifice to God is a contrite spirit; God, you will not despise a contrite and crushed heart").

DORFF (THEOLOGY)

"Adonai, open my lips that my mouth may declare your praise" While we commonly think that

prayer happens solely at the initiative of the

person praying, this verse from Ps. 51:17, placed at the beginning of the *Amidah* — what the Rabbis call "The Prayer" — strongly proclaims another message. We are, as it were, dumb when we want to address God. We need God's help in what we are about to do. Prayer, in other words, is not the utterances of the person praying, as subject, to God, as object. Prayer is, rather, the interaction of the person praying with God. For prayer to work, God has to want to help us pray as much as we must want to pray.

OPENING MEDITATION

<sup>1</sup> Adonai, open my lips that my mouth may declare your praise.

ELLENSON (MODERN LITURGIES)

"Adonai, open my lips" Many non-Orthodox prayer books, beginning with the classics, *Olath Tamid* of David Einhorn and *Minhag America* of Isaac Mayer Wise, but including also the *Union Prayer Book*, classical Reconstructionist liturgy, and *The Book of Blessings* by Marcia Falk, omit this line. Some consider it (p. 54)

FALK (FEMINISM)

"Adonai, open my lips that my mouth may declare your praise" What does it mean to ask that one's lips be opened to speech — opened, that is, not by the self but by an Other?

In her book *The Journey Is Home*, feminist theologian Nelle Morton tells a

אֲדֹנָי שְׁפֹתַי תִּפְתָּח

speech" by a supportive community. In Morton's recounting, a reluctant (p. 54)

HAUPTMAN (TALMUD)

"Adonai, open my lips that my mouth may declare your praise" Printed right before the beginning of the *Amidah*, usually in small letters, is the verse "Adonai, open my lips that my mouth may declare your praise" (Ps. 51:17). Following the *Amidah* is a similarly inspirational verse, "May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of my heart be favorable before You, Adonai, my rock and redeemer" (Ps. 19:15). This bracketing of the *Amidah* with verses originated with R. Yohanan (Talmud Bavli, Ber. 4b; Yerushalmi Ber. 4:4, 8a). (p. 54)

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KUSHNER & POLEN (CHASIDISM)

"*Adonai, open my lips that my mouth may declare your praise*" It seems odd that as a prelude to the *amidah*—a bouquet of prayers of praise, petition, and thanksgiving, the most intensely conversational script of the entire Siddur—someone thought to throw in Psalm 51:17: "God, open my lips so that my mouth may declare Your praise."

Wouldn't it make more sense to say something like, "Here I am God, ready to begin our conversation," or "Permit me to introduce myself," or "I know we haven't always seen eye to eye on certain things," something that would accentuate the dialogic nature of what will follow. For there to be a conversation, an intercession, there must be two discrete parties. It takes two to tango.

In much (but not all) of the Hebrew Bible and the Siddur, God and people are separate, (p. 55)

LANDES (HALAKHAH)

"*Adonai, open my lips*" The connection between the *G'ullah* (the blessing that completes the prior rubric, known as the *Sh'ma* and Its Blessings—see Volume 1, *The Sh'ma and Its Blessings*) and the *Amidah* cannot be broken. One can say "Amen" to the reader's recitation of the *G'ullah*, for it is considered an integral part of the blessing itself (and, therefore, not a real interruption), but we try to say the blessing with the reader, so as to obviate the need to say "Amen" separately. In addition, (p. 56)

L. HOFFMAN (HISTORY)

PS. 51:17 PROVIDES A SILENT MEDITATIVE MOMENT, BEFORE THE ACTUAL BLESSINGS OF THE AMIDAH BEGIN. THE FIRST THREE BLESSINGS, KNOWN TRADITIONALLY AS BLESSINGS OF PRAISE, THEN COMMENCE. THE FIRST OF THE THREE ESTABLISHES OUR COVENANTAL CLAIM ON GOD, WHOM WE APPROACH KNOWING THAT WE ARE SPIRITUAL DESCENDANTS OF THE BIBLICAL ANCESTORS WHO ESTABLISHED THE COVENANT IN THE FIRST PLACE.

"*Adonai, open my lips that my mouth may declare your praise*" Despite the second-century ruling against inserting anything at all between the prayer preceding the morning *Amidah* and the *Amidah* itself, it (p. 56)

J. HOFFMAN  
(TRANSLATION)

"*Open my lips*" In the Hebrew, "lips" pre-

cedes "open" and is thereby emphasized, in a way that English grammar cannot capture.

"*That my mouth may declare your praise* [t'hillah]" The Hebrew reads (literally), "and my mouth will declare. . . ." But Hebrew often uses conjunction where English prefers subordination. Other possibilities include "and let . . ." (*Kol Haneshamah* [Reconstructionist]) or "and my lips will . . ." (*Siddur Sim Shalom* [Conservative]). Birnbaum, *Kol Haneshamah* (Reconstructionist), *Siddur Sim Shalom* (Conservative), and *Service of the Heart* (Liberal, England) all agree with "praise." For t'hillah, *Gates of Prayer* (p. 56)

אֲדֹנָי שִׁפְתַי תִּפְתָּח וּפִי יַגִּיד תְּהִלָּתְךָ<sup>1</sup>

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## OPENING MEDITATION

### ELLENSON (MODERN LITURGIES)

extraneous. Others, however, whose naturalistic theology posits an impersonal deity, reject the reference to a personal God who hears supplicatory prayer. Both editions of the *Hamburg Temple Prayer Book* (1819 and 1841) retained it, however, and it has been reinserted in most modern liberal liturgies, including the American *Gates of Prayer*, the British *Siddur Lev Chadash*, the Israeli *Ha'avodah Shebalev*, and the current Reconstructionist *Kol Haneshamah*. The Hamburg authors were conservative regarding change and tended to keep things in if they had no serious objection. Modern decisions to restore it demonstrate the extent to which people have internalized a personalistic faith once again.

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### FALK (FEMINISM)

a participant in a women's conference is given an extraordinary kind of attention — a wholly attuned, uninterrupted listening — that allows her to break through her reticence and tell her own (as it happens, painful) story. Reversing the familiar model of speech as stimulus to hearing, Morton creates a new paradigm: hearing as stimulus to speech. This is, as Morton puts it, "a totally new understanding of hearing," hearing that can indeed open the lips. Is this, then, what the prayer asks of God in the opening line of the *Amidah*?

Perhaps. But in Morton's paradigm, the purpose of "hearing someone to speech" is not to evoke praise — indeed, it is not to elicit any particular predetermined outcome at all. Rather, Morton calls for a respectful receptivity that allows even one who is reticent to fully express *her own truths*.

I would have to say that Morton's story is more resonant for me than the deferential statement that opens the *Amidah*. Even if we view this statement as a request for God's aid or a declaration of one's intentions — rather than as a promise or a bargain being struck — it still rings false. For though one may be praying with fixed words, one can never predict or anticipate the true prayer of the heart — nor, it would seem, should one strive to. The sacrality that I sometimes experience in deep silence is one that allows truth to be seen and heard and recognized — in whatever form it takes.

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### HAUPTMAN (TALMUD)

Although he gave no rationale for appending these deeply religious passages from Psalms, it seems clear that he wanted to enclose the rabbinic set of petitions with biblical verses on the subject of heartfelt prayer and its acceptance by God. These additions would "force" God to listen. It should be noted that a different sage, R. Judan, recited both verses before saying the *Amidah*. This, too, makes good sense.

## SECTION 1

The first verse, "open my lips," is a prayer for successful prayer, a request that the supplicant not stumble in their attempt to sing God's praises, and, as a result, fail to "grab God's ear." It is saying, in a self-effacing way, that the one who prays intends to praise God but may not find the appropriate words to do so. Petitioners may be so awed by coming into the presence of God that they find themselves tongue-tied. This verse expresses the hope that the words flow smoothly.

The second verse, "May the words of my mouth . . ." is the closing line of Psalm 19, a poem about the magnificence of nature and the excellence of God's Torah. This passage, too, is a prayer for successful prayer, a request that the petitions just uttered be accepted and answered. Over time, this second verse was incorporated into a closing paragraph, also of Talmudic origin (Bavli, Ber. 17a). We are told that when Mar, the son of Ravina, finished praying the *Amidah* he would append yet another petition, as we still do today, "My God, guard my tongue from evil . . ." and conclude with the verse "May the words of my mouth . . ." as recommended by R. Yohanan.

All of these supplements to the *Amidah* are written in the first person singular and not the first person plural, the mode of most paragraphs of the *Amidah* itself. They thus add a personal dimension to the *Amidah*, allowing the petitioner to feel more immediately involved in the prayer.

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## KUSHNER &amp; POLEN (CHASIDISM)

distinct, discrete, autonomous, independent and apart from one another. God says this, we say that. God does this, we do that. God's there, we're here. The energy of the whole thing comes precisely from our being separate from one another. So why begin our personal prayers with a denial of that mutual autonomy and free will?

The Psalm says, "God, would you please open my mouth." Hey, who's working my mouth anyway, me or God? Who's praising God, me or God? What's going on here?

What's going on here is another spiritual paradigm, one in which God and people are not only *not* distinct from one another but are literally *within* one another. God is the ocean and we are the waves. In the words of the Chasidic maxim, "*Alles ist Gott*, it's all God." My mouth is God's mouth. My praises are God's words. In the teaching of Rabbi Kalynomos Kalmish Shapira of Piesetzna (who perished in the Warsaw ghetto), "Not only does God hear our prayers, God prays them through us as well!"

The words of the *amidah* that will follow may *sound* like they come from me but in truth they come from a higher source. Prayer may ultimately be an exercise for helping us let go of our egos, hopelessly anchored to this world where one person is discrete from another and from God, and soar to the heavens where we realize there is a holy One to all being and that we have been an expression of it all along. "God, open my lips so that my mouth may declare Your praise."

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ISE

OPENING MEDITATION

Tra

LANDES (HALAKHAH)

we say, "Ado-nai, open my lips . . .," before commencing the *Amidah*, but we do it in an undertone. That practice is permitted because it was established by the Rabbis, and technically, it is considered an attachment to the *G'ullah*, not a separate liturgical entity that would constitute a separation between the *G'ullah* and the *Amidah*, the two of which belong together (*Turei Zahav* 101:2).

Say the sentence in an undertone while taking three short steps backward, beginning with the right foot, and then three steps forward, as if approaching a sovereign.

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Jev

L. HOFFMAN (HISTORY)

became customary to preface the *Amidah* with this quotation from Psalms. The innovation is talmudic, and its apparent disregard for the earlier regulation led to considerable commentary through the centuries. This simple biblical line must contain a message so important that the Rabbis elected to include it.

Indeed, there is a message here, and it is astonishingly bold. The full citation from Psalms, of which this is but the beginning, is, "Adonai, open my lips that my mouth may declare your praise; for you have no delight in sacrifice. If I were to give a burnt offering, You would not be pleased" (Ps. 51:17-18). It is well known that the Rabbis proclaimed the *Amidah* to be the equivalent of the defunct sacrificial cult. Here, by innuendo, the Rabbis go even farther: the *Amidah* is not just equal to the sacrificial system that ceased with the Temple's destruction in 70; it is even better. God would not accept a sacrifice even if we were to offer it, whereas the words of our mouth are always acceptable on high. According to the Midrash, Israel said to God, "We are impoverished now that we cannot offer sacrifices." God answered, "I seek words from you now, as it is written, 'Take words with You when you return to God'" (Hos. 14:2).

So great is the power of words that Jewish philosophy customarily categorized human beings as *mdaber*, that is, the sole creation whose distinctive capacity is speech. As we open the *Amidah* with a prayer to use our speech wisely, so too we end it with such a hope. The final meditation reads, "My God, guard my tongue from evil, and my lips from speaking deceit." With speech we may curse or bless, slander or praise, hurt or heal. The Rabbis have instructed us to bracket the *Amidah* with the wish that we use the power of words only for good.

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J. HOFFMAN (TRANSLATION)

(Reform) offers "glory," perhaps for prosodic reasons: their translation may be sung to the same melody as the Hebrew.



THE ONLY PRAYER OF PETITION ON SHABBAT...

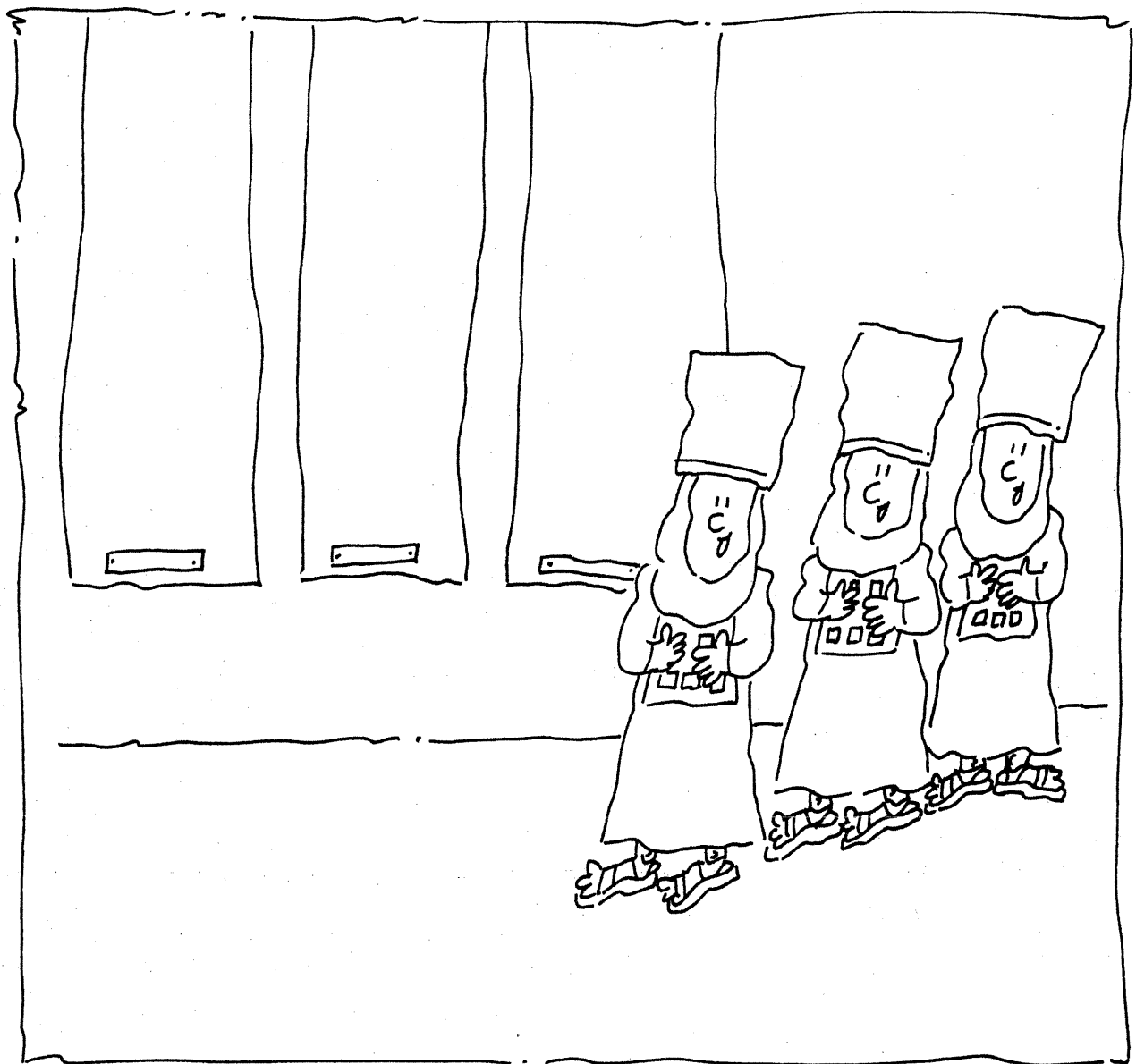
# בְּרָכָה (The Nineteenth) שִׁים שְׁלוֹם

1. שִׁים שְׁלוֹם טוֹבָה וּבְרָכָה,
2. חַן וְחֶסֶד וְרַחֲמִים
3. עָלֵינוּ וְעַל כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל עֲמִיד.
4. בְּרַכְנוּ אֲבִינוּ כְּלָנוּ כְּאַחַד בְּאוֹר פָּנֶיךָ,   
 "the light of your presence"
5. כִּי בְאוֹר פָּנֶיךָ נִתַּת לָנוּ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ   
 "all-as one" "all-as if we are one"
6. תּוֹרַת חַיִּים וְאַהֲבַת חֶסֶד,   
 "love of kindness" "Tzedaakah of life"
7. וְצִדְקָה וּבְרָכָה וְרַחֲמִים וְחַיִּים וְשְׁלוֹם.   
 "Shalom" "life" "mercy" "Blessing" "Tzedakah"
8. וְטוֹב בְּעֵינֶיךָ לְבָרֵךְ אֶת עַמֶּךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל
9. בְּכָל עֵת וּבְכָל שָׁעָה בְּשָׁלוֹמְךָ.
10. בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה
11. הַמְּבָרֵךְ אֶת עַמּוֹ יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּשָׁלוֹם.

Why does this final בְּרָכָה ask for seven things?

The seven blessings mentioned here <sup>④</sup> <sup>③</sup> <sup>②</sup> <sup>①</sup>   
 תּוֹרַת חַיִּים וְאַהֲבַת חֶסֶד וְצִדְקָה וּבְרָכָה וְרַחֲמִים וְחַיִּים וְשְׁלוֹם   
 are all given us in God's light. This is the same number of colors as are found in a rainbow, the symbol of God's covenant which was put in the bow in the clouds after the flood. In the same way, the rainbow shows us God's sevenfold blessing.

Dr. Elie Munk



In the Temple, each of the daily services would end with the **Kohanim** asking God to bless Israel with peace. Because the rabbis saw תַּפִּלָּה as the replacement for the sacrifices, they ended the עֲמִידָה with a בְּרָכָה for peace, too. This last בְּרָכָה is called בְּרַכַּת הַכוֹהֲנִים, the priestly benediction, or שִׁים שְׁלוֹם (after its first words). Sometimes it is also called בְּרַכַּת שְׁלוֹם, the peace blessing.

In the Ashkenazic tradition, שִׁים שְׁלוֹם is said only at morning services. A second "peace prayer," שְׁלוֹם רַב, is said at מְנַחָה and מַעֲרִיב. Sefardim only say שְׁלוֹם רַב, they use it at all services.

Even though the last three brakhot of the עֲמִידָה are supposed to be prayers of **thanksgiving**, בְּרַכַּת הַכוֹהֲנִים is a request for peace, the most important of all בְּרָכוֹת.

# SHALOM שלום

All of the following words are built around the root [שלם].

שָׁלוֹם = Peace

שְׁלֵמוֹת = Wholeness

שָׁלוֹם = Hello

תְּשָׁלוֹם = Payment

שָׁלוֹם = Goodbye

מְשָׁלֵם = Perfect

שְׁלֹמֹה = Solomon

נִשְׁלַם = Was Completed

a. Based on all of these examples, what do you think the root [שלם] means?

b. Explain how "wholeness" is connected to "payment."

c. Explain how "Goodbye" is connected to "perfect."

d. The English word "peace" comes from the Latin root *Pax* which means "quiet." Based on their roots, how is שלום different than "peace?"

## CONCEPT: שלום

The Hebrew word שָׁלוֹם really means "wholeness" or "completeness." Peace, Hello, Good-bye, etc. are all expressions of being whole or complete. For Jews, יְרוּשָׁלַיִם, the Holy City, is the City which is the source of completion—the location from which all people will become one.

A בְּרָכָה for שָׁלוֹם is the last בְּרָכָה in the עֲמִידָה, because שָׁלוֹם is the final expression of all the other gifts God has given us. When everything comes together—we have not just no fighting, not just no conflict, not just "quiet"—we have something more—שָׁלוֹם.

# Commentary

## BLESSING

Why is "peace" the last בְּרָכָה (especially when we have already finished the petitions and are supposed to be giving thanks)?

Rabbi Mani of Sheav and Rabbi Joshua of Sichnin said in the name of Rabbi Levi:

Great is peace, for all of the בְּרָכוֹת and all of the good and comforting things which The Holy-One-Who-is-to-Be-Blessed does for Israel conclude with שְׁלוֹם. For example:

The וּפְרַשׁ עָלֵינוּ סִבַּת שְׁלוֹמָךְ which ends, "וּפְרַשׁ עָלֵינוּ סִבַּת שְׁלוֹמָךְ."

The בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ, עוֹשֵׂה הַשְׁלוֹם which ends, "בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ, עוֹשֵׂה הַשְׁלוֹם."

And וַיֵּשֶׁם לָךְ שְׁלוֹם which ends, "וַיֵּשֶׁם לָךְ שְׁלוֹם."

Leviticus Rabbah 9.9

The reason that this blessing for peace for all of Israel was attached to the end of the תְּפִלָּה is that at the end of every service in the Temple, the **Kohen** would bless the people of Israel...The תְּפִלוֹת were introduced by the rabbis to parallel the Temple service.

Abudraham

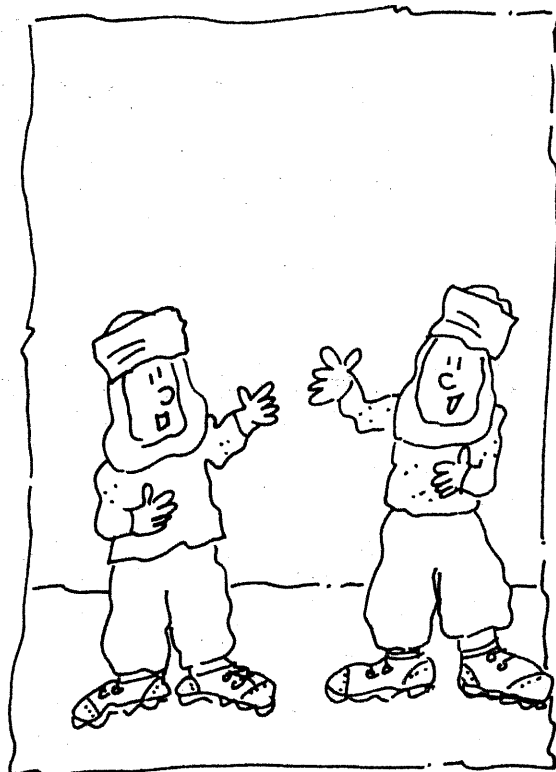
## What is the purpose of this בְּרָכָה?

There should be a תְּפִלָּה for peace, since nothing brings a greater blessing than peace. This is the best bond, the complete unification of the families of Israel.

When one prays for peace, he should pray that there be no fighting in Israel, no jealousy, hatred, or rivalry—but that all should love one another and be completely united in love, brotherhood, and friendship—that all Israel should be of one spirit, and all of them have in mind to fulfill the מִצְוָה "AND YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF." This is a מִצְוָה which expresses the entire תּוֹרָה. This, too, should be the objective of the תְּפִלָּה which is the ultimate תְּפִלָּה.

One should pray to be entirely free of the trait of anger, and to be humble towards all, because where there is anger, there is no peace.

Ya'arot Devash



# 3 Closing Meditation

## אלהי נצר לשוני מרע

<sup>1</sup> My God, guard my tongue from evil  
and my lips from speaking deceit.

<sup>2</sup> To those who insult me, may my soul  
be silent; may my soul be like dust to  
everyone. <sup>3</sup> Open my heart to your  
Torah, that my soul might pursue your  
commandments. <sup>4</sup> As for all who think  
evil of me, quickly bring their advice to  
naught and frustrate their plan. <sup>5</sup> Do this  
for the sake of your name, for the sake of  
your right hand, for the sake of your holi-  
ness, for the sake of your Torah. <sup>6</sup> For the  
sake of delivering your beloved, save with  
your right hand and answer me. <sup>7</sup> May  
the words of my mouth and the thoughts  
of my heart be favorable before You,  
Adonai, my rock and my redeemer. <sup>8</sup> May  
the One who brings peace on high bring  
peace to us and to all Israel. Say: Amen.

<sup>9</sup> May it be favorable before You, Adonai  
our God and our ancestors' God, that  
the Temple be speedily rebuilt in our day,  
and grant us a share in your Torah.

<sup>10</sup> There we will serve You in reverence,  
as in the ancient days and the earliest of  
years. <sup>11</sup> And the afternoon offering of  
Judah and Jerusalem will reach God, as in  
the ancient days and the earliest of years.

<sup>1</sup> אלהי נצר לשוני מרע ושפתי מדבר  
מרמה. <sup>2</sup> ולמקללי נפשי תדום ונפשי  
פעפר לכל תהיה. <sup>3</sup> פתח לבי בתורתך  
ובמצותיך תרדף נפשי. <sup>4</sup> וכל החושבים  
עלי רעה, מהרה הפר עצתם וקלקל  
מחשבתם. <sup>5</sup> עשה למען שמך עשה למען  
ימינך עשה למען קדשתך עשה למען  
תורתך. <sup>6</sup> למען יחלצון ידיך הושיעה  
ימינך וענני. <sup>7</sup> יהיו לרצון אמרי פי והגיון  
לבי לפניך יי צורי וגאלי. <sup>8</sup> עשה שלום  
במרומו הוא יעשה שלום עלינו ועל כל  
ישראל ואמרו אמן.

<sup>9</sup> יהי רצון מלפניך יי אלהינו ואלהי  
אבותינו שיבנה בית המקדש במהרה  
בנימינו ותן חלקנו בתורתך. <sup>10</sup> ושם נעבדך  
ביראה בימי עולם וכשנים קדמניות.  
<sup>11</sup> וערבך ליי מנחת יהודה וירושלים בימי  
עולם וכשנים קדמניות.

## BRETTLER (BIBLE)

"My God" This additional prayer exactly follows the typical pattern of the biblical lament. It opens with an invocation of God, *elohai*, "My God," continues with requests ("guard . . . frustrate their plan"), and adds a set of motivations ("Do this for the sake . . ."). The biblical and rabbinic liturgical pattern may be natural to human discourse. Compare: "Boss [invocation], please give me tomorrow morning off [request] so I can go to my daughter's school play [motivation]." This section is concluded by two biblical verses. The first ("May the words of my mouth . . .") is the conclusion of Ps. 19:15 and an appropriate ending both there and here.

The second verse is based on Job 25:2, which notes that God "makes peace in his heavens"

(*oseh shalom*

*bimromav*). This highly mythological verse about *shalom* concludes this prayer, echoing the final blessing's theme of *shalom*, "peace/well-being."

## CLOSING MEDITATION אֱלֹהֵי נֹצַר לְשׁוֹנֵי מִכָּר

<sup>1</sup> My God, guard my tongue from evil and my lips from speaking deceit. <sup>2</sup> To those who insult me, may my soul be silent; may my soul be like dust to everyone. <sup>3</sup> Open my heart to your Torah, that my soul might pursue your commandments.

## ELLENSON (MODERN LITURGIES)

*"That the Temple be speedily rebuilt in our day . . . and the afternoon offering of Judah and Jerusalem will reach God, as in the ancient days and the earliest of years."*

All non-Orthodox prayer books — Reform, Conservative, and Reconstructionist — have been of one mind in excising this paragraph. Conservative Jews are no more anxious for the restoration of the sacrificial cult than Reform Jews and Reconstructionists.

## J. HOFFMAN (TRANSLATION)

*"May my soul be like dust"* Birnbaum (Orthodox):

"lowly as dust." *Siddur Sim Shalom* (Conservative): "humble."

*"Your right hand"*

Birnbaum (Orthodox): "power."

*"Say [v'imru]"* The popular "and let us say" is more convenient, but wrong. Artscroll (Orthodox) suggests "respond."

*"Rebuilt"* Literally, "Built."

*"Earliest of"* Literally, "Early." (p. 191)

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## LANDES (HALAKHAH)

"My God, guard my tongue from evil"

This personal meditation at the end of the *Amidah* may be omitted in times of emergency or even in just a pressing situation, even though, halakhically speaking, it is technically considered to be part of the *Amidah*. This is a proper spot to pray personally, in any language, for all of one's needs, and especially for the spiritual welfare and Jewish continuity of one's children and descendants (*Mishnah B'rurah*). At the words near the end, *Oseh shalom* ("May the One who brings peace"), as taking leave of a sovereign, bow the back and head (but not the knees), and take three steps backward.

Turn to the left and say *Oseh shalom bimromav*; then bow forward while saying the next word, *hu*, and continue to the

right for *ya'aseh shalom alenu*. Begin taking three steps forward now, still in the bowed position, and say *v'al kol yisrael v'imru amen*. If you can wait that long, it is customary not to walk forward until the prayer leader actually begins the repetition of the *Amidah*, or even (if possible) until he is about to begin the *Kdushah*. Nonetheless, you can walk forward earlier if necessary.

## L. HOFFMAN (HISTORY)

THE AMIDAH ENDS WITH AN OPPORTUNITY FOR PRIVATE WORDS WITH GOD. TRADITION PROVIDES A MEDITATION FOR THOSE WHO WISH, BUT ANY WORDS ARE APPROPRIATE HERE, AS WORSHIPERS ARE ENCOURAGED TO ENGAGE GOD IN SILENT DIALOGUE.

"My God, guard my tongue from evil"

Originally, private prayer was offered after the *Sh'ma* and Its Blessings (the rubric that now precedes the *Amidah*). When Gamaliel II ordained the *Amidah*, he wanted to be sure people said it, so he banned private prayer there. People thus moved their private prayer to the end of the *Amidah*.

The Talmud provides several examples of private prayers by the Rabbis of old, and this is one of them, attributed to

Mar bar Ravina, a late Babylonian master. Somehow, by the ninth century, it had become popular in the academies of Babylonia, and when Amram Gaon codified our first known prayer book (see Volume 1, *The Sh'ma and Its Blessings*, p. 8), he included this prayer as a fitting meditation for people who had nothing that they wanted to say on their own.

(p. 191)

<sup>1</sup> אֱלֹהֵי, נִצַּר לְשׁוֹנִי מִרָע וּשְׁפָתִי מִדִּבָּר  
מִרָמָה. <sup>2</sup> וְלִמְקַלְלִי נִפְשִׁי תִדּוּם וְנִפְשִׁי  
כְּעֶפֶר לְכָל תִּהְיֶה. <sup>3</sup> פְּתַח לְבִי בְּתוֹרָתְךָ  
וּבְמִצְוֹתֶיךָ תִּרְדּוּף נִפְשִׁי.

## SECTION 3

## J. HOFFMAN (TRANSLATION)

"*Reach God*" Sacrifice was apparently thought of as something earth-bound that could be converted by the flame into smoke that reaches God. The whole point was that only by consuming the offering on a fire could it find its way on high. By contrast, Birnbaum and Artschall (both Orthodox) prefer "be pleasing to God," thereby emphasizing God's will in accepting it.

## L. HOFFMAN (HISTORY)

The first prayer book in Europe came into being in eleventh-century France, a work called *Machzor Vitry* ("The book of annual prayers composed by [Rabbi Simchah from the town of] Vitry"). Holding Amram in high regard, the author of this book simply tells people to say whatever Amram advocated. No longer can readers make up their own prayer at all! And with that decision, Jewish prayer dropped the original idea of reserving a spot for private meditation in the midst of public worship.

From time to time, rabbis spoke out against the omission, but the printing press virtually ended the matter by printing Mar's prayer and making it normative for everyone who read the prayers from a book and did whatever it asked of them, but no more and no less. A century ago, Reform Judaism reinstated a period of "silent devotion" here, and nowadays, it is common in all movements for Jews to offer their own prayers, either in addition to Rav's masterpiece, or in place of it. *Siddur Sim Shalom* (Conservative), for instance, says, "At the conclusion of the *Amidah*, personal prayers may be added." The Reconstructionist *Kol Haneshamah* provides two guided meditations along with a kabbalistic diagram, as well as Mar's prayer, with the further instructions, "If this prayer does not speak to you, make up your own."



# TELUSHKIN, 'A CODE OF JEWISH ETHICS'

## APPENDIX

### THE NINE MOST IMPORTANT COMMANDMENTS ACCORDING TO THE RABBIS

At various places in rabbinic writings, the Rabbis identified nine commandments as being of equal significance with all the other commandments combined. In some instances (e.g., number 2 below), the Rabbis were clearly speaking hyperbolically, and their words should not be taken literally.

1. **Charity.** Rabbi Assi taught that "The commandment of giving charity is equal to all the other commandments combined" (*Bava Bathra* 9a). This teaching is perhaps what motivated Maimonides' previously cited ruling that "We are to be more particular about the commandment of charity than about any other positive commandment" ("Laws of Gifts to the Poor" 10:1).

2. **Lashon hara** (unfair speech about another person). "For these acts they punish a person in this world, while the principal (i.e., eternal punishment) remains for the World-to-Come: for idolatrous worship, incest, and murder, and for *lashon hara*, which is worse than all of them together" (*Tosefta, Peah* 1:2). Gossip and unfair speech are great wrongs (see chapters 37-43), but can one seriously consider them worse than idolatry, incest, and murder? This would seem to be an exaggeration designed to emphasize the seriousness of an act that most people regard as minor.

3. **Tzitzit** (the ritual fringes commanded in the Book of Numbers). "The Lord said to Moses: Speak to the Israelite people and instruct them to make for themselves fringes on the corners of their garments throughout the ages. . . . look at it and recall all the commandments of the Lord and observe them, so that you do not follow your heart and eyes in your lustful urge. Thus you shall be reminded to observe all My commandments and to be holy to your God"; 15:37-40). Because this commandment reminds us to practice all

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the others, the Talmud taught that "the observance of this mitzvah (*tzitzit*) is equivalent to the observance of all the commandments combined" (*Menachot* 43b). However, we should note that the Rabbis mandated the observance of *tzitzit* as required only for Jewish men; it seems odd, therefore, that a commandment that "is equivalent to the observance of all the commandments combined" applies to only half of the Jewish people.

4. *Brit Milah*. "Great is circumcision, for it is equal to all of the commandments in the Torah" (*Nedarim* 32a; see also *The Midrash on Psalms* 6:1). Circumcision symbolizes the willingness to submit even one's sexual organ to the rule of God.

As is the case with *tzitzit*, this commandment applies to only half of the Jewish people.

5. *Shabbat*. "Rabbi Levi taught, 'If the Jews observe the Sabbath properly, even just once, the Son of David [i.e., the Messiah] will come. Why? Because the observance of the Sabbath is equal to all the other commandments combined'" (*Exodus Rabbah* 25:12). Later, the same passage describes God as saying to the Jewish people: "If you . . . observe the Sabbath, I will regard it as if you kept all the commandments in the Torah, and if you desecrate the Sabbath, I will regard it as if you violated all the commandments." The Talmud also sees the violation of Shabbat as a singular evil: "Jerusalem was destroyed only because the Sabbath was desecrated there" (*Shabbat* 119b).\*

6. Settling the Land of Israel. "Living in the land of Israel is equivalent to performing all the commands of the Torah" (*Sifre Devarim, parashat Re'eh* 28).

Chief Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook (1865-1935) was influenced by this and similar teachings to view with great love and admiration nonreligious Jews who came to settle in the Land of Israel. After all, even secular settlers in Israel obeyed a commandment that some of the ancient Rabbis viewed as equal in importance to all the other commandments.

7. Not worshipping idols. So basic is the rejection of idolatry to Jewish identity that the Talmud teaches that "whoever repudiates idolatry is called a Jew" (*Megillah* 13a);† in another passage, the Talmud teaches that "Anyone who renounces idolatry is like one that acknowledges [the truth of] the en-

\*The Talmud was speaking about the destruction of Jerusalem and the First Temple in 586 B.C.E.

†In the context of the quote, it seems to mean, "Whoever repudiates idolatry is called a member of the tribe of Judah."

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tire Torah" (*Kiddushin* 40a). Maimonides instructs those who are dealing with potential converts to "inform them of the essence of the faith, which is the oneness of God and the prohibition of idolatry" ("Laws of Forbidden Relations" 14:2).

8. *Talmud Torah* (study of Torah). "The following are the activities for which a person is rewarded in this world, and again in the World-to-Come: honoring one's father and mother, deeds of loving-kindness, and making peace between a man and his neighbor. The study of Torah, however, is as important as all of them together" (*Mishna Peah* 1:1; see also *Kiddushin* 40a). On the reason for the importance of Torah study in Jewish life, see page 496.

9. **Making interest-free loans.** "He who lends money without interest [i.e., to those in serious need] is regarded as if he fulfilled all the commandments" (*Exodus Rabbah* 31:13).\*

In a post-rabbinic source, the *Shulchan Arukh* rules that there is no *mitzvah* greater than *pidyon shvuyim*, "redeeming captives" (*Yoreh Deah* 252:1, based on Maimonides, "Laws of Gifts to the Poor" 8:10).

The laws concerning the redeeming of captives will be explained in volume 2 of this work.

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overwhelming majority of the Jews at the time of the Talmud were assumed to derive from the tribe of Judah. The other tribes had been dispersed by the Assyrians in 722 B.C.E., and had disappeared.

\*See also *Makkot* 24a, which speaks approvingly of not charging non-Jews interest (based on Psalms 15:5), even though biblical law permits one to do so.

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## Rabbi Israel Meir haKohen Kagan (known as the Chafetz Chayim, 1838-1933)

"יְהִי עֵינֶיךָ רְאוּת אֶת מִדְרֵיךְ" (ישעיה ל ט)



תמונת מו"ר החפץ חיים זצ"ל

Rabbi, ethical writer and talmudist, the Rabbi Israel Meir haKohen was one of the most saintly figures in modern Judaism. Of humble origins, he was taught until the age of ten by his parents and then went to Vilna where he continued his studies. He did not distinguish himself as a student; nevertheless, he later towered above all his contemporaries in his qualities of religious leadership. He became universally known as the Chafetz Chayim, after the title of his first work. His personality, his piety, his humility of conduct, his integrity of thought and action, together with his books exercised a tremendous influence on religious leaders and fascinated the masses to whom he became the admired master and leader. Hundreds of sayings full of practical wisdom are attributed to him, and hundreds of stories both factual and legendary, all rich in morals, are reported about his life.

When he was 35 he published anonymously in Vilna (1873) his first book, Chafetz Chayim, devoted entirely to an exposition of the primary importance of the laws of slander, gossip and tale bearing. Throughout his life, he laid great emphasis on the careful observance of these laws, so generally neglected in spite of the fact that their transgression involves the violation of numerous prohibitions. In 1879 he published another book on the same subject and a third in 1925. He even composed a special prayer to be recited every morning asking for protection from the sins of slander and gossip. The best known and most widely studied book is his six volume halachic work the Mishna Berurah (1894-1907), a comprehensive commentary on Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chayim) which has been accepted as an indispensable reference book on practical everyday Jewish living.