

## Defining Jewish Prayer

Goal Of This Lesson:

To teach the students that the **סידור**, the fixed text, is only one form of Jewish prayer and not the only form of Jewish Prayer. The following represent forms of Jewish prayer:

1. Spontaneous prayer;
2. Prayer in times of difficulty;
3. The fixed prayers (the Siddur);
4. Personal prayers that are added to the fixed prayers;
5. Non-verbal acts of prayer-sitting, standing, bowing, Shofar blowing, etc.
6. Vows.

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### *Spontaneous prayer*

You will be hard pressed to find any references to spontaneous prayer in Rabbinic literature. However, the absence of such a discussion should not be interpreted as a prohibition against doing so. In fact, spontaneous prayer is one of the oldest form of Jewish prayer and the composition of the fixed text was never meant to discourage spontaneous prayer. How do we define spontaneous prayer? A desire to express oneself by creating a prayer without waiting to recite the prayer as part of the next formal prayer service.

That spontaneous prayer is one of the oldest forms of Jewish prayer can be demonstrated from the statements made by the **רמב"ם** in declaring his position that reciting a prayer every day has been a requirement in Judaism since the Torah was given to the Jewish People, a **מצוה מדאורייתא**, a Torah mandated law. At the same time, he acknowledges that despite being a **מצוה מדאורייתא**, the form of that prayer did not initially follow a fixed text. It was a spontaneous prayer that was to be recited once a day and which needed to include words that fulfilled the following formula: words of praise, followed by words of request, followed by words of thanks.

There is no reason to believe that the formula for spontaneous prayer that the **רמב"ם** provided disappeared simply because our Sages composed a fixed text for the prayer services. A good practice to follow is to formulate your spontaneous prayer along the lines of the formula put forth by the **רמב"ם**. For example, if you suddenly learn that someone close to you is very ill and you do not want to wait to add a request for that person's recovery until the next prayer service, you can say: G-d, healer of the sick (words of praise), please bring a full and speedy recovery to . . . (words of request). Thank you, G-d, for providing cures to the sick (words of thanks).

To understand the role that spontaneous prayer plays within Jewish prayer, it is worth reviewing the statements of the רמב"ם:

רמב"ם – הלכות תפלה פרק א', הלכה א' – מצות עשה להתפלל בכל יום שנאמר ועבדתם את ה' אלוהיכם. מפי השמועה למדו שעבודה זו היא תפלה שנאמר ולעבדו בכל לבבכם. אמרו חכמים אי זו היא עבודה שבלב זו תפלה. ואין מנין התפלות מן התורה, ואין משנה התפלה הזאת מן התורה, ואין לתפלה זמן קבוע מן התורה.

*Translation: It is a positive commandment to pray each day as it is written: and you shall serve G-d. From divine inspiration, they taught that service is prayer as it is written: And to serve Him with all your hearts. Our sages said: what is service of the heart? That is prayer. And the number of prayers to pray each day is not decreed by the Torah; and the wording of the prayers is not decreed by the Torah and the Torah does not set forth a set time each day for prayer.*

הלכה ב' – ולפיכך נשים ועבדים חייבין בתפלה לפי שהיא מצות עשה שלא הזמן גרמא אלא חיוב מצוה זו כך הוא שיהא אדם מתחנן ומתפלל בכל יום ומגיד שבחו של הקדוש ברוך הוא ואחר כך שואל צרכיו שהוא צריך להם בבקשה ובתחנה ואחר כך נותן שבה והודיה לה' על הטובה שהשפיע לו, כל אחד לפי כחו.

*Translation: Therefore, women and slaves are obligated to perform the mitzvah of praying because it is a positive commandment that does not have a fixed time but the way to perform this obligation is in this way: that a person should supplicate and pray each day and should state the praise of G-d and then should ask for his needs that he needs by request and by supplicating and then should give praise and thanks to G-d for the good that G-d bears to him, everyone according to his ability.*

הלכה ג' – אם היה רגיל מרבה בתחנה ובקשה ואם היה ערל שפתים מדבר כפי יכולתו ובכל עת שירצה, וכן מנין התפלות כל אחד כפי יכולתו, יש מתפלל פעם אחת ביום, ויש מתפללין פעמים הרבה, והכל יהיו מתפללין נכח המקדש בכל מקום שיהיה, וכן היה הדבר תמיד ממש רבינו ועד עזרא.

*Translation: If he was accustomed to praying, he should say much supplication and requests. But if he had difficulty expressing himself, he should speak to the best of his ability and whenever he could and the number of times he prays should be according to his ability. There were those who prayed once a day; there were those who prayed several times a day. Everyone should pray facing towards the Holy Temple no matter where he is situated. And that is the way things were from the time of Moses to the time of Ezra.*

### *Prayer in times of difficulty*

The רמב"ן disagrees with the רמב"ם's position that every Jew has been obligated to recite a prayer each day since מתן תורה, the day the Torah was given to the Jewish People. In his opinion, the only Torah mandated prayer consisted of prayer during times of difficulty. The רמב"ן's position provides us with a second form of Jewish Prayer that pre-dates the סידור; i.e. prayer in times of difficulty. This is how the רמב"ן expresses his opinion :

השנות הרמב"ן לספר המצוות מצות עשה ה'–ומה שדרשו בספרי (עקב) ולעבדו זה התלמוד ד"א זו תפלה אסמכתא היא או לומר שמכלל העבודה, שנלמוד תורה ושנתפלל אליו בעת הצרות ותהיינה עינינו ולבנו אליו לבדו כעיני עבדים אל יד אדוניהם. וזה כענין שכתוב (בהעלותך י', ט') וכי תבאו מלחמה בארצכם על הצר הצורך אתכם והרעותם בחצוצרות ונזכרתם לפני י–י א–להיכם. והיא מצוה על כל צרה וצרה שתבא על הצבור לצעוק לפניו בתפלה ובתרועה והוא הענין שבאר שלמה ע"ה כמו שכתוב (מ"א ח', לה', לז'–לח', דה"ב ו) בהעצר השמים ולא יהיה מטר וכתוב רעב כי יהיה דבר כי יהיה שדפון ירקון ארבה חסיל כי יהיה כי יצר לו אויבו בארץ שעריו כל נגע כל מחלה כל תפלה כל תחנה אשר יהיה לכל האדם לכל עמך ישראל אשר ידעו איש נגע לבבו ופרש כפיו אל הבית הזה.

*Translation: That which was taught in the Midrash Sifrei that the words to serve G-d represent study or prayer did not consist of a commandment but consisted of good advice or to indicate that as part of the requirement to serve G-d we should study Torah or pray to G-d in times of trouble; that our eyes and hearts should be pointed towards G-d in the same manner that servants turn to their masters. This is in line with what we learned (Bamidbar 10, 9): And if you go to war in your land against an enemy who oppresses you, then you shall blow an alarm with the trumpets; and you shall be remembered before the Lord your G-d, and you shall be saved from your enemies. This verse represents the Mitzvah to cry out to G-d in prayer and with Shofar blowing each and every time the Jewish community is faced with difficulties. This was further explained by King Solomon: (Melachim 1, 8, 35, 37-38): When heaven is closed, and there is no rain, etc., If there is in the land famine, if there is pestilence, blasting, mildew, locust, or if there is caterpillar; if their enemy besiege them in the land of their cities; whatever plague, whatever sickness there might be; Whatever prayer and supplication is made by any man, or by all your people Israel, who shall know every man the plague of his own heart, and spread out his hands toward this house.*

The רמב"ן's view that prayer at times of difficulties is a Torah-mandated obligation has significant implications for our prayer services today. Prayers recited during the Shabbat prayer service for the State Of Israel, for the IDF or for Israeli soldiers in captivity all fall into the category of prayers being recited because of difficulties. As a result, we face the following anomaly in our prayer services; our recital of **שמונה עשרה**, the Prayer of 18 (19) Benedictions is deemed to be a **מצוה מדרבנן**, a Rabbinically mandated Mitzvah, while the prayers we recite for the State Of Israel, for the IDF or for Israeli soldiers in captivity, are viewed as **מצוות מדאורייתא**, Torah mandated requirements. As a result special attention should be given to the prayers we recite on behalf of the State Of Israel, the IDF or for Israeli soldiers in captivity during the prayer service.

### *The fixed prayers-שמונה עשרה, The Prayer Of 18 (19) Benedictions*

The רמב"ם explains why our Sages felt compelled to create a fixed text for the community to recite as part of the daily prayer requirement:

רמב"ם – הלכות תפלה פרק א', הלכה ד' – כיון שגלו ישראל בימי נבוכדנצר הרשע נתערבו בפרס ויון ושאר האומות ונולדו להם בנים בארצות הגוים ואותן הבנים נתבלבלו שפתם והיתה שפת כל אחד ואחד מעורבת מלשונות הרבה וכיון שהיה מדבר אינו יכול לדבר כל צורכו בלשון אחת אלא בשיבוש שנאמר ובניהם חצי מדבר אשדודית וגו' ואינם מכירים לדבר יהודית וכלשון עם ועם ומפני זה כשהיה אחד מהן מתפלל תקצר לשונו לשאול הפציו או להגיד שבה הקדוש ברוך הוא בלשון הקדש עד שיערבו עמה לשונות אחרות, וכיון שראה עזרא ובית דינו כך עמדו ותקנו להם שמנה עשרה ברכות על הסדר, שלש ראשונות שבה לה' ושלש אחרונות הודיה, ואמצעיות יש בהן שאלת כל הדברים שהן כמו אבות לכל הפציו איש ואיש ולצרכי הציבור כולן, כדי שיהיו ערוכות בפי הכל וילמדו אותן ותהיה תפלת אלו העלגים תפלה שלימה כתפלת בעלי הלשון הצחה, ומפני ענין זה תקנו כל הברכות והתפלות מסודרות בפי כל ישראל כדי שיהא ענין כל ברכה ערוך בפי העלג.

*Translation: After the Jews were forced into exile by Nebechednezzzer the evil one (destruction of first Temple), Jews mingle with the Persians and Greeks and other nations and they gave birth to children in the Nations of the non-Jews. These children found that their spoken language was a combination of many spoken languages. When they would speak, they could not express their whole thought in one language except as a mixture of languages as 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 wishes to pray he runs short of Hebrew words with which to ask his needs or to praise G-d in Hebrew and ends up mixing words from other languages. When Ezra and his court noticed this issue, they authored the 18 blessings (shmona esrei) in order; the first three blessings that contain praise of G-d; the last three blessings that contain thanks to G-d; and the middle ones that contain requests for prsonal needs and communal needs. By establishing the text of the blessings, everyone said the blessings in the same order. As a result, they will study the blessings. The prayers of those who might stammer becomes a complete prayer like the prayer of those who have a strong command of the Hebrew language. And for this reason, they authored all the blessings and prayers so that the blessings and the prayers would be the same text for all so that each blessing would be said correctly even by those who stammer.*

Although the Talmud provides a the **התימות הברכות** for **שמונה עשרה**, the Talmud does not provide further details concerning the wording of each **ברכה**. The first detailed description of the prayer service was written by Rav Amrom Gaon, head of the Yeshiva in Babylonia in the mid-800's. Rav Amrom was responding to a question put to him by a community in Spain. By providing a detailed description of what must be said during the prayer services each day, Rav Amrom Gaon provided the Jewish community with its first **סידור**. That is why his response became known as **סדר רב עמרם גאון**. The first page of his response with its English translation is provided in the addendum to this lesson and should be studied with the students

The central focus of the **סידור** is **שמונה עשרה**, the Prayer Of 18 (19) **ברכות**. Given the important role that **שמונה עשרה** plays within Jewish prayer, it is important to identify what **שמונה עשרה** represents. In point of fact, the prayer of **שמונה עשרה** can be viewed from

one of two perspectives. The רמב"ם created his formula of words of praise, followed by words of request, followed by words of thanks by analyzing the structure of שמונה עשרה. He viewed the first three ברכות as representing words of praise; the middle thirteen ברכות representing words of request and the last three ברכות as representing words of thanks. His analysis of שמונה עשרה is in line with the following Talmudic passage:

ברכות דף לד' עמ' א' – אמר רב יהודה: לעולם אל ישאל אדם צרכיו לא בשלש ראשונות, ולא בשלש אחרונות, אלא באמצעיות. דאמר רבי חנינא: ראשונות, דומה לעבד שמסדר שבה לפני רבו. אמצעיות, דומה לעבד שמבקש פרס מרבו. אחרונות, דומה לעבד שקבל פרס מרבו ונפטר והולך לו.

*Translation: Rabbi Yebuda said: a person should not make a request for his personal needs while reciting the first three Brachos of Shemona Esrei, and not while reciting the last three Brachos but he can make personal requests while saying the middle Brachos. This is in accordance with what Rav Chanina said: The first Brachos of Shemona Esrei are similar to a servant who is preparing the praise he plans to say to his master; the middle blessings are similar to a servant who is asking for a reward from his master; the last blessings are similar to a servant who received his reward from his master and is taking leave from him.*

In summary, we can suggest that the רמב"ם views שמונה עשרה as a means by which man asks G-d to provide his necessities of life; food and good health.

A second perspective upon שמונה עשרה can be gained by acknowledging that the word: מודים found in שמונה עשרה carries two definitions. In general, the word: מודים is defined as: thanking. It shares the same root as the word: תודה, thanks. The presence of that word at the end of שמונה עשרה provides the רמב"ם with the basis for the third leg of his formula. Nevertheless, there is a major flaw in defining the word: מודים as thanking in the context in which it appears in שמונה עשרה. Since we are required to bow when we says the word: מודים, we can ask: why bow if the word means to express thanks.

The practice among Jews to bow when saying the word: מודים led some to point to the following source to identify the word מודים as an Aramaic word which is defined as: bow: שמואל ב', טז', ד' – ויאמר המלך לצבא הנה לך כל אשר למפי בשת ויאמר ציבא השתחויתי אמצא חן בעיניך אדני המלך.

*Translation: Then said the king to Ziba, Behold, all that belonged to Mephibosheth is yours. And Ziba said, I humbly beseech you that I may find grace in your sight, my lord, O king.*

דאבא : ד ואמר מלכא  
 לצבא קא לך כל די  
 למפיבשת ואמר ציבא  
 מודינא אשכח רחמין  
 בעינך רבויי מלכא :  
 ה ואתא דוד מלכא עד  
 עלמת והא מפמן נכרא  
 נביק מנר עית בית שאול  
 ושמייה שמי בר נרא

ממלכות אבי: דייאמר המלך לצבא  
 הנה לך כל אשר למפיבשת ויאמר  
 ציבא השתחויתי אמצא חן בעיניך  
 אדני המלך: ויבא המלך דוד עד

Why is it necessary to bow as we open the next to last Bracha in שמונה עשרה? If שמונה עשרה represents a substitute for the עבודה that was performed in the בית המקדש every morning and every evening, then bowing is required when we finish our עבודה. A review of the משניות which outline the daily service in the Temple reveals that when the כהנים completed the service each morning, they would congregate in a central location within the Temple and they would bow, signalling that they had completed their service. In a similar manner we bow in the 18th Bracha to signify that we have completed the substitute for the daily service in the Temple. What did the כהנים do after bowing? They recited the Priestly Blessings, ברכת כהנים. We follow in their footsteps. We recite the ברכה of שים שלום, a substitute for ברכת כהנים, the Priestly Blessings, after bowing.

The two views of שמונה עשרה as the formula: words of praise followed by words of request followed by words of thanks or as a substitute for the daily service have a practical implication. At what point within שמונה עשרה does a person insert his personal prayers while reciting שמונה עשרה? That category of Jewish prayer is our next example of a form of Jewish prayer.

### *Personal Requests within שמונה עשרה*

In מסכת ברכות, the Talmud teaches us that personal requests should be placed within the middle ברכות of שמונה עשרה.

ברכות דף לד' עמ' א'—אמר רב יהודה: לעולם אל ישאל אדם צרכיו לא בשלש ראשונות, ולא בשלש אחרונות, אלא באמצעיות. דאמר רבי חנינא: ראשונות, דומה לעבד שמסדר שבה לפני רבו. אמצעיות, דומה לעבד שמבקש פרס מרבו. אחרונות, דומה לעבד שקבל פרס מרבו ונפטר והולך לו.

*Translation: Rabbi Yehuda said: a person should not make a request for his personal needs while reciting the first three Brachos of Shemona Esrei and not while reciting the last three Brachos but he can make personal requests while saying the middle Brachos. This is in accordance with what Rav Chanina said: The first Brachos of Shemona Esrei are similar to a servant who is preparing the praise he plans to say to his master; the middle blessings are similar to a servant who is asking for a reward from his master; and the last blessings are similar to a servant who received his reward from his master and is taking leave from him.*

In מסכת עבודה זרה, the Talmud makes several alternate suggestions; that personal requests should be added to the ברכה of שומע תפלה; that the personal requests should be added to the ברכה of שמונה עשרה whose theme matches the request and lastly that personal requests should be added at the end of שמונה עשרה. The differences in opinion do not represent disagreements as to right and wrong practices. Like many disputes that concern תפלה found in the Talmud, the alternate suggestions reflect different customs that

were followed in the early years of Jewish Prayer.

תלמוד בבלי מסכת עבודה זרה דף ח' עמ' א'—אמר רב יהודה בריה דרב שמואל בר שילת משמיה דרב, אף על פי שאמרו: שואל אדם צרכיו בשומע תפלה, אבל אם בא לומר בסוף כל ברכה וברכה מעין כל ברכה וברכה – אומר. א"ר חייא בר אשי אמר רב, אף על פי שאמרו: שואל אדם צרכיו בשומע תפלה, אם יש לו חולה בתוך ביתו – אומר בברכת חולים, ואם צריך לפרנסה – אומר בברכת השנים. אמר ר' יהושע בן לוי, אף על פי שאמרו: שואל אדם צרכיו בשומע תפלה, אבל אם בא לומר אחר תפלתו, אפילו כסדר יוה"כ – אומר.

*Translation: Said Rav Judah the son of Samuel son of Shilath in the name of Rav: Even though it was said that one should pray for his private needs only at 'Who hearkens to prayer,' nevertheless, if he is disposed to supplement any of the Brachos with personal supplications relevant to the subject of each particular Bracha, he may do so. So also said Rav Hiyya son of Ashi in the name of Rav: Even though it has been said that one should pray for his own needs only at 'Who hearkens to prayer', still if, for example, one has a sick person at home, he may offer an extempore prayer at the Bracha of the sick for the sick; or if he has financial difficulties, he may offer his own prayer in connection with the Bracha for prosperous years. Rav Joshua son of Levi said: Though it has been decided that private prayers for personal needs only may be inserted in the Bracha of 'Who hearkens to prayer', yet if one wishes to offer his supplications after Shemona Esrei, to the extent of the reciting the entire Day of Atonement Service, he may do so.*

In this last excerpt from the Talmud, we are presented with the two alternate methods of inserting personal requests into שמונה עשרה. Each depends on one's view of what שמונה עשרה represents. If one views שמונה עשרה as representing the formula of words of praise followed by words of request followed by words of thanks, one should add personal request into the ברכה whose theme matches the theme of the personal request. If one views שמונה עשרה as representing a substitute for the service in the בית המקדש, one should not add his personal prayers in the middle ברכות of שמונה עשרה because the כהנים were not permitted to interrupt the service they were performing by inserting their personal requests while performing the service. At what point should personal prayers be added? According to the excerpt from the Talmud above, that would be after one concludes שמונה עשרה. At what point do we conclude שמונה עשרה? If you play close attention to what follows the ברכה of ברוך אתה יי, המברך את עמו ישראל בשלום, the end of the nineteenth ברכה, you will see that in many סידורים the publisher presents the verse: יהיו לרצון אמרי פי והגיון לבי לפניך, יי צורי וגואלי. According to the following excerpt from the Talmud, שמונה עשרה begins with the verse ה' שפתי תפתח and ends with the verse: יהיו לרצון אמרי פי:

תלמוד בבלי מסכת ברכות דף ד' עמ' ב'—והא אמר רבי יוחנן, בתחלה אומר: (תהלים נ"א) ה' שפתי תפתח, ולבסוף הוא אומר: (תהלים י"ט) יהיו לרצון אמרי פי!

*Translation: Did not Rav Yochanon say that Shemona Esrei must begin with the verse: Hashem Sifasei Tiftach and end with the verse: Yihiyu L'Ratzon Imrei Phi.*

It is advisable that you recite the verse: יהיו לרצון אמרי פי after the ברכה of המברך את בשלום in order to signal that you have completed עשרה, the substitute for the service in the בית המקדש. At that point it is appropriate to add your personal prayer. In fact, what follows in the standard text of שמונה עשרה is a personal prayer; i.e. א-להי נצור. If you search for the source for the paragraph of א-להי נצור you will find it presented in the Talmud, 'עמ' א, מסכת ברכות דף יז, as an example of a personal prayer that Mar son of Ravina would add to the end of Shemona Esrei.

### *Non-Verbal Acts Of Prayer*

At the end of תחנון, we add the following line: ואנחנו לא נדע מה נעשה, כי עליך עינינו, we do not know what else we can do-all we can do is focus our eyes on You (turn to You for assistance). Why do we say; מה נעשה, what to do, instead of saying מה נאמר, what to say? The אבודרהם explains that we are referring to the non-verbal acts of prayer that we have performed during the prayer service:

ספר אבודרהם נפילת אפים, אשרי, למנצח ובא לציון-והטעם שנהגו לומר ואנחנו לא נדע כלומר כבר עשינו כענין שעשה משה בהר בעליתו לקבל התורה שאמר בתחלה ואשב בהר בלשון ישיבה ואח"כ ואנכי עמדתי בהר. ואח"כ ואתנפל לפני ה': וכן עשינו אנחנו בתחלה פסוקי הזמירות בישיבה ואח"כ י"ח בעמידה ואח"כ נפילת אפים ומנחה אין אנו יודעים להתפלל בענין אחר, וזהו ואנחנו לא נדע.

*Translation: The meaning of the words: "we do not know what else to do" is as follows: In the morning prayer service, we performed several non-verbal acts of prayer similar to the non-verbal acts of prayer that Moshe Rabbenu performed when he climbed Mount Sinai and he received the Torah. Moshe Rabbenu relates that at first he sat on the mountain using the Hebrew word that means sitting and then he says that "I stood on the mountain." And then he relates that he fell on his face before G-d. We conduct ourselves in a similar manner. We recite Pseukei D'Zimra in a seated position; then we stand for Shemona Esrei and then we fall on our faces as part of tachanun. That is why we then say: we do not know what else we can do.*

Professor Uri Urlich has written a book, השפה הלא מלולית של, כל עצמתי תאמרנה, התפלה, All My Bones Shall Speak, The Non-Verbal Language of Prayer, in which he describes the various types of non-verbal acts of prayer that are performed during the prayer services. The table of contents of the book is annexed hereto in the addendum.

Professor Urlich may have omitted what is the most important non-verbal aspect of prayer; i.e. who we are. It is foolhardy for anyone to think that G-d's decision on whether He should respond to our prayer is based on how we act in synagogue. From G-d's perspective, it is how we act outside of the synagogue, in our personal lives and in our professional lives, that determines whether G-d will respond to our prayers.



On two holidays, non verbal acts of prayer play a very important role in the prayer service. On **מוסף שמונה עשרה** that takes place during the repetition of **ראש השנה**, **תקיעת שופר** should be viewed as an essential part of the **שמונה עשרה** prayer. In addition, on the seven days of **סוכות**, the shaking of the **ארבע מינים**, the Lulav and Esrog, during **הלל** are an essential part of the prayer as is our walking around the synagogue with the **ארבע מינים** while reciting the **הושענות**.

## Vows

In modern times, Biblical examples of vows appear to play a very small role in Jewish prayer. However, vows in the form of inadvertent expressions of prayer are still commonly uttered today. Often they are expressed in moments of distress and then are forgotten. For example, if someone hears that a family member took ill, his reaction may be to turn his eyes to heaven and say: please G-d, deliver a cure to X and I will donate one thousand dollars to a charity. The person then recovers from the illness while the one who made the vow forgets to fulfill his promise.

In the current Jewish liturgy, references to vows are absent except on the days just before **ראש השנה** and continuing until **יום כיפור**. On those days, vows play a role in two forms: **כל נדרי** and **התרת נדרים**. In contrast, vows played a very significant role in early Jewish prayer and while the **בית המקדש** stood. Let us look at several examples of vows, each of which represent an example of prayer, found in **תנ"ך**:

**בראשית פרק כ"ב** – וידר יעקב נדר לאמר אם יהיה א-להים עמדי ושמרני בדרך הזה אשר אנכי הולך ונתן לי לחם לאכל ובגד ללבש: (כ"א) – ושבתני בשלום אל בית אבי והיה ה' לי לא-להים: כ"ב – והאבן הזאת אשר שמתני מצבה יהיה בית א-להים וכל אשר תתן לי עשר אעשרנו לך.

*Translation: 20. And Jacob uttered a vow in which he promised: If G-d remains with me, and guards me while I am on the path that I am about to follow and provides me bread to eat and clothes to wear, 21. So that I can return to my father's house whole, then the Lord shall be my G-d.*

**בראשית פרק לא'**, יג' – אנכי הא-ל בית אל אשר משחת שם מצבה אשר נדרת לי שם נדר עתה קום צא מן הארץ הזאת ושוב אל ארץ מולדתך.

*Translation: I am the G-d you approached in Beth-El, where you anointed the pillar, and where you issued a vow to Me, now arise, leave this land, and return to the land of your family.*

**יעקב אבינו** makes a vow to G-d after escaping from the danger he faced as a result of receiving the blessing of his father, **יצחק**, intended for his brother, **עשו**. The fact that G-d reminds **יעקב אבינו** several chapters later of the vow that **יעקב אבינו** made to G-d provides evidence that G-d welcomes vows as a form of prayer.

Prayer in the form of vows was not limited to individuals. The תורה provides an example of communal prayer uttered by the Jewish People that took the form of a vow:

במדבר פרק כא', ב' – וידר ישראל נדר לה' ויאמר אם נתן תתן את העם הזה בידי והחרמתי את עריהם. (ג) וישמע ה' בקול ישראל ויתן את הכנעני ויחרם אתהם ואת עריהם ויקרא שם המקום חרמה.

*Translation: 2. And the Jewish People issued a vow to the Lord, and said, If You will indeed deliver this people into our hands, then we will totally destroy their cities. 3. And the Lord answered the request of the Jewish People, and caused them to defeat the Canaanites. They totally destroyed them and their cities; and he called the name of the place Hormah.*

In this example, the תורה reveals that G-d answered this prayer that was in the form of a vow thus validating the use of communal vows as a form of prayer.

In one well-known example found in תנ"ך, a vow, which led to a military victory for the Jewish People, had the unexpected result of causing a personal tragedy for the leader who made the vow. This incident serves as an example of the dangers that can develop when a vow is taken:

שופטים פרק יא', ל' – וידר יפתח נדר לה' ויאמר אם נתון תתן את בני עמון בידי. (לא) והיה היוצא אשר יצא מדלתי ביתי לקראתי בשובי בשלום מבני עמון והיה לה' והעליתו עולה:

*Translation: 30. And Yiftach issued a vow to the Lord, and said, If You shall without fail deliver the Ammonites into my hands, 31. Then it shall be, that whatever or whomever comes out of the doors of my house to meet me when I return in peace from the Ammonites, shall then be sanctified to G-d, and I will offer it up for a burnt offering.*

Several verses later, we learn that the first person to meet יפתח, the one who uttered the vow, was his daughter. יפתח reluctantly fulfills his vow.

שופטים פרק יא', לד' – ויבא יפתח המצפה אל ביתו והנה בתו יצאת לקראתו בתפים ובמחלות ורק היא יחידה אין לו ממנו בן או בת: (לה) והיה כראותו אותה ויקרע את בגדיו ויאמר אהה בתי הכרע הכרעתי ואת היית בעברי ואנכי פציתי פי אל ה' ולא אוכל לשוב: (לו) ותאמר אליו אבי פצית את פיך אל ה' עשה לי כאשר יצא מפיה אחרי אשר עשה לך ה' נקמות מאיביך מבני עמון: (לז) ותאמר אל אביה יעשה לי הדבר הזה הרפה ממני שנים חדשים ואלכה וירדתי על ההרים ואבכה על בתולי אנכי ורעיתי ורעותי: (לח) ויאמר לכי וישלח אותה שני חדשים ותלך היא ורעותיה ותבך על בתוליה על ההרים: (לט) והיה מקץ שנים חדשים ותשב אל אביה ויעש לה את נדרו אשר נדר והיא לא ידעה איש ותהי חק בישראל: (מ) מימים ימימה תלכנה בנות ישראל לתנות לבת יפתח הגלעדי ארבעת ימים בשנה.

*Translation: 34. And Yiftach came to Mizpah to his house, and, behold, his daughter came out to meet him with tambourines and with dances; and she was his only child; other than her, he had neither son nor daughter. 35. And it came to pass, when he saw her, that he tore his clothes, and said, Alas, my daughter! you have brought me very low, and you have become the cause of trouble to me; for I have opened my mouth*

to the Lord, and I cannot recant. 36. And she said to him, My father, if you have opened your mouth to the Lord, do to me according to that which has come from your mouth; seeing that the Lord has taken vengeance for you of your enemies, of the Ammonites. 37. And she said to her father, allow me to do one thing; leave me alone for two months, that I may go up and down upon the mountains, and bewail that I never married, I and my friends. 38. And he said, Go. And he sent her away for two months; and she went with her companions, and wept for never having married, upon the mountains. 39. And it came to pass at the end of two months, that she returned to her father, who did with her according to his vow which he had uttered; and she knew no man before her death. And it became a custom in Israel, 40. That the daughters of Israel went yearly for four days to lament the daughter of Yiftach, the Gileadite.

In the הפטרה for the first day of ראש השנה, we read of the well-known vow made by חנה. Two facts about this excerpt from תנ"ך should be emphasized. The prayer of חנה, which includes her vow, became the model for standard Jewish prayer. Second, the תנ"ך records that חנה's prayer was said so softly that no one could hear her words.

Nevertheless, the תנ"ך, on its own initiative, discloses one section of the prayer; i.e. the vow that חנה made:

שמואל א' פרק א', י'—והיא מרת נפש ותתפלל על ה' ובכה תבכה: (יא) ותדר נדר ותאמר ה' עב-אות אם ראה תראה בעני אמתך וזכרתני ולא תשכח את אמתך ונתתה לאמתך זרע אנשים ונתתיו לה' כל ימי חייו ומורה לא יעלה על ראשו: (יב) והיה כי הרבתה להתפלל לפני ה' ועלי שמר את פיה: (יג) וחנה היא מדברת על לבה רק שפתיה נעות וקולה לא ישמע ויחשבה עלי לשכרה.

*Translation: 10. And she (Chana) was in bitterness of soul, and prayed to the Lord, and wept bitterly. 11. And she uttered a vow, and said, O Lord of Hosts, if You will indeed pay attention to the affliction of Your maidservant, and remember me, and not forget Your maidservant, and will give to Your maidservant a male child, then I will give my child to the Lord for all the days of his life, and no razor shall come upon his head. 12. And it came to pass, as she continued praying before the Lord, that Eli observed her mouth. 13. And Chana spoke in her heart; only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard; therefore Eli presumed that Chana was intoxicated.*

Vows are also mentioned in the הפטרה on יום כיפור recited at תפלת מנחה:

יונה פרק א', טז'— וייראו האנשים יראה גדולה את ה' ויזבחו זבח לה' וידרו נדרים.

*Translation: Then the men feared the Lord exceedingly. They offered a sacrifice to the Lord and issued vows.*

Vows played an important role in the עבודה in the בית המקדש:

ויקרא פרק ז', טז'— ואם נדר או נדבה זבח קרבנו ביום הקריבו את זבחו יאכל וממחרת והנותר ממנו יאכל.

*Translation: If the sacrifice he is offering is based on a vow or a voluntary offering, it shall be eaten the same day that he brings his sacrifice and on the next day he may also eat the remainder of it.*

במדבר פרק ל', ג' – איש כי ידר נדר לה' או השבע שבעה לאסר אסר על נפשו לא יחל דברו ככל היצא מפיו יעשה.

*Translation: If a man issues a vow to the Lord or swears an oath to bind his soul with a bond, he shall not break his word. He shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth.*

דברים פרק כג', כב' – כי תדר נדר לה' א-להיך לא תאחר לשלמו כי דרש ידרשנו ה' א-להיך מעמך והיה בך חטא.

*Translation: When you shall utter a vow to the Lord your G-d, you shall not delay fulfilling it, for the Lord your G-d will surely require it of you. Your delay will cause you a sin.*

Many chapters of תהלים contain references to vows:

תהלים פרק כב', כו' – מאתך תהלתי בקהל רב נדרי אשלם נגד יראיו.

*Translation: My praise shall be of You in the large congregation. I will pay my vows before those who fear him.*

תהלים פרק נ', יד' – זבח לא-להים תודה ושלם לעליון נדריך.

*Translation: Offer to G-d thanksgiving and pay your vows to the most High;*

תהלים פרק נו', יג' – עלי א-להים נדריך אשלם תודת לך.

*Translation: The vows I issue on Your behalf are my responsibility, O G-d; I will bring thanksgiving offerings to you.*

תהלים פרק סה', ב' – לך דמיה תהלה א-להים בציון ולך ישלם נדר.

*Translation: Praise awaits you, O G-d, in Zion; and all vows on Your behalf shall be fulfilled.*

תהלים פרק סא', ו' – כי אתה א-להים שמעת לנדרי נתת ירשת יראי שמך.

*Translation: For You, O G-d, have heard my vows. You have passed onto me the heritage of those who fear your name.*

תהלים פרק סו', יג' – אבוא ביתך בעולות אשלם לך נדרי.

*Translation: I will come into Your house with burnt offerings; I will redeem on Your behalf my vows.*

תהלים פרק עו', יב' – נדרו ושלמו לה' א-להיכם כל סביביו יובילו שי למורא.

*Translation: Make a vow, and pay to the Lord Your G-d; let all who are around Him bring gifts to Him who is to be feared.*

תהלים פרק קטז', יד' – נדרי לה' אשלם נגדה נא לכל עמו.

*Translation: I will redeem my vows to the Lord in the presence of all his people.*

Perhaps an argument can be made that the first reference to a vow found in the תורה, the one cited above involving יעקב אבינו, became the basis for including vows in עבודת ה' service to G-d, through both תפלה and קרבנות. That same incident also provides a lesson on the dangers awaiting anyone who delays the fulfillment of his vows. The days surrounding the ימים נוראים may have been chosen as the time of year to either fulfill vows or to obtain the cancellation of vows so that the failure to fulfill vows does not interfere with G-d granting the person a favorable year. Avivah Gottlieb Zornberg, in her book: Genesis, The Beginning of Desire, JPS, 1995, pages 220-225, excerpted herein, views

the incident involving **יעקב אבינו** as presenting a primer on vows and on the dangers of not fulfilling vows in a timely manner:

### The problem of delay

The problem of delay can be approached obliquely, if we explore the implications of the one surprising criticism leveled against Jacob in the midrashic narratives. The Rabbis, in general, breathe no word of disapproval for any of Jacob's apparently more dubious acts: his acquisition of the birthright, his "taking" of the blessing, his financial negotiations with Laban. The harshest criticism -- and the suggestion that he was terribly punished -- is leveled against Jacob's delay in fulfilling the overt thrust of his vow at Beth El. G-d finally has to tell him, with some exasperation: "Arise, go to Beth El and remain there; and build an altar there to G-d who appeared to you when you were fleeing from your brother Esau" (35:1). On this, Rashi comments, condensing the Midrash Tanhuma narrative: "Because you delayed on your journey, you were punished by this, your daughter's fate."

The extraordinary midrashic claim is that Jacob is delinquent in delaying his return to Beth El, where he had vowed that the stone pillar he had erected would "become a house of G-d." What are the repercussions of this vow? And why is delay in fulfilling it considered so gravely as to be punishable by the agony of his daughter?

Even while he is still in Padan Aram, G-d has to remind him of his vow: "I am the G-d of Beth El, where you anointed a pillar and where you made a vow to Me. Now, arise and leave this land and return to your native land" (31:13). Rashi reads this as implicit reproach: "*Where you made a vow to Me*: -- and you must [lit.] pay it, since you said, 'It will become a house of G-d' -- that you would offer sacrifices there." This reference to Jacob's vow does not appear in the original account in which G-d tells Jacob to return home (31:3). It is Jacob, in fact, who fills in this detail -- he must pay off what he has promised -- when he explains to his wives why he must return. The narrative thus suggests, most subtly, the workings of Jacob's subconscious mind, the guilt that he feels at a profound ambivalence he senses in himself.

Specifically, however, to "pay off" a vow has a precise meaning, which Rashi here indicates. At root, a vow is a *vow to sacrifice*. When one is in trouble, one promises to give of oneself, of one's real resources, to G-d, if He will act to save one's life. The animal sacrificed, the money allocated to the Holy Temple, is a metaphoric, even a metonymic, displacement for the life of a person. "When you make a vow to the Lord your G-d, do not put off fulfilling it, for the Lord your G-d will require it of you, and you will have incurred guilt" (Deuteronomy 23:22). The statutory period of "delay" is declared to be a cycle of three pilgrim festivals. Once this period has passed, a person finds himself guilty of delay (*ichur*) in "paying" his obligations of sacrifice, be they animal or money equivalents.

Even before he returns to the Holy Land, therefore, Jacob is aware of a reluctance to "pay the sacrifice." Technically, he must transform the place of the dream into a house of G-d, by sacrifice. Symbolically, something unwhole in himself remains unresolved, according to Rashi, until G-d finally and explicitly urges him to "arise, go to Beth El."

Rashi's source, in Midrash Tanhuma, is vividly evocative of the troubled condition of "delay":

There are three conditions where a person's ledger is examined: if one goes on a journey alone, if one sits in a house that is in danger of collapse, and if one vows and does not pay [lit., make whole] one's vow. . . . How do we know about the problem of vowing and not paying? Because it is written, "When you make a vow to the Lord your G-d, do not put off fulfilling it" [ Deuteronomy 23:22]; and "It is a snare for a man to pledge a sacred gift rashly, and to give thought to (examine) his vows only after they have been made" [ Proverbs 20:25]. If one delays paying one's vow, one's ledger is examined, and the angels assume a prosecutorial stance, and speak of his sins. . . . Come and see: when Jacob went to Aram Naharayim, what is written? "And Jacob made a vow. . . ." He went and became wealthy, and returned and settled down, and did not pay his vow. So G-d brought Esau against him, bent on killing him, and he took all that huge gift from him -- 200 goats, etc. -- yet Jacob did not pay attention. He brought the angel against him; he wrestled with him but did not kill him, as it is said: " Jacob was left alone. And a man wrestled with him until the break of dawn" -- that was Sammael, Esau's guardian angel, who wanted to kill him, as it is said, "He saw that he could not prevail against him." But Jacob was crippled. And when he still did not pay attention, the trouble with Dinah came upon him: "And Dinah went out." When he still did not pay attention, the trouble with Rachel came upon him: "And Rachel died and was buried." Then G-d said, "How long will this righteous man take punishment and not pay attention to the sin for which he is suffering? I must inform him now: 'Arise, go to Beth El.' -These troubles have come upon you only because you delayed fulfilling your vow. If you do not want any more trouble -- arise and go to Beth El, and make an altar there, in the very place where you vowed to Me. In time of distress, you made a vow, and in time of ease, you let it slip from your mind?!"

When Jacob made his vow, he prayed to be preserved from the three cardinal sins: idolatry, immorality, and bloodshed. Because he delayed fulfilling his vow, he became guilty of all three: idolatry -- "'Rid yourselves of the alien G-ds in your

midst'" (35:2); immorality -- the story of Dinah; and bloodshed -- "They [ Simeon and Levi] killed every male [in the city of Shekhem]" (34:25). This teaches you that delaying the fulfillment of a vow is a graver offense than all three cardinal sins!

"It is better not to vow at all than to vow and not fulfill" (Ecclesiastes 5:4). R. Meir said: It is better than both alternatives [vowing and not fulfilling one's vow, or even vowing and fulfilling one's vow] not to vow at all. A person should simply bring his lamb to the Temple Courtyard and slaughter it. R. Yehuda said: It is better than both alternatives [vowing and not fulfilling one's vow, or not vowing at all] to vow and fulfill one's vow, as it is said, "Make vows and pay them to the Lord your G-d" (Psalms 76:12). One then receives reward, both for the vow and for the fulfillment.

The main statement of the midrash is, of course, that the making of a vow creates a sacred, dangerous reality. To delay fulfilling a vow is not so much a moral issue as it is a question of disturbing an essential balance. Like going on a journey, unaccompanied, or sitting in a house that is about to collapse, the unfulfilled vow suggests a state of disequilibrium: the whole structure may collapse around one's ears, the forces of chaos are free to attack, one has exposed oneself to the baneful stare of the accusing angels.

While solitary journeys and dilapidated houses are obviously dangerous, however, the peculiar peril of the unfulfilled vow needs some clarification. It is as though one has enjoyed a special kind of oral pleasure, as in the quotation from Proverbs: one has eaten of the sacred, of the animals set aside for ritual purposes. To vow is to break a rational limitation, a clear boundary between hand and mouth, as another midrash puts it: "Let your hand [the fulfillment of your vow] be close to your mouth. The Sages said: Let your hand be *in front* of your mouth -- that is, hold the object to be vowed, ready in your hand, *before* uttering vows." If the mouth is not underwritten, as it were, by the hand, if words correspond to nothing, then one finds that one has created a reality-that-is-not-reality.

Language has the power to create such marginal -- sacred and dangerous -- realities. In making a vow, one constructs an image of an intended future, and thereby opens a Pandora's box of conflicts and resistances, of hitherto hidden fears and fantasies: the ledger of one's inner being, in the imagery of the midrash, is exposed to searching angelic gaze. The unbalanced books are audited, and one may find, even if only in subconscious form, the three cardinal sins traced within. The gap between hand and mouth is a perilous space; by bringing trouble after trouble upon him, G-d tries to make Jacob aware of the need to close the gap. But Jacob does not pay attention: he is insensitive to the implications of catastrophe, to the single message encoded in the many blows that rain down on him.

The midrash insists that the root of all Jacob's vicissitudes on his return to the Holy Land is the problem of delay, that dangerous space of *unawareness* that separates the vow from its fulfillment. In the end, G-d gives up on symbolic codes of reminder and -- baldly, literally -- tells Jacob to close the gap between symbolic language and realization: "Arise, go to Beth El." For the vow claims to transcend, to transgress the limits of space and time. It pretends to a stake *now* in a portion of reality that is not,

what must be deferred, and translates the exigencies of action into the freedom of symbolic language.

At times. . . I would let myself daydream; I would discover, in a state of anguish, ghastly possibilities, a monstrous universe that was only the underside of my omnipotence; I would say to myself: anything can happen! and that meant: I can imagine anything. Tremulously, always on the point of tearing up the page, I would relate supernatural atrocities. If my mother happened to read over my shoulder, she would utter a cry of glory and alarm: "What an imagination!"

### **Glory and alarm**

Glory and alarm: the power of imagination and of language arouses ambivalent responses. In the midrashic argument, the alarmed response is that of R. Meir, who declares: better not to vow at all. For there is always risk in utterance, in the work of the mouth. Better simply to act: language is unnecessary and potentially dangerous. Its danger is formulated in the reproach G-d directs at Jacob: "When you were in distress, you made a vow -- now you are at ease, you let it slip from your mind." What could make one utter what is not there, if one were not in such distress as impels one to a vow, rather than die? One offers one's real substance in words, substituting for the life that is under duress. But this offer of words is intrinsically an irresponsible, perilous substitute. It is a gesture of sacrifice without the blood, without the real cost. In the best of cases, even where the gap is eventually closed, one should not do it, says R. Meir: the alarming power of words is too great.

R. Yehuda, on the other hand, insists on the glory of avowals. The highest possibility is that of vowing and fulfilling one's vow, achieving a kind of equilibrium that will contain the originating anguish that led to words in the first place. Such words are informed by the pressure of reality. Just to take the animal and slaughter it is a brief, inglorious act: to vow the sacrifice, to lay claim to a territory in time not yet one's own, is to be most fully human.

In the vow, imagination and will press for words to embody a radical sense of power. "Every intention is an attention, and attention is I-can," writes Merleau-Ponty. In making a vow ("Man is the only creature who can make promises" [Nietzsche]), one experiences one's identity, one's ability to see and construct a future. But consciously to intend an act -- an act of closure, in particular -- and then to feel oneself incapable of making good on that intention, is to be plunged into a radical despair, in which all the books are opened to the accusing stare of the vengeful angels.

This, I suggest, is the implication of the midrash about Jacob's condition at the time of his return to the Holy Land. Returning is a harrowing experience: vows have to be made good, what was begun in words has to be completed, made whole (*shalem* -- to



pay, fulfill, make whole). If Jacob had fulfilled his vow, according to R. Yehuda, he would have received reward both for the vow and for the fulfillment. He would have been the first human being to engage in this most alarming, glorious act of interfusing words and acts, so that each informs the other. Jacob, however, does not make good on his vow; mysteriously, in a way that is never made explicit in the text, he avoids such a closing of the circle.

The notion of delay in fulfilling a vow is profoundly equivocal. Jacob does not, after all, refuse to fulfill his vow: he simply delays, hangs back (*acher*, the word for "delay," is rooted in the idea of "behind, at the back"). This is a passive, not active, denial. But, effectively, repression is the gravest form of refusal (graver than the three cardinal sins), since it will not engage with -- avow or disavow -- the vow. Through all the symbolic bombardments of fate, he remains unaware, not reading the signs of his condition. In the imagery of the midrash, the books are open and fatally unbalanced: he alone fails to decipher the traces of his own debt.

The problem that is called "delay" is most clearly inscribed in the issue of the vow: G-d finally sets aside the challenges and risks of symbolic disclosure and *tells* Jacob to return to Beth El and bring his sacrifices. This issue is then apparently resolved, immediately preceding the death of Deborah and Jacob's renaming (35:7). The main thrust of the vow is fulfilled, language is made whole in action, as Jacob builds an altar and offers sacrifices in the very place of his vow.

The **מדרש תנחומא**, cited by Ms. Zornberg, is a midrash on the Torah from the Land of Israel and ascribed to the Amora Rabbi Tanchuma bar Abba, who is quoted extensively in this midrash. It also contains midrashim from Tanna'im, mostly Amoraic midrashim, and some things from the Geonic period (Bar Ilan Digital Library). Serious consideration should be given to the possibility of a link between the dissemination of the **מדרש תנחומא**, with its comments about the vow of **יעקב אבינו**, and the institution of the practice of **כל נדררי** and later **התרת נדרים** to be performed during a period of the year in which "*one's ledger is examined, and the angels assume a prosecutorial stance, and speak of his sins.*"

*ADDENDUM*

1. First page of סדר רב עמרם גאון, the first סידור;
2. Table of contents- השפה הלא מלולית של תפלה- כל עצמתי תאמרנה, by Uri Urlich.

## First Page Of סידור רב עמרם גאון, The First

## א סדור רב עמרם גאון

**עמרם** בר ששנא ריש מתיבתא דמתא בחסא, לרבינו יצחק ברי' דמרנא ורבנא שבועין חביב ויקיר ונכבד עלינו ועל ישיבה כלה. שלום רב מרחמנות השמים יהי' עליך ועל זרעך, ועל כל החכמים וההלמודים ואחינו ישראל השרוים שם, שאו שלום מומנו ומן רב צמח אב בית דין ישראל, ומן אלופים וחכמי ישיבה ובני ישיבה שלנו ועל עיר בחסא, שכלם צבליים חכמים הלמודים, ואחינו ישראל השרוים כאן, שתמידו לנו שואלים צבלימכס והיררים אחכם בזכרון טוב, ומתפללים בעדכם ומצקשים רחמים עליכם, שירחם ה' ציה ברחמיו הרבים, ויגן עליכם ויגיל אהכם מכל לרה ומק ומכל חולי ומכאוב ומשלטון רע, ומכל מיני משחית ומכל מיני פורעניות המהרגשות בעולם, וימלא ברחמיו הרבים כל השאלות לצבס. שגר לפנינו רבינו יעקב בן רבנא יצחק עשרה זבובים ששגרת לישיבה, ה' שלנו וה' לקופה של ישיבה, ואינו וברכנו אותך ברכות שיתקיימו בך ובזרעך ובזרע זרעך. וברך חפלות וברכות של שנה כלה ששאלת, שהראנו מן השמים, ראינו לסדר ולהשיב כמוכרת שבידנו כתיקון תנאים ואמוראים. דהניא ר' מאיר אומר חייב אדם לברך מאה ברכות בכל יום, ובגמרא דארץ ישראל גרסינן הכי, תניא בשם ר' מאיר אין לך אדם מישראל שאינו עושה מאה מלות בכל יום, שנאמר ועתה ישראל מה ה' אליך שאל מעתך, אל תקרא מה אלא מאה. ודוד מלך ישראל תקן, כשהדיעושו יושבי ירושלים שמתים מישראל מאה בכל יום, עמד והקין. וגראה הדבר ששחכמו ועמדו תנאים ואמוראים ויכדום. וברך אלו מאה ברכות כך השיב רב נטרונאי ב"ר הילאי ריש מתיבתא דמתא בחסא לבני קהל אלישאנה על ידי מר רב יוסף מאור עינינו, לברך כל אחת ואחת בשעתה אי אפשר מפני טופת ידים העסקניות העשיות ליושנש, אלא כשניטור משנתו רוחץ פניו ידיו ורגליו כהוגן, לקיים מה שנאמר הבון לקראת אליך ישראל, וכל ימיד וימיד חייב צהס. ומנסג' כל ישראל צספרד היא אספמיה כך היא, להוציא למי שאינו יודע שלים ליבור, כהשיב' רב נטרונאי בר הילאי:

The English translation of this page is found on the next page.

## OPENING PAGE -SEDER RAV AMROM GAON, 'THE FIRST' SIDUR

Amrom son of Shashna, head of the Yeshiva in Masa Machsiya (suburb of Sura) responding to Rav Yitzchok son of the teacher and Rabbi, Rabbi Shimon, who is held dear, adored and honored in our eyes and in the opinion of the entire Yeshiva. Greetings of peace. May Heaven show compassion to you, your children and all the scholars, their students and our Jewish brethren who live there. Send greetings of peace from us and from Rav Tzemach head of the Jewish Court, from the officers, the scholars of the Yeshiva and the students of our Yeshiva and of the city of Machsiya. We, the teachers, the students and the Jewish citizens of this area are at peace. We are constantly concerned about your welfare and think of you favorably at all times. We pray for you and ask that G-d show compassion to you; that G-d bestow abundant mercy upon you, protect you, save you from troubles and difficulties, from sickness and affliction, from oppressive governments, from destructive actions, and from all the troubles that can occur in life. May G-d demonstrate compassion in granting you all that you ask for yourselves.

Rabbi Yaakov, son of Rav Yitzchok, delivered ten gold coins that were sent for the benefit of the Yeshiva; five for the leadership of the Yeshiva and five for the Yeshiva itself. We have commanded that you be blessed with Brachos and that they come to fruition for you and for your descendants.

The order of prayers and Brachos for the entire year that you requested, that has been shown to us by Heaven, we deem appropriate to set forth and lay out in the manner in which the tradition was passed down to us, as compiled by the Rabbis during the period of the Mishna and of the Gemara. And so we learned: Rabbi Mayer said: a person is obligated to recite 100 Brachos each day. In the Jerusalem Talmud we learned: it was taught in the name of Rabbi Mayer; there is no Jew who does not fulfill one hundred Mitzvos each day, as it was written: Now Israel, what does G-d your G-d ask of you? Do not read the verse as providing for the word: "what" (Mah); instead read it as including the word: "one hundred" (Mai'Eh). King David established the practice of reciting one hundred Brachos each day. When the residents of Jerusalem informed him that one hundred Jews were dying everyday, he established this requirement. It appears that the practice was forgotten until our Sages at the time of the Mishna and at the time of the Gemara re-established it. The order of the 100 Brachos was set forth by Rav Natroni son of Hil'Ai, head of the Yeshiva at Masa Machsiya, in correspondence with the community in Lucena, Spain through Rav Yosef, the elder. Rav Natroni provided as follows: it is no longer possible to recite each Bracha at its correct time because today we awake each day with unclean hands, hands that inadvertently came in contact with unclean parts of our bodies during the night. Instead when a person wakes, he should first wash his face, hands and feet as is appropriate. That is how a Jew fulfills the directive in the following verse: Prepare, Jews, for meeting with the Almighty. Every person is obligated to do so. The following represents the custom among Jews in Spain, which is Hispania: in synagogue, the prayer leader recites the morning blessings on behalf of those present so that they may fulfill their obligation by answering: Amen to the Brachos that the prayer leader recites, as Rav Natroni son of Hil'Ai provided.

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