

From Nothing to Nothing: Finding your own Voice in Prayer

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- Imagine you know nothing about Jewish prayer. How would you observe this verse:

Deuteronomy 11:13

If, then, you obey the commandments that I enjoin upon you this day, **loving** the ETERNAL your God and **rendering service** with all your heart and soul.

וְהָיָה אִם-שָׁמַעַתְּ אֶת-מִצְוֹתַי אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי מְצַוֶּה
אֶתְכֶם הַיּוֹם לְאַהֲבָה אֶת-יְיָ
אֱלֹהֵיכֶם וּלְעֹבְדוֹ בְּכָל-
לְבַבְכֶם וּבְכָל-נַפְשְׁכֶם:

- How does the Talmud interpret the verse?

Babylonian Talmud Tractate Ta'anit 2a

The Gemara asks: And from where do we derive that rain must be mentioned specifically in the *Amida* prayer? The Gemara answers: As it was taught in a *baraita* with regard to the verse: "To love the Lord your God..." (Deuteronomy 11:13). Which is the service of God that is performed in the heart? **You must say that this is referring to prayer.** And, afterward, it is written: "And I shall give the rain of your land in its due time, the first

וּמִנָּא לַן דְּבִתְפִלָּה – דִּתְנִינָא:
"לְאַהֲבָה אֶת ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם
וּלְעֹבְדוֹ בְּכָל לְבַבְכֶם," אִיזוּ
– הִיא עֲבוּדָה שֶׁהִיא בִּלְבָב
הָיִי אוֹמֵר: זוֹ תְּפִלָּה
וּכְתִיב בְּתַרְיָה: "וְנָתַתִּי מָטָר
אֶרְצְכֶם בְּעֵתוֹ יוֹרֵה
וּמִלְקוֹשׁ"

rain and the last rain” (Deuteronomy 11:14).	
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- How does Maimonides understand our obligation to pray?

Maimonides’ Mishneh Torah: The Laws of Prayer and the Priestly Blessing 1:1 (12th Century)

It is a positive Torah commandment to pray every day...The number of prayers is not prescribed in the Torah , nor does it prescribe a specific formula for prayer. Also, according to Torah law , there are no fixed times for prayers.	מִצְוֹת עֲשֵׂה לְהִתְפַּלֵּל בְּכָל יוֹם וְאֵין מִנִּין הַתְּפִלוֹת מִן וְאֵין מִשְׁנֵה הַתְּפִלָּה. הַתּוֹרָה וְאֵין. הַזֹּאת מִן הַתּוֹרָה לְתְּפִלָּה זְמַן קָבוֹעַ מִן הַתּוֹרָה
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- If everyone prayed according to Maimonides’ opinion, what would Jewish prayer look like?

Personal Prayer – Reflection Questions

1. Do you ever pray personal prayers outside of synagogue services?
2. Do you generally add personal prayers in synagogue? Are the High Holidays different?
3. What are your personal prayers about? Yourself? Your loved ones? Your community? The world?

Excerpts from Babylonian Talmud Tractate Berakhot 16b-17a

- Is this a personal prayer?
- What do you appreciate/not appreciate about this prayer?
- Would you pray this prayer? If so, in what context?
- Would you consider writing your own prayer? If so, what would it be?

After his prayer, Rava said the following: My God, before I was created I was worthless, and now that I have been created it is as if I had not been created, I am no more significant. I am dust in life, all the more so in my death. I am before You as a vessel filled with shame and humiliation. Therefore, may it be Your will, Lord my God, that I will sin no more, and that those transgressions that I have committed, cleanse in Your abundant mercy; but may this cleansing not be by means of suffering and serious illness, but rather in a manner I will be able to easily endure. And this is the confession of Rav Hamnuna Zuti on Yom Kippur.	רַבָּא בְּתַר צְלוּתֵיהּ אָמַר הָכִי אֱלֹהִי, עַד שְׁלֹא נִוצַרְתִּי // אֵינִי כְּדָאִי, וְעַכְשָׁיו שְׁנוּצַרְתִּי כְּאֵלוֹ לֹא נִוצַרְתִּי. עֶפֶר אָנִי בְּחַיִּי, קָל וְחוֹמֶר בְּמִיתָתִי, הָרִי אָנִי לְפָנֶיךָ כְּכֵל מָלֵא בוֹשָׁה וּכְלִימָה. יְהִי רְצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ ה' אֱלֹהִי, שְׁלֹא אֶחָטָא עוֹד, וּמָה שְׁחָטָאתִי לְפָנֶיךָ מֶרֶק בְּרַחֲמֶיךָ הָרָבִים, אֲבָל לֹא עַל יְדֵי // יְסוּרִין וְחֻלָּאִים רָעִים וְהֵינִנּוּ וַיְדוּי דְּרַב הַמְנוּנָא זוּטִי בְיוֹמָא דְּכַפּוּרִי
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When Mar, son of Ravina, would conclude his prayer, he said the following: My God, guard my tongue from evil and my lips from speaking deceit. To those who curse me let my soul be silent and may my soul be like dust to all. Open my heart to	מֶר בְּרִיָּה דְּרַבִּינָא כִּי הָוָה מְסִיִּים צְלוּתֵיהּ אָמַר הָכִי אֱלֹהִי, נִצּוֹר לְשׁוֹנִי מִרַע // וּשְׁפָתוֹתַי מִדִּבֵּר מִרְמָה,
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Your Torah, and may my soul pursue your mitzvot. And save me from a bad mishap, from the evil inclination, from a bad woman, and from all evils that suddenly come upon the world. And all who plan evil against me, swiftly thwart their counsel, and frustrate their plans. May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart find favor before You, Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.

וְלִמְקַלְלִי נַפְשִׁי תְּדוּם, וְנַפְשִׁי
כָּעֶפֶר לְכָל תְּהִיָּה. פֶּתַח לְבִי
בְּתוֹרֶתְךָ, וּבְמִצְוֹתֶיךָ תִּרְדּוּף
נַפְשִׁי. וְתַצִּילֵנִי מִפְּנֵעַ רָע,
מִיֵּצֵר הָרָע, וּמֵאִשָּׁה רָעָה,
וּמִכָּל רָעוֹת הַמִּתְרַגְּשׁוֹת לְבָא
וְכָל הַחֹשְׁבִים עָלַי. בְּעוֹלָם
רָעָה מְהֵרָה הִפֵּר עֲצָתָם
יְהִיוּ. וְקַלְקַל מַחֲשַׁבּוֹתָם
לְרָצוֹן אֲמַרִי כִּי וְהִגִּיוֹן לְבִי
”לִפְנֶיךָ ה' צוּרִי וְגֹאֲלִי

Yom Kippur Mahzor

God, before I was formed, I was unworthy [to be created]. And now that I have been formed, it is as if I had not been formed. I am like dust while I live, how much more so when I am dead. Here I am before You like a vessel filled with shame.
May it be Your will, Adonai, my God, **and the God of my ancestors**, that I shall sin no more, and the sins I have committed before You, cleanse them in Your abundant mercies; but not through suffering and severe illness.

אֱלֹהֵי. עַד שֶׁלֹּא נֻצַּרְתִּי אֲיִנִּי
כְּדָאִי, וְעַכְשָׁיו שֶׁנֻּצַּרְתִּי כְּאֵלוֹ
לֹא נֻצַּרְתִּי. עֶפֶר אָנִי בְּחַיִּי.
קָל וְחֶמֶר בְּמִיתָתִי. הֲרִי אָנִי
לִפְנֶיךָ כְּכֵלִי מָלֵא בּוֹשָׁה
וּכְלָמָה

יְהִי רָצוֹן מִלִּפְנֶיךָ יְהִי אֱלֹהֵי
וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתַי שֶׁלֹּא אֶחֱטָא
עוֹד. וּמָה שֶׁחֲטָאתִי לִפְנֶיךָ
מֶרֶק בְּרַחֲמֶיךָ הַרְבִּים. אֲבָל

לֹא עַל יְדֵי יִסּוּרִים וְחַלְלִים
רְעִים:

Siddur (every day)

My God, guard my tongue from evil and my lips from speaking deceitfully. May my soul be unresponsive to those who curse me; and let my soul be like dust to all. Open my heart to Your Torah and let my soul pursue Your commandments. **And** all who plan evil against me, quickly annul their counsel and frustrate their intention. **Act for the sake of Your right hand. Act for the sake of Your holiness. Act for the sake of Your Torah. In order that Your loved ones be released, deliver [with] Your right hand and answer me.** May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of my heart be acceptable before You Adonai, my Rock and my Redeemer.

אֱלֹהֵי נְצוּר לְשׁוֹנֵי מַרְעַ וּשְׁפָתִי
מִדְּבַר מִרְמָה. וְלִמְקַלְלִי נִפְשִׁי
תִּדּוּם וְנִפְשִׁי כְּעָפָר לְכָל
תְּהִיָּה. פֶּתַח לִבִּי בְּתוֹרָתְךָ
וְכָל. וּבְמִצְוֹתֶיךָ תִּרְדֶּךָ נִפְשִׁי
הַחוֹשְׁבִים עָלַי רָעָה מְהֵרָה
הַפֵּר עֲצָתָם וְקַלְקַל מַחֲשַׁבְתָּם:
עֲשֵׂה לְמַעַן שְׁמֶךָ עֲשֵׂה לְמַעַן
יִמְיִנְךָ עֲשֵׂה לְמַעַן קֹדֶשְׁתְּךָ
עֲשֵׂה לְמַעַן תּוֹרָתְךָ. לְמַעַן
יִחַלְצוּן יְדִידֶיךָ הוֹשִׁיעָה
יְהִיו לְרִצּוֹן: יִמְיִנְךָ וְעֲנֵנִי
אֲמַרִּי פִי וְהִגִּיוֹן לִבִּי לְפָנֶיךָ
יְהִי צוּרִי וְגֹאֲלִי