

SUPPLEMENT

The Book: **אוצר התפילה** By Rabbi David Cohen

The organization that sponsors the publication of the **אנציקלופדיה התלמודית**, the Talmidic Encyclopedia, recently published a one volume work entitled: **אוצר התפילה**. The book follows the same pattern used in the entire **אנציקלופדיה התלמודית** series, providing background and then rules. This volume employs that format to furnish the background to **פסוקי דזמרה** and **שמונה עשרה** and the rules that pertain to those two sections of the **סידור**. The book offers a concise summary of each topic while including extensive footnotes that allow its readers to supplement the information provided in the text. Teachers may find this book to be an excellent starting point for developing a basic course in **תפלה**.

I was very impressed by the introduction provided to the work by Rabbi Avrohom Steinberg, Dean of Yad Ha'Rav Herzog and chief editor of the Encyclopedia Ha'Talmudit series. I have taken the liberty of translating much of his introduction into English:

הקדמה-Introduction

A great act of compassion was performed by G-d on behalf of his creations when He consented to their turning to Him with words of prayer, with requests and supplications, on any day and at any hour. (See the comments of the Ramban to the Rambam's Sefer Ha'Mitzvot Positive Commandment Number 5). In contrast, no mortal king has ever permitted his subjects to approach him directly whenever they pleased. This means that any Jew can pour out his heart to G-d to the best of his ability, in any language and in any style. That is manner in which the Rambam describes early Jewish prayer:

The way to perform this obligation is as follows: a person should supplicate and pray each day. He should express praise of G-d and then ask for the fulfillment of his immediate needs by stating his requests and by supplicating. He should then utter words of praise and thanks to G-d for the good that G-d bears to him; everyone according to his ability. If he is accustomed to praying, he should say much supplication and request. But if he has difficulty expressing himself, he should speak to the best of his ability, whenever he can. The number of times he prays should be according to his ability as well. There were those who prayed once a day and there were those who prayed several times a day. Everyone should pray facing towards the Holy Temple no matter where they are situated. That is the way prayer was performed from the time of Moshe Rabbenu to the time of Ezra.

Indeed, we find that the first man, Adom, prayed to G-d:

Because no rain had fallen-no rain had fallen because G-d's initial intent was that Man not work the soil and thus, would have never learned of the benefits that rain brings. When Man's role changed and he began to recognize that the world needed rain, he prayed for rain and rain fell. The trees and the grasses then began to grow. (Rashi Bereishit 2, 5).

So too we learn of the prayers of our Forefathers, of Moshe Rabbeinu, of King David and King Solomon and of the prayers of other great leaders of the Jewish People, as well as the prayers of simple people referred to in Tanach, listed for us in this book by the author at the beginning of chapter three of the section of the book devoted to Shemona Esrei.

As a result, the power of prayer -as service of the heart (Maseches Ta'Anis 2a)- is great and powerful particularly when it is recited employing the words and following the linguistic style provided for us by Ezra and his court and the Men of the Great Assembly. Added to those prayers were the words of the poets who composed their poetry in the days of the Geonim and during the period of the Rabbinic authorities of the High Middle Ages, to be recited at the times set by Halacha. And although the Rabbinic authorities of the High Middle Ages disagreed as to whether the requirement to pray regularly was a Torah mandated Mitzvah or that only prayer in times of crisis fell into that category, they all agreed that praying while following the fixed text set by our Sages, together with any changes to the text that our ancestors instituted, was a Rabbinic mandated Mitzvah, to be recited at set times and on set days, as established by Halacha.

The development of the basic set of Tefilot, their fixed text and style, is described by the Rambam as follows:

After Jews were forced into exile by Nebechednezzar the evil one (after the destruction of first Temple), Jews mingled with the Persians and Greeks and other nations. They gave birth to children among the Nations of the non-Jewish world. Those children found that their spoken language was a combination of many languages. When they would speak, they could not express their entire thoughts in one language but as a mixture of languages. So we learn in Nehemia chapter 13, verse 24: "and their children speak half Ashdodite and they did not know how to speak Hebrew. They speak the language of each nation." Therefore when one of them wished to pray, he ran short of the Hebrew words with which to ask for his needs or with which to praise G-d. As a result, he mixed together words from a variety of languages. When Ezra and his court noticed this problem, they authored the 18 Brachot (Shemona Esrei) to be recited in a set order; the first three Brachot containing praise of G-d; the last three Brachot, words of thanks to G-d; and the middle Brachot, words of request for personal and communal needs. The Brachot

were composed so that everyone would say the Brachot in the same order and they would recite the same text. As a result, the prayers of those who might have had difficulty expressing themselves became a complete prayer equal to the prayers of those who had a strong command of the Hebrew language. In the same manner, our Sages established that the number of prayers recited daily match the number of sacrifices that were once brought each day in the Beis Hamikdash.

Siddurim began to appear only during the period of the Geonim: The Siddur of Rav Natroni Gaon which he compiled for the Jewish community of Lucena, Spain, and the Siddur of Rav Amrom Gaon, head of the Yeshiva in Sura, that was compiled on behalf of the Jewish Community in Barcelona, Spain in the year 875 CE. Rav Amrom's Siddur was written on animal skin and copies of it were sent to Jewish communities around the world. This Siddur was published in book form in Warsaw, 1865 and later in Yerushalayim-Frumkin edition in the year 1912. It became the foundation of all Siddurim compiled by the various Jewish communities. That era also provided us with the Siddur of Rav Sa'Adiya Gaon which was accepted by Jewish communities in Egypt and in other Arab countries.

From the period of the Rabbinic authorities of the High Middle Ages, we have the Siddur of the Rambam and the Machzor Vitry, written by Rabbi Simcha, son of Shmuel, a student of Rashi, the first Siddur to capture the text employed by the Jews of France.

The compilation of the prayers for Shabbos and weekdays became known as a Siddur while the compilation of prayers for the major holidays (Pesach, Shavuot and Succot), the Yomim Noraim (Rosh Hashonah and Yom Kippur) was established as a separate book and was given the name Machzor.

The wording of the basic prayers found in the Siddur is fixed, but in its details we find variations among the communities and we find that the customs concerning prayer varied. This fact about the Siddur has existed since the first Siddurim were compiled. It began as a difference between the wording of the Tefilot as recited by Jews in Eretz Yisroel and by Jews who resided in Babylonia. Subsequently the variations in wording grew among the Jewish communities spread throughout the world. We can now identify several primary Nuscha'Ot-Nusach Ashkenaz, Nusach Sfarad of European Jewry, Nusach Sepharad of the Jews from Islamic countries and Nusach Teiman (Yemenite). In addition, within the primary Nuscha'Ot we find additional variations; for example, Nusach Ar"i, the Roman Rite, the German Rite and others. Over the years, commentaries on the versions of the Tefilot were composed using the standard methods of Jewish study-P'Shat, Remez, Derash, Sod, Halacha, custom and others.

The Siddur became the book most frequently utilized within Jewish communities, wherever situated and in every era-on weekdays, Shabbos and on holidays. With the Siddur in his hand, a Jew begins his day by reciting Modeh Ani and with it he concludes his day by

reciting Kriyas Shema Al Ha'Mitah (the bedtime Shema).

Indeed, since the time that the wording of the Tefilot was composed and the time to recite them was established, detailed rules concerning the proper way to recite the Tefilot developed. Deep and grand meanings were embedded into the words of the prayers by those who composed them. To that were added many details on how to properly recite the words so that a person who carefully follows the rules merits encountering G-d's presence and developing a close relationship with the Creator of the World.

We owe a debt of gratitude to Rabbi David Cohen who produced a great and honorable work by gathering, like a farmer harvesting his crops, all the variations in Nusach and all the details of the Halachot and the many customs that pertain to Pseukei D'Zimra and Shemona Esrei. This comprehensive and fundamental work was performed by Rabbi Cohen during the years 5723-5724 in preparation for the composition of those two topics for the Encyclopedia Ha'Talmudit.