

WORSHIP OF THE HEART

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SELECTED WRITINGS OF RABBI JOSEPH B. SOLOVEITCHIK

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Essays on Jewish Prayer



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Reflections on the Amidah

Redemption, *ge'ulah*, is one of the most fundamental ideas of Judaism. It is not confined to the national-historical spheres, but extends over the diverse domains of existence.

Everything requires redemption: the historical community, the individual, nature, the world as whole—all cry out for redemption and repair. In similar fashion, man's thoughts, ideas, reflections, ideals and feelings must be redeemed. All these find themselves in narrow straits; they all cry out to God to be made explicit.

Even the *Shehinchah*, the Divine Presence, as it were, is a captive of historical and metaphysical exile and hopes for redemption.

Sometimes an idea remains forlorn and anonymous within a system of thought until its redeemer comes, extricating it from loneliness and desolation, liberating it, and bringing it to a position of centrality. Just as the Redeemer [the Messiah] whom we all await will lift the impoverished nation from the ashes, so, too, is the spiritual redeemer sent to mend an idea and establish it in its glory and grandeur. The history of human thought is replete with examples, and there is no need to cite them. There is a commonly repeated expression: "My ancestors left me

an area to fence in" or "God has left me an area" (*Hullin* 7a). What does this mean?

Halakhic thought, too, is subject to redemption. Some halakhic concepts were sentenced to a long or short period of exile, and strove for redemption over the generations until the advent of their redeemer—one of the sages of Israel who was selected by Providence to bring those concepts out of isolation and into the center of halakhic thought. Suddenly, an anonymous idea, which had been hidden away in a corner, begins to move from the periphery to the center, from concealment to revelation.

One halakhic concept that was sentenced to temporary isolation but was at last redeemed, is *avodah she-ba-lev* (service, or worship, of the heart). The concept of *avodah she-ba-lev* was coined by the Talmudic sages.¹ The Tosafists, for example, cite a Rabbinic text on Deut. 11:13: "To serve Him with all your heart—what is the service of the heart? That is to say prayer" (*Ta'anit* 2a). But despite this derivation from a Biblical verse, prayer was regarded as a rabbinic commandment and did not occupy a central place in halakhic thought. Many discussed prayer, and many laws were formulated about it. Yet the central point, prayer as service of the heart, awaited its redeemer, who would highlight it and fill it with content. Providence eventually ordained that the redeemer appear.

Rambam on the Status of Prayer

The first redeemer of prayer was Rambam (Maimonides). Thus ordained the Master of the universe, omniscient Diety, Rambam restored to prayer its crown, its preeminent position known to us from the days of the Patriarchs and prophets. Although both his and his opponents' views are "the words of the living God" [*Eruvin* 13b], yet it was Rambam who merited being the restorer.

Rambam's contribution in the area of prayer is revolutionary in two respects. First of all, he determined as a matter of

¹Endnotes to this chapter are on p. 182—E7.

practical halakhah that prayer is a Biblical commandment—contrary to the virtual halakhic consensus, a view taken as almost obvious, that the obligation to pray every day is only rabbinic. Secondly, he held that prayer is identical with service of the heart, an idea that is, according to Rambam, all-encompassing and all-pervasive and which represents the essence of man's relationship with God.² This great halakhic achievement and philosophical innovation has become a basic principle of our world view, both in halakhic thought and in the religious experience of our people.

Ramban (Nahmanides), in trying to defend those of Rambam's predecessors who did not regard prayer as a Biblical commandment, found it necessary to admit that, despite the absence of a fixed law obligating daily prayer, the substance of prayer and its essence are derived from the Torah.³ In times of distress, he admitted, there exists a Biblical obligation upon the community to cry out and beseech the God of Israel. In effect, Ramban's concession mitigates his absolute position that prayer is not a Biblical obligation at all. Actually, it was Rambam who also introduced the idea of the singular importance of prayer in time of trouble and distress (*Hilkhot Ta'anit* 1:1-2). He was the first to identify the commandment of blowing the trumpets [Num. 10:9] with the commandment to plead and cry out.

According to Rambam, it is impossible to conceive of Divine worship without including prayer in it. What then is prayer? It is the expression of the soul that yearns for God via the medium of the word, through which the human being gives expression to the storminess of his soul and spirit.

The Torah commands love and fear of God, total commitment to Him and cleaving unto Him. Antithetical, dynamic experiences which seek to erupt and reveal themselves must be integrated into the external, concrete realm through the forms of language and expression, by means of song, weeping and supplication.

Had the Torah not commanded prayer as the exclusive medium for expressing inward worship—we do not know what the

God-seeking human being, whose soul thirsts for the living God, would do. Could one entertain the thought that Judaism would want man to suppress his experience? On the contrary! The Halakhah was always interested in expressions of the inner life, in the uncovering of the subjective and opaque, and in the conversion of emotion and thought into action. How could one assume that the Halakhah was totally oblivious to the supreme attainment—that is, to prayer? Did Halakhah demand that worship be mute, that experiences be concealed, that they not be allowed expression?

When Rambam said that prayer is Biblically ordained and identical with the service of the heart, he thereby redeemed love, fear, and indeed our entire religious life from muteness. They were given a voice. The lover expresses his yearning, the trembler his fear, the wretched and dejected his helplessness, the perplexed his confusion, and the joyful his religious song—all within the framework of prayer. The service of the heart gained a foothold in the world of forms and facts. Experience and prayer constitute two poles between which the great service of God oscillates.

The *act* (ma'aseh) of prayer is formal, the recitation of a known, set text; but the *fulfillment* of prayer, its *kivyum*, is subjective: it is the service of the heart. The intention (*kavvanah*) required for prayer is not like the *kavvanah* required for other *mitzvot*.⁴ In other commandments the intention is not the most important element. It is a secondary element, even if it is required for fulfillment of the *mitzvah*. Rather it is the act, the concrete action, that is primary, and *kavvanah* simply accompanies the action.⁵ With prayer, however, *kavvanah* is the essence and substance: prayer without intention is nothing.

Hasidism, which placed so much stress on the spiritual element, the subjectivity in religious life, and which devoted so much attention to the act of prayer and to the individual's coming closer to God through prayer, is also sustained by Rambam's view of *avodah she-ba-lev* as an all-encompassing, all-penetrat-

ing experience. Because of Rambam, the concept of prayer became a central element in Jewish thought.

Prayer, which is like a mirror reflecting the image of the person who worships God with heart and soul, is shot through with perplexity, for worship itself is rooted in the human dialectical consciousness. Hence prayer is not marked by monotonous uniformity. It is multi-colored: it contains contradictory themes, expresses a variety of moods, conflicting experiences, and desires oscillating in opposing directions. Religious experience is a multi-directional movement, metaphysically infused. Prayer too does not proceed slowly along one straight path, but leaps and cascades from wondrous heights to terrifying depths, and back.

Sources of Prayer

Let us now examine the fundamental components of the *Amidah*.

Rambam stated as a matter of law that, although the formula and times for prayer are Rabbinic in origin, the threefold structure of prayer is Biblical. The first three benedictions comprise praise (*shevah*); the middle benedictions comprise supplication and petition; and the last three benedictions comprise acknowledgment and thanksgiving. Rambam writes: "Rather this commandment obligates each person to offer supplication and prayer every day and utter praises of the Holy One, blessed be He; then petition for all his needs with requests and supplications; and finally give praises and thanks to God for the goodness that He has bestowed upon him. [He is to do this] each day according to his own ability" (*Hilkhot Tefillah* 1:2).

Needless to say, Rambam derived his position from Talmudic sources. The Rabbis frequently emphasized the importance of the order of prayer, and deduced the formula of prayer from biblical texts. They taught: "May one ask his needs and then pray? Solomon already has stated—'To hearken to the

rinnah and the *tefillah*' [II Kings 8:28]. *rinnah* is prayer; *tefillah* is petition" (*Berakhot* 31a). Praise of God must precede petition for one's needs, as we learn from another rabbinic statement: "R. Simlai expounded: A man should always recount the praise of the Holy One, blessed be He, then pray. How do we know this? From Moses; for it is written: 'And I entreated God at that time,' and it says, 'You began to show Your servant Your greatness... let me pass over and see the good land' [Deut. 3:23-25]" (*Berakhot* 32a).

For Rambam, these *derashot* (rabbinic deductions of laws from of biblical texts) provide a full-fledged proof that the principles of prayer are derived from the Torah, rather than the Torah verses constituting a mere prop or support (*asmakhta*). The halakhic outlook necessitates this approach. For the Halakah could not overlook an apparently irresolvable problem and paradox. Relating to God through speech and supplication appears to our sages as a brazen and adventurous activity. How can mortal man, who is today here and tomorrow in the grave, approach the supreme King, the Holy One blessed be He? Does an ordinary subject have license to speak to a great and exalted King and petition Him for his needs?

Of course, the experience of fear and trembling, which is an integral part of religious life, complicates the problem of prayer and turns it into a riddle. On the one hand, it is impossible for man to come close to God. The more he approaches God, the more man negates his finite human status. Finitude is swallowed up by infinity and perishes in its labyrinth. Man at times flees from God and hides from Him, lest he be engulfed. "And Moses hid his face, for he feared to look upon God" (Ex. 3:6). Man's selfhood and self-confidence are annulled in confrontation with the greatness of God and His majesty. If so, the question arises: How can prayer take place? Prayer is standing before God, in the presence of the *Shekhinah*; but how can man find himself in the presence of God without losing his individual existence? God, the awesome and terrifying sovereign, negates

all being, annihilates all otherness, and turns all else into nothingness. When Moses pleaded with God to be shown His Glory, he received but a curt reply: "You cannot see My Face, for no man can see Me and live" (Ex. 33:20). When God speaks to him, the prophet recoils and collapses in trembling. Daniel attests to such a psychological state, and Rambam incorporated the latter's description into his code: "When any of them prophesy, their limbs tremble, their physical powers are attenuated, they lose control of their senses, and thus their minds are free to comprehend what they see, as it states concerning Abraham 'and a great dark dread fell over him' (Gen. 15:12). Similarly, Daniel (10:8) states: 'My appearance was horribly changed and I retained no strength.'" (*Hilkhot Yesodei ha-Torah* 7:2).⁶

If this is the case, what is the character of prayer? The whole substance of prayer as petition and supplication for man's petty needs, as we have indicated, is puzzling and beyond our ken. Can man attain a foothold within Divine transcendence? Can he shower Him with a plethora of insignificant matters?

Halakhic thought labored mightily to resolve this question and to discover a basis for permitting flesh and blood to approach his Creator. This permission is based on three fundamental ideas of Judaism:

First: as we have explained, prayer is a vital necessity for the religious individual. He cannot conceal his thoughts and his feelings, his vacillations and his struggles, his yearnings and his wishes, his despair and his bitterness—in a word, the great wealth stored away in his religious consciousness—in the depths of his soul. Suppressing liturgical expression is simply impossible: prayer is a necessity. Vital, vibrant religiosity cannot sustain itself without prayer. In sum, prayer is justified because it is impossible to exist without it.

Second: Our Rabbis permitted prayer not only because it is impossible for man to exist without it, but because there is historical precedent for it. The Patriarchs, Moses and the prophets, all fell before God in supplication, conversing with Him as a

man would with a friend, laying bare before Him that which was hidden in their hearts, burdening Him, as it were, with their needs. They argued with Him, even made demands. We can rely on the practice of our nation's Patriarchs, who approached God and strove to attach themselves to Him. Verily, fear causes trembling; yet the historical fact cannot be gainsaid. Prayer is a time-honored institution in Judaism, having been revealed at the very dawn of the nation.

Third: The Temple cult, the offering of sacrifices, is a fundamental ingredient in Halakhah. To bring a sacrifice is to come close to God. The Torah desired that man be intimate with God. Man must not flee from Him, but rather must yearn for and move toward Him. It is in these terms that the sacrificial cult in the Temple must be understood. From time to time, said the Torah, man is to encounter God and stand before Him. He is not to fear being consumed by Infinity and thus ceasing to be. Finite existence is not consumed by the infinite Divine Being. On the contrary, finite being gains strength and power and finds redemption from existential exile. In similar fashion, prayer, too, permits man to confront God. Thus, if bringing a sacrifice constitutes the fulfillment of a *mizvah*, then prayer, too, is a positive commandment.

The Talmudic dictum "the prayers were established by the Patriarchs" does not contradict a second statement of the Sages, "the prayers were established to correspond to the fixed daily sacrificial offerings, the *terzidim*."⁷ Rambam quoted both opinions, for they are mutually complementary. Prayer is justified by both factors, historical precedent and the ceremonial law of the Temple cult.

For this reason, Halakhah insisted upon the formality and orderliness of prayer, upon a standardized structure and a set text, and prohibited anarchy and arbitrariness in man's approach to God. Were it not that scriptural passages speak of prayer, we would have no right to pray. For that reason, one should not add to the standard format of prayer.

We know that the Torah commands the offering of two daily sacrifices. Corresponding to these offerings, prayer was ordained by *Anshei Keneset ha-Gedolah*, members of the Great Assembly, for morning and afternoon. The evening prayer was established to correspond to the consumption of the limbs and fatty parts upon the altar. The Patriarchs also prayed at these times. No Jew has the right to add to the three prayers ordained by the sages of Israel; we have no license to compose new prayers. We find in the Talmud: "R. Judah said in the name of Samuel: If someone was standing in prayer and remembered that he had already prayed, he must cease, even in the middle [of the benediction]" (*Berakhot* 21a). It is forbidden to repeat one's recitation of an obligatory prayer. Once is enough! If one adds, it is as if he had offered two of the daily sacrifices.⁸ "R. Hiyya bar Abba said: Whoever prolongs his prayer and dwells upon it eventually incurs heartache" (*Berakhot* 32b). We today no longer are competent in the articulation of elective prayer (*nedavah*); hence we do not have such prayers.

When a Jew prays, he must be fastidious about the entire order and form of the prayer. One must begin not with supplication but instead with acknowledgement through praise and song. Only gradually may one pass to the presentation of needs. It would be errant impudence to push forward vulgarly and to press God to respond to our petitions before we have greeted Him with hymns. As the prophets did, so is the law of the Torah.

The Prayerful Stance Before God

That praise precedes supplication and the whispered plea is based on a fundamental motif of religious experience. Man fears God and reveres Him, but also loves Him. Man withdraws from Him but also longs for Him; his soul yearns for the living God. In such a state of mind, he envisions God not only as a lofty and exalted King—standing apart, distinct from all other reality—but as a merciful Father, the source of his being, a shelter and

haven for his ruptured and torn soul, a comfort and safe shore for a lonely, forlorn refugee whose ship has been engulfed in a terrifyingly stormy ocean. Man yearns for God, desires to cling to Him and cleave unto Him forever. Man does not feel that Infinity is antagonistic to finitude. To the contrary, (God supports and fortifies man's conditioned, limited status.

From the midst of this experience man views God, as it were, like a friend walking among companions: "And Noah walked with God" (Gen. 6:9). Man extrudes the fear and dread, the wondrous and the mysterious, and fills his consciousness with an assured love. The rendezvous [with God] is not an affront, but instead a mutual encounter of friends who dwell securely together, bonded by love. At this stage, man's relationship to God is rooted in the experience of love and is borne of man's observation of nature, creatures and the world as a whole; this gives rise to wonder and reverence, to enthusiasm and exaltation, and to inspiration. This observation is ecstatic. Man experiences God's sublimity and grandeur, His infinity, omnipotence and omniscience, His disclosure in the world through the cosmic drama, through the experience of God's mightiness and majesty, for the universe and all that fills it demonstrate all these. "The heavens tell God's Glory, and the firmament proclaims His handiwork" (Ps. 19:1).

Awareness of God as Creator of the world and of man is a firm principle of Judaism. The Torah opens with "in the beginning," with the world's genesis. From the cosmic experience there is born, as we noted, a love directed toward God. Love of God is thus based on man's relationship to the majestic reality on which the Holy One, blessed be He, has imprinted His seal. Rambam established this as a halakhic principle: "What is the way to attain love and fear of Him? When a person contemplates His wondrous and great deeds and creations and appreciates His infinite wisdom that surpasses all comparison, he will immediately love, praise, and glorify Him, yearning with tremendous desire to know God's great name as David (Ps. 42:3)

stated: 'My soul thirsts for the Lord, for the living God?' (*Hilkhot Yesodei ha-Torah* 2:2).

Therefore the Rabbis ordered Israel's tributes (i.e., prayer) so that praise for God's mighty works and wonders bursts forth immediately. Man does not begin with trembling, but by approaching with love, by singing a hymn about the wonders of creation.

Abraham discovered God by observing the universe and all it contains; he was the first to stand before God. Is it possible to stand before God? Indeed it is! Abraham was the one who discovered the secret that man should not flee or hide from the presence of God as Adam did. Man can hold his ground; the creature can appear before the Creator. Abraham brought the message of prayer to the world: man may pour out his feelings before God and have a dialogue with Him. The kingdom of Heaven is filled with inexhaustible lovingkindness. The Holy One, blessed be He, does not insist upon the protocol of His absolute kingship and sovereignty. "Wherever you find God's grandeur, there too you find His humility" [*Megillah* 31a]. God approaches man in lovingkindness and sympathy, which incorporates an element of friendship. The belief that God descends into the world of man as his familiar companion, as one who lives with him in the same abode, is one of the principles upon which the ancient covenant is based. "I will walk with you and dwell in your midst," God proclaims [Lev. 26:12]. In fact, the question we presented above—how is prayer possible—is both a general theoretical question and also a specific practical question. From a theoretical perspective we answered that the possibility of prayer is based on three foundations (pp. 150–51). All the same, every individual who comes to pray grapples anew with this question, as he seeks to initiate the prayer with fearful supplication and petition: his initial, immediate reaction is expressed in paralyzing fear and shuddering dread. How is it possible to set up a dialogue between man and his Creator, he asks himself. As his lips move with trepidation and trembling,

he expresses his frailty and nothingness, beginning the *Amidah* as follows: "God, open my lips, let my mouth utter Your praise" (Ps. 51:17). In other words: I do not know how to move my lips, how to find the right words to express the thoughts in my heart. O God, do this on my behalf. I plead with You not only to fulfill my petitions and satisfy my needs, but to guide me regarding the very substance of prayer. I am ignorant, I know nothing. This is the general preamble to prayer: the unfortunate one confesses his lowliness, his grief and his despair. He pleads with God: teach me how to pray! Nonetheless, within the space of a single phrase comes *Avot*, the first benediction of the *Amidah*. God's kingship is not mentioned in this benediction. The Holy One, blessed be He, revealed Himself to Abraham not as King but as Father.

The First Blessing: Avot

Avot contains two elements: that of paternal lovingkindness and the appeal to historical precedent. The Jew who prays sees himself as integrated with those who have carried the burden over the generations, as connected to the past and the future like a link in one long chain. Awareness of historical continuity, strong faith in the messianic, eschatological destiny of the nation, and the experience of attachment to the generations assure the praying person that God will not reject him. The God who walked with Abraham, the God to whom Abraham prayed, the God who forged a covenant with Abraham, will not hide His face from the individual who prays, even though the latter is hapless and unworthy of standing before Him. In the *Avot* benediction, one recites: "He who remembers the *hesed* of the Patriarchs and brings a Redeemer to the children of their children for the sake of His Name with love." The everlasting continuity of the nation guarantees my worth and value in the eyes of God. If sanctity does not inhere in the individual personality *per se*, it nevertheless takes hold of the individual by virtue of

his identifying with those generations that struggled for the existence of the nation. On his own, the person who prays is without worth; but in the context of the generations, he reflects the image of Abraham, the father of all generations!

In the benediction of *Avot* one praises God for three of His attributes: great, mighty, and awe-inspiring (*gadol, gibbor, norá*). The Rabbis say: "Had Moses not pronounced these [attributes] in the Torah and had not the men of the Great Assembly ordained this in the prayer, we would be unable to say it" (*Berakhot* 33b). These three attributes represent the transcendental awareness, expressing its three characteristics and tendencies. *Gadol* means full of lovingkindness (*gedulah* and *hesed* are equated). Man senses God by feeling the great emanation of *hesed* that descends upon him; he recognizes the footprint of God in the great world. One who prays appreciates that being able to pray to God whenever he wishes and wherever he is, is the supreme gift of *hesed*: "And I, in the multitude of your *hesed*, enter Your abode" [Ps. 5:8]. This *hesed* gives him the power to approach God, the author of the *hesed*, with words of propitiation and supplication.

The Second Blessing: Geurot

Man cognizes God in the world not only as abundant in *hesed* but also as *gibbor*, omnipotent. No action lies beyond His capacity. In this experience of Divine mightiness is embedded also man's sense of frailty and helplessness, and from this sensibility there emerges a recognition of utter exhaustion. Man cannot be his own master; he cannot nourish his personality on his own and preserve his independence. He is not free, nor is he able to plan, initiate and execute through his own powers. He requires God's assistance, blessing and supervision. A feeling of waiting for God suffuses the human being. The Divine attribute *gibbor* implies to him that none of his human achievements are the fruit of his thought and action, but only the product of the

Divine act and might. Pride recedes, humility grows. At first man approaches with joy and wholeness of soul, a cleaving unto God who calls out to him from the hidden recesses. This optimistic stance gives way to the cry of one who feels frail and miserable and whose eyes are lifted to "deliverance and rescue from another place" [Esther 4:14]. God abounds in kindness and is also mighty. To this latter attribute the Rabbis devoted a special benediction: *Geurot*.

In this blessing we describe God as mighty, not only in the sense that the cosmos is dynamic, but in an ethical sense. God is omnipotent and mighty—and hence He is *rau le-hosh'ia*, "the great Savior."

God's might is not concentrated only in the dynamic that governs the cosmic process, but extends into the realm of the moral as well. Mightiness is modeled on *hesed*. God saves those who cannot be delivered and redeemed on their own. All God's deeds, all His acts, even in the realm of nature, are imprinted with an ethical seal. The causal-cosmic process is nothing but an exalted ethical drama, which is rooted in the Divine will that is beyond our grasp. We do not understand how the laws of nature relate to the absolute ethical laws of God. But the bond exists. God's will is the source of ethics and also of natural law. God, who sustains the cosmos, who is consummate in His might, is the possessor of the infinite moral will. The Jew enumerates the mighty acts of God in a specific, singular manner: "Who sustains the living with *hesed*, resurrects the dead with abundant mercy, supports the fallen and heals the sick, releases the confined and maintains his faith with those who sleep in the dust."

Here the Jew does not sing about the might of God by reference to the stability of creation, its breadth and greatness, the energy active in it, or the stormy elements that abide within, as did the psalmist: "Thou rulest the raging of the sea: When the waves thereof rise up, Thou stillest them" (89:10); "And He rode upon the Cherub, and did fly: He soared on the wings of the wind" (18:11); "So is this great and wide sea wherein are creep-

ing things innumerable, both small and great beasts" (104:25). The arrangers of the *Amidah* prayer refrained from introducing into the prayer the aesthetic moment, the impact on the soul of the majesty and beauty of creation, the sublimity inherent in it. One who prays the *Amidah* does not recite, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, O Lord my God, Thou art very great, Thou art clothed with glory and majesty" (Ps. 104:1). Such a hymn does not burst forth from the prayer. Those who arranged the prayer introduced the cosmic-majestic element into the *Pesukei de-Zimrah* (the preliminary psalms of the morning service), but not into the *Amidah* prayer. The dynamic and the beautiful of are not the context for this prayer. The ear of the individual at prayer is bent to receive the whisperings of the moral law that is active within the beauty, the moral might found within the splendor of power. The heart of the person at prayer senses the miracle of a moral vision embroidered in the cosmic veil, and he recounts it in his prayer.

The Rabbis were strict with respect to exaltation and praise, permitting only the use of the three attributes mentioned by our teacher Moses—*gadol*, *gibbor*, *nora*. We cannot praise the Infinite drawing upon the cogitations of our limited hearts: "What is the meaning of the verse, 'who can express the mighty acts of the Lord, or make all his praise heard' (Ps. 106:2)? For whom is it fitting to express the mighty acts of the Lord? For one who can make all His praises heard. Raba Bar Bar Hana said in the name of R. Yohanan: one who enumerates upon the praise of the Holy One, blessed be He, to excess is uprooted from the world as it says: 'for Thee, silence is praise' (Ps. 65:2)" (*Megillah* 18a). Such statements are scattered throughout the vast Talmudic and Midrashic literature, and they testify to a characteristic sensibility. Although the sages of the Halakhah taught that prayer should begin with praise of God, their minds recoiled from the proliferation of praises and poetry on the part of the person who prays. Only one kind of song to God was allowed, a song that includes not only the eruption of the total-

ity of the creature's yearning, but a pure way of life, a religious-ethical imperative. Because all of creation represents the moral activity of God, and all the processes of cosmic creation serve as conduits for the supreme purposive volition that is enfolded in the cosmic will, aesthetic-ecstatic contemplation turns into an ethical demand—a command to act. You will not find in the Bible any song that does not culminate in ethical conclusions. Even the most sublime hymn on the beauty and splendor ends with a moral judgment: "I will sing praise to my God while I live... I will rejoice in the Lord. Let sinners depart from the earth, and the wicked are no more. Let my soul bless God, Halleluah" (Ps. 104:33-35).

Rambam formulated a wonderful and pertinent teaching. He maintained that the attributes of Divine action whose use is permitted to man, are all moral principles, imposing upon man an ethical obligation, and compelling him to mend his ways according to the ethical-halakhic imperative which derives from observing the world. We would not have been permitted the most sublime praise of the Deity, if this praise did not obligate us to follow in His ways and to imitate Him.⁹

The blessing of *Geurof*, then, teaches us how to approach God from an ethical standpoint that we acquire through an understanding of the world. Science reveals to us the might of the Holy One, blessed be He, with respect to the dynamics, energy and mechanical workings of nature. But this initiative alone is not sufficient. The ethical strand inherent in these aspects of nature is to be emulated and imitated. The central commandment of the 613 is to follow the ways of God.

Interesting is the Jewish conception that the greatest of all kindnesses, the singular ethical act, is resurrection of the dead. God involves Himself with the dead, whose existence has already ceased, who not only are unable to act or attain anything, but who are also stripped of the capacity to demand and complain, to plead and entreat, who, having lived, are now consigned to the abyss of the silent grave. The dead person, too,

needs deliverance, and God will resurrect the dead. The *hesed* that God performs with the dead is the most miraculous and majestic ethical act. *Geurot* concludes with repeated reference to the motif of resurrection of the dead. Some spark of this conception is embodied in the halakah about the obligation to bury a *met mitzvah* (an unattended corpse), which overrides many other commandments; also in the idea that burying the dead constitutes *hesed shel emet* [the *hesed* of truth, because it is offered to one who is unable to repay the kindness].

Third Benediction: Kedushat Ha-Shem

Finally comes the attribute *nora* (awe-inspiring), which symbolizes the pole opposite to that expressed in *Avot*. Awesomeness conveys absolute separation, the absence of any direct relationship between God and man. God is not accessible to the human search, but is rather separated and isolated from it. He cannot be grasped via intellectual comprehension, by way of the experience of the beautiful and the good. From this perspective it is impossible to approach God at all. Since coming closer to God culminates in the annihilation of man, the question arises again: if God appears as the awesome God, how can prayer subsist? Does not the notion of an intimate conversation with the awesome God, who is singular and unique and negates all other being, carry within itself two opposites? How is it possible for the Jew to relate to God as "Thou," when "Thou" nullifies the existence of the praying individual?

Nonetheless, Judaism did not despair of worship of the heart. Even in the realm of the experience of the awesome it wished to attain the impossible and illogical. The praying individual stands and whispers: "You are holy and Your name is holy." The immediate conclusion is that prayer in this mood is an enormous riddle. No human being, no limited, finite creature, can attempt dialogue with the Infinite. Nonetheless, he continues: "And the holy beings each day extol You." There is

such a thing as standing before Him, cleaving unto Him; the praying person stands before God, great and awesome. It is in the context of this riddle that the fundamental element of *avodah she-ba-lev* emerges.

Prayer and Sacrifice

The Torah identified religious worship with worship in the *Mikdash* (the Temple). As we indicated above, *avodah* (worship) is a synonym for sacrifice (*hakravah*). The worshipper offers a sacrifice to God. As regards literal sacrifice, the Torah knows only of animal offerings; it bans human sacrifice as practiced by the people of the ancient Near East. But, as we noted, this prohibition applies only to physical sacrifice; when it comes to experiential sacrifice—this God demands from us. Offering an animal is merely a symbolic act. The fundamental correlative of the external action is a spiritual action of self-sacrifice. The blood sprinkled on the altar, the fat and limbs consumed by fire—these represent the blood and fat of the owner of the sacrifice. The inner act of sacrifice is the binding of oneself on the altar. Isaac was the *olah*, the burnt offering set aside for God. In the consciousness of the nation is etched the binding of Isaac as a human sacrifice. His ashes are collected upon the altar. We have no interest in the ram's ashes. Already in childhood we learned the words of Rashi on Leviticus 26:42: "Why does scripture not say that God remembers Isaac? This is unnecessary: for God says, as it were, 'the ashes of Isaac are ever visible before me as though they were heaped upon the altar.'" The ram was offered—but Isaac took on its form and was sacrificed with it. God did not nullify the command of the *akedah*. When he sent His angel to warn Abraham not to lay his hand upon the young man, Abraham already had completed the act of sacrifice. It was fully consummated when he held the knife. The external drama was altered; the inner one remains. Isaac is bound upon the altar, transformed into the ram—a sacrificed ram, whose blood

has been sprinkled, whose body has been burned, whose ashes are gathered on Mount Moriah for all generations. The binding of Isaac, which occupies such an important place in Israel's liturgy and world view, means: the binding and sacrifice of man. The doctrine of *korbano*, of offering to God, demands human sacrifice, but in the form of an animal. Man-spirit, garbed in animal-body, is offered up to God.

After the Temple was destroyed and the daily offerings ceased, the concept of worship remained unaltered. The symbol may be lacking, but the idea survives. Animal sacrifice is not practiced in our day; human sacrifice endures! This principle, that sacrifice comes as a ransom for man who is obligated to offer himself to God, was formulated by R. Abraham Ibn Ezra and Ramban.¹⁰ God demands of man His "deposit," man's being, and man must restore everything to his Owner. The fifth of sin precipitates this demand. Soul and body belong to God: "The soul is Yours and the body Your handiwork." The trustee must return to its owner the object entrusted—man's finite being. However, God, in His mercy exchanged one offering for the other, as ransom to God. Yet this substitution pertains only to the physical symbol of the offering. The spiritual act remains in place. The sacrificer binds his body and soul on the altar of the burnt offering, dedicating these to God.¹¹

Ramban inquired deeply into the idea of sacrifice, elevating the concept to a sublime mystical height. The requirement to sacrifice flows from the Attribute of Judgment (*midat ha-din*). God demands the human burnt offering. The manifestation of God—awesome and all-powerful—negates a world that is sequestered in the borders of otherness and is content with the relative and the temporal. *Din* jealously guards the absolute uniqueness of God and demands the annulment of finite independent being. God will not tolerate the arrogant man. Man who has become alienated from his Creator through a horrifying ontic pride, must mount the altar of God. The revelation of the *akedah* imperative suddenly erupts from the silent twilight

of transcendence, addressing the guardian who has betrayed his task and misappropriated his Master's work.¹²

Build an altar. Arrange the wood. Kindle the fire. Take the knife to slaughter your existence for Me. This is the command of the awesome God who suddenly appears out of an absolute separation. This approach is the very foundation of prayer. Man hands himself over to God. He approaches the awesome God, expressing this movement in sacrifice and binding of oneself.

Structure of the Three Opening Benedictions

The three opening benedictions thus place in relief three fundamental motifs pertaining to the structure of prayer and its essence. First, man yearns for God and discovers Him via that which surrounds him. God is the God of *hesed* who permeates all, and makes the creature a partner in his Being. In Him we find a refuge and stronghold, a protective fortress. We approach Him calmly and confidently. The motto is "Divine *hesed* everlasting" (Ps. 103:17) from the beginning to the end of the generations. The God of Abraham participates in the sorrow of the miserable, impoverished human being. He responds to his entreaty and hears his cry. Urto Him do we pray.

Studies in the psychology of religion that report on the benefit of prayer as a source of consolation and relief for the weary, reflect the belief that the God of *hesed* receives our prayer with love and favor.

The situation is altered when we move from *Avot* to *Geurot*. Here prayer changes direction. At the outset, in the benediction of *Avot*, the praying individual did not feel confusion, need or inadequacy. At this first stage he lacked nothing; he had more than enough. He was close to God and was nourished by a perfect existence, devoid of deficiency or flaw.

In the second benediction, a new motif wells up. The human being discovers his emptiness, and begins to understand that he has no standing at all. He can be rescued only through God's

hesed, to which he has no right. Here is an introduction to the prayer of supplication and vigorous entreaty. God is mighty and omnipotent, whereas man is weak and miserable, incapable of earning his bread and fulfilling his needs. Man flees toward God, seeks protection beneath His wings, and presents before Him his supplication, like a slave or maidservant before a master. Man is ready to entreat and plead for undeserved *hesed* from the All-powerful. "You are mighty forever, O God." The "You" excludes everything. Only *You* are high; not *I*: "Who is like You, Master of mightiness." In the first benediction man is aware of his greatness and singularity—he was created in the Divine image, and therefore can approach God; the second benediction expresses man's self-abnegation, his feeling of weakness and his recognition of his own nothingness.

The third benediction commands both the person who believes in his worth and importance and the one who negates his own self to offer up their entire being to God. When man appears before the great God, the God of *hesed*, he is joyful and happy. When he encounters the mighty God, he is filled with dread. When he praises the awesomeness of God, he is prepared to surrender everything to Him.

Prayer and Life

Prayer is not a specific service confined to the cultic realm. The domains of life are intermingled. The service of God is perpetual, without cessation. You can find no action, from the most intimate area to public and national activity, on which the cult does not impress its stamp. Halakhah, which requires a particular form of life consecrated to the one goal of fulfilling God's will, penetrated with its glowing lamp into the hidden places of concrete human existence, physical and spiritual, omitting nothing, oblivious to nothing. Worship must be total and complete, without defect or flaw: "Walk before Me and be perfect" (Gen. 17:1). Worship begins with physiological functions like nutrition

and copulation, with the intimate feelings of the individual, with love of parents, and then moves through all of man's public manifestations, his conduct in every nook and cranny of reality, culminating in connections to friends and companions, in business dealings, in professional work that serves society, in the manufacture of economic-industrial products, in social and national initiatives, in political sovereignty. In short, the human being serves God from the fundamentals of his vital, instinctual existence to the realms of cultural creativity. Halakhah is concerned with each and every stage of life and leaves its distinctive marks on all of them: "Thus one who follows this path is always serving God, even when he is involved in his affairs, even when he engages in intercourse, for his intention, in all matters, is to satisfy his needs so that his body will be whole for the service of God. Even when he sleeps, if he sleeps in order to rest his mind and body to avoid falling ill and being unable to serve God because of his illness, his sleep is then service to God. This is what the Rabbis meant when they said, 'Let all your actions be for the sake of Heaven' (*Avot* 2:11), and Solomon said in his wisdom, 'In all your ways know Him and He will straighten your path' (*Proverbs* 3:6)" (Rambam, *Hilkhot De'ot* 3:3).

The first stage in the service of the heart is the integration of halakhic-religious value into the human being's life in all areas, from the lowest instinctual level to the apex of spiritual being.¹³ Prayer is not merely an additional stage in the worship of the heart, but, as we have stressed, the mirror that reflects the soul of the worshipper who is totally and perpetually committed to God. Prayer is a kind of information center which reports occurrences in the depths of the love-sick soul. Prayer cannot be separated from life. When the source of an image is placed at a distance from the mirror, the reflection disappears. When the service of the heart is absent in human existence, and the human being is driven by hot, undisciplined and undirected instinct, then prayer is nothing but hypocrisy and insolence. O you empty one, what is the point of expressing with your lips

feelings that you never felt, thoughts that never occupied you, borrowed moods and counterfeit experiences? "And to the wicked He said: what is it to you to speak of My laws" (Ps. 50:16). Prayer was established to correspond to the sacrifice of man to God. However, one does not approach Him suddenly according to man's caprice. One does not knock on the royal portals without an invitation. But this invitation is extended to him not in the synagogue, but in the private and public domains which man inhabits: the bedroom, the restaurant, the factory, the office, the seashore and the club. There the invitation is offered, and there the human being encounters God. One who prays cannot diminish the distance between himself and God through cultic enchantment and ceremony, which are useless in themselves. Man must discover the great privilege of coming before God *outside* the sanctuary, in the struggle of existence. Within its precincts there is no wisdom and calculation; here man is treated on the basis of what he has already prepared in the secular domain. Nothing is added or taken away.

Thus, prayer is intertwined with the purity of life and the sanctity of one's overall existence. Robbery prevents man's prayer from being accepted. Sin separates the praying person from his Creator. Dedication to cheap pleasures tarnishes the image of prayer. This is why, at one time, the Rabbis decreed that seminal emission disqualified prayer, "so that men would not copulate like roosters" (*Berakhot* 22a). R. Sa'adyah Gaon devoted a chapter to the laws of prayer, which revolves around one principle: clean hands and pure heart.¹⁴ Prayer, for Sa'adyah, is identical with repentance. Washing one's hands before prayer, omission of which disqualifies prayer according to Rambam,¹⁵ symbolizes the purification of soiled hands from the filth of iniquity and oppression. Hazal command: extend righteousness and charity to the poor before you engage in supplication before God.

This element is known to us from the days of the prophets. Historians err in describing the attitude of the Israelite

prophets towards the Temple cult. Under the influence of ancient Christian tradition, which was anti-Judaic and thoroughly detested the Temple, the secular historians state that the prophets negated the institution of sacrifices and the priestly office. The prophets, they say, wished to abrogate ceremonial religiosity *in toto*. These assumptions are based on falsehood and hatred of Israel, rooted in early Christianity. The prophets never fought against the institution of sacrifice in itself, and never intended to strip Judaism of the forms of the Temple cult. Jeremiah, who chastised Israel so much for the proliferation of sacrifices, mourned the destruction of the Temple for many days. In Lamentations, he emphasizes strenuously that the abrogation of sacrifice and festival was an extremely tragic event. Isaiah, who shouted, "For what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices, says God. I am sated with the burnt offerings of rams, and the suet of fattened animals, and the blood of bullocks and sheep and goats I did not desire" (Isaiah 1:11), prophesied the day when the Temple will stand at the head of all mountains and when offerings will be brought to God (see chapters 2 and 66). No prophet ever rose up against the Temple, Heaven forbid, but rather against a certain spirit among those who made pilgrimages to the Temple. For them, the sanctuary was separated from real life as a special locus for the presence of God, where man appears from time to time before his heavenly Father, there to discharge his oaths and obligations.

The prophets protested against the view that man's world is divided into two domains, the secular and the sacred, and that, within the former, man is free to behave as he desires, without subjecting himself to the yoke of commandment and duty. They protested against the human being who wanted God not to intervene in his private affairs and public conduct. They protested against the view that it is only in the second domain (the sacred) that man must serve God, and that as long as one discharges one's cultic obligations, all is well. The prophets did not tolerate the outlook which says that God requires only one

region to be consecrated to His Name, only one region in which man is to unburden himself of the yoke of his many calculations and consecrate himself to the single purpose of worshipping God in holiness. They protested against discontinuity between the secular and sacred domains. They opposed the strange leap from the secular to the sacred, from the defiled to the pure. Against all these phenomena the prophets remonstrated, as well as against the occluded heart that howls sublime utterances and the personality that is insolent outside the Temple, but genuflects and abases itself within its precincts. Any disjunction of the self, any hypocrisy connected with such twofaced conduct, aroused the prophets' abhorrence and revulsion. Worship in the Temple and worship of the heart are both rooted in man's existence as a singular being endowed with identity and continuity. Both prayer and sacrifice are retrospective. The praying person pauses for a moment in his hurried life and looks back at what has been done; if what was done is dishonest and impure, the prayer is an abomination.

Prayer and the Gesture of Surrender

The prayer of the Patriarchs is disclosed to us against this sort of spiritual background. Abraham, the first to discover the constancy of man's service to God, offered the morning service (*shacharit*), but he was occupied with the worship of God day and night:¹⁶ whether sitting at the entrance to his tent at noon or looking up at the blue, star-seeded sky, raising his eyes to wondrous heights as he sought the way up to God; while engaged in dealings with others, in speaking and acting. Prayer began early in the morning, when the universe glistened in the dew of dawn and the rays of the sun. This prayer did not end with the heat of the day; it expresses the aggregate of his past deeds and served as an impulse towards future elevation.

Jewish thought always understood the act of sacrifice as the surrender of something which man's multifarious biological and

imaginative appetites crave. The most satisfactory offering to God is the conquest of one's culturally-conditioned desires if they are opposed to God's will. Halakhah did not prescribe total withdrawal from life or an asceticism of the flesh. On the contrary, Halakhah wants man to enjoy God's world. Nonetheless, it demands that man discipline his instincts and lusts, in all areas and with respect to all his capacities. Man is to sacrifice something of the "first fruits of his land," the "first of his dough," the first of his cattle, the first of his toil. The coveting and impulsive heart at times exerts pressure on him with regard to eating and drinking, with respect to his relations with his wife or fellow men. The first commandment given to man as a test of his moral mettle involved a minor renunciation, withdrawal from eating the fruit of one tree. Likewise, when we sanctify the glorious and awesome Name by accepting His decrees, we consecrate ourselves as sacrificial offerings to Him.

Sacrifice is not identical with annihilation. The Torah was interested in life and repelled by death. The altar is built not at man's grave, but at his cradle. On the eighth day [of life] man is offered to God, the circumcision ritual symbolizing the perpetual offering of the Jew's life. His table, his bed, his place of business, his abode—all become altars upon which man offers himself up daily. Man makes his person holy through daily self-control, by renouncing acts of pleasure and satisfaction, by undertaking preoccupations that cause pain and anguish, in order to attain a moral ideal.

Already our Sages depicted sacrifice as a sudden retreat from the fulfillment of cherished desire just at the moment when it reaches its highest tension. When only one step separates total realization from bitter disappointment, the intoxication of happiness from the pain of disappointment—it is then that withdrawal must come. The true commandment of sacrifice splits the being of the person driven by desire; he must avert his face and control the enormous impulse of his boiling blood. The most sublime sacrifice has been offered. The fire of just has been

consecrated to the fire of the altar. The erotic tremor of the personality infested with burning instinctual passion has been purified and brought up to the locus that is consecrated to God. "The groom yearns for his bride. But when he comes to her, she reports seeing a bloodstain like a mustard seed. He turns away, although no scorpion has stung him; no serpent has bitten him—that is the meaning of the verse, 'hedged with roses'" (*Shir ha-Shirim Rabbah* to Song 7:3).

Realization of the moral imperative does not require sanctions and coercive force; it does not need a breach-proof fence. It is like a hedge of roses that is trampled only by the foot of pride. Extraordinary sensitivity to beauty and refinement is implanted in the human personality and restrains the inclination to trample a row of flowers, though beyond that row desire beckons enchantingly, and eye and heart are seduced by it. This row has been devoted to the altar, and the groom who controls his inclination is simultaneously the priest who brings the offering, the sacrifice itself, and the locus of the offering. Wherever such sacrifice takes place, man is worshipping God. How beautiful is the law that the groom must withdraw after the initial cohabitation of the marriage (*Niddah* 65b); or the stringency which Jewish women have accepted to abstain from intercourse for seven days after any flux (*Niddah* 66a). To separate from the bride of one's youth for a brief period is the most sacred and exalted Jewish worship, which the Creator awaits and responds to with love and satisfaction: "Does God desire thousands of rams, multitudes of unctuous rivers?" (Micaiah 6:7). Sanctity prevails wherever sexual behavior is "fenced off". Sexual behavior is a paradigm for withdrawal from the orgy of lust in all areas. In his *Mishneh Torah*, Rambam included both food prohibitions and sexual prohibitions in the Book of Holiness (*Sefer ha-Kedushah*). Abstinence from the lust for forbidden food also rises to the level of a sacrifice to God. On the one hand, the Torah does not recognize the doctrine of asceticism and scorns monasticism. On the other hand, it demands of man to sanctify desires and to

elevate the body as an act of worship, thereby damming the current of lust and disciplining the anarchy which represents neither physiological-biological normality nor spiritual achievement. The offerings of surrender and the conquest of inclination constitute a substitute for the great and awesome sacrifice that man is obligated to bring: his fully saturated vitality.

Abraham renounced many things. He rejected the instincts that impelled him to rebellion, he continued to wait for his relationship to be fulfilled in spite of the smug mocking that jeered at him and his obsacle-strewn way of life. He triumphed: "You are holy and Your Name is holy." Before You human prominence must bend, You shake the foundations of the world. And yet, "the holy praise You each day." Reality is sanctified through the self-sacrifice of man, as he is offered up on the altar before God.

Prayer, Absolute Dependence and Tahannun

Prayer is an act expressing total dependence, a prostration in absolute surrender. This act, which, as noted above, bursts forth in the second benediction, brings the praying individual to offer sacrifice—the sacrifice of self through self-discipline, the sacrifice of independence through absolute surrender. Man is disappointed, fate is cruel, life is tainted and ugly and amounts to nothing; wealth, power, and wisdom are naught. There is no refuge for a finite being writhing between being and nothingness; only God can help and rescue. Without Him, rescue is impossible, without Him all is in vain: "All turn to You, to give their nourishment in time. You give them and they glean; You open Your hand and they are filled with good. You hide Your face and they are confused; You gather in their breath and they die, returning to their dust" (Ps. 104:27-29). An irreversible dependency binds everything to the Master of everything. He who nourishes and sustains everything, the one to Whom all raise their eyes, glean from His Hand and anticipate His Mercy. To Him all commit their souls and offer up all they have.

"Do not make your prayer rote, but a plea for mercy and an entreaty before God" (*Avot* 2:13). Pray like a pauper pleading and asking for his needs: "Entreaties speaks the impoverished" (*Prov.* 18:23). Do not approach God confidently and sedately. Every human being is in need of mercy. Even the fortunate cannot trust in his success. Prosperity is not everlasting. God humbles the proud and raises the humble, relents from evil and at times withdraws benefits.¹⁷ The formula of the abbreviated prayer (*Mishnah Berakhot* 4:4, a short prayer which was recommended by R. Joshua for pressing circumstances) refers to the "multiplicity of needs and the limitation of understanding." It is impossible for man to comprehend his needs and formulate them by means of a lucid prayer. His mouth is inarticulate, his tongue falters. He requires Divine assistance not only for his sustenance but also in order to recognize his deficiencies and to arrange his words: "O God, open my lips and let my mouth utter Your praise," says the praying person when he begins the *Amidah*: that is, it is impossible for me to open my lips and articulate the words. He stands confused before the mighty God. At the conclusion of the prayer, he takes three steps backwards, as one parting from his master. The person who has completed the *Amidah* "falls on his face" in supplication [and recites the *Tahanun* prayer].

This institution of *Tahanun* or *nefilat appayim* stresses the annihilation of man's being. Man lowers himself to the dust and negates his existence. The words of supplication spoken during *nefilat appayim* highlight the tragic character of the pleader: "God, do not rebuke me in Your anger..." (*Ps.* 6:2). From this plea emerge all the terrors of the miserable and unfortunate person, who bears in his bosom perpetual grief and disgrace. The one who supplicates regrets his sins and calls for help. This formula of entreaty laden with the pain of shame is especially prominent at the moment of *vidduy*, confession. The practice of many communities to recite the *vidduy* (confession) before *nefilat appayim* is not without point. The essence of confession is

the demolition of pride and arrogance, leading to a catharsis of the soul that lifts its eyes from the depths of filth.

Centrality of Petition

When we examine the formulation of the benedictions we note that those who arranged the prayer extended the petitions while keeping the celebratory elements (*rimzah*) brief. Entreaty is the back bone of *avodah she-ba-lev*. One who prays on a weekday and omits one of the nineteen blessings does not fulfill his obligation because he does not enumerate properly the needs of the individual and the needs of the community. One who mistakenly recited the weekday prayer on Shabbat has fulfilled the obligation of prayer *be-di-avoda*, that is, after the fact, so long as he made some mention of Shabbat.

Even the prayers specified for Shabbat and Yom Tov are not devoid of expressions signifying petition and supplication. To be sure, "Shabbat and Yom Tov are not days to cry out,"¹⁸ yet we plead to Him to purify our hearts, sanctify us through our performance of *mitzvot* and study of Torah, and bestow upon us true goodness, the joy of salvation and of a full respite undiluted by grief. The *musaf*, or "additional," prayer is an outpouring of the heart over Israel's exile from its land and an appeal to God for speedy redemption. A mute sadness suffuses the text of *mišpenei hattenu* ("Because of our sins") in the Yom Tov *musaf*. There is no prayer without petition and supplication. Halakhah opposed all those outlooks which derive from pantheistic mysticism and which aim to excise entreaty from prayer and to establish worship exclusively on an aesthetic-ecstatic basis of the hymn.

Even though, as noted, prayer requires praise and thanksgiving, nonetheless the vigor and power of prayer derive from petition. Halakhah is interested in psychosomatic man, in his concrete corporeality. It is displeased by the ecstatic separation of soul from body during prayer. The aim of worship of the heart

is the offering of sacrifice through the total surrender of body and soul to God. Moreover, Halakhah observes scrupulously the principle of exotericism. The community as a whole cannot escape the bonds of corporeality and its petty needs. Any attempt to require all members of the community to achieve such liberation entails greater loss than benefit. Halakhah is concerned with human beings who dwell in darkness and shadow, who struggle for their bread. Such people are enclosed within their four cubits of distasteful, ridiculous desire. It is such confounded stammerers that Halakhah taught to pray, and into whose mouths it inserted a clear formula. The common man is commanded to offer prayers for the sick in his household, the wine that has turned to vinegar, the crop that has failed. The hymn, embroidered with aesthetic experience is confined to the private domain of the elite. It is pleasing only to mystics, who are characteristically anti-social. Their mode of existence is esoteric; they are spiritually fastidious. Halakhah cannot be confined within the domain of the spiritual nobility. Only petition can bring prayer to the public domain.

So, too, did the greatest figures of the nation prefer entreaty to song. Abraham stood before God in prayer for the people of Sodom. Israel cried out to God in Egypt and at the Red Sea. Moses petitioned God to sweeten the waters of Marah. At Sinai he confronted God over the forgiving of sin; at Hatzerot, he prayed for the healing of Miriam; on the plains of Moab he pleaded with God to enter the promised land. Prayerful supplication and the outcry of the needy burst forth from the Book of Psalms. It is because human outcry predominates over song and praise in this book that it is called *Tehillim* rather than *tehillot*: the latter would ordinarily refer to the plural of *tehillah* (praise) and imply that the theme of the book is praise; the former is not the customary plural, and therefore does not carry the exclusive connotation of praise. Hezekiah, in his illness, turned his face to the wall and prayed (Isaiah 38); Daniel, Esther, Ezra, Nehemiah, lifted their eyes and pleaded with God in their trou-

ble and suffering. It is the hounded and entrapped creature, the tormented being, who cries out to God. Such a prayer is described by Solomon at the inauguration of the Temple: "And You will turn to the prayer of Your servant and to his supplication... When Your people Israel are smitten before a foe... they will pray and plead to You in this house... When the heaven is shut and there is no rain because they sinned unto You, they will pray in this place... When there is a famine or pestilence... Every affliction and sickness, every prayer and supplication that any person has among Your people Israel, when each knows what afflicts his heart, he shall spread his hands towards this house" (I Kings 8:28-38). The needs are varied, and in every case supplication is called for.

The *Amidah* is based on these words enunciated by Solomon. The *Amidah* deals with the needs of this world: bodily health, fertility of the earth, sustenance, political needs of the nation in the land, ingathering of the exiles, restoration of judicial autonomy, the perpetuation of Israel's sages, the building of Jerusalem, the restoration of Davidic kingship, and the like form the background of prayer in all its diversity. The very gesture of falling before God and acknowledging His unlimited sovereignty and man's utter impotence, constitutes an act of sacrifice. Service of the heart is expressed in the middle benedictions.

Need for Praise and Thanksgiving

Nevertheless, as already noted, it is impossible to recite the middle benedictions without the first three. Let me bring out this point by means of an example: "He who goes in a place of wild animals or robbers recites an abridged prayer. What is it? R. Eliezer said: Do Your will in heaven above, and give satisfaction to those who fear You below, and do what is good in Your eyes. Blessed are You, O God, who heartens unto prayer. R. Joshua said: The cry of Your people Israel—quickly do their

petition... Others said: The needs of Your people are many and their intelligence is limited. May it be Your will to give each according to his needs and his deficiency..." (*Berachot* 29b). This *baraita* deals with a strange problem. According to the Halakha, the abridged prayer does not fulfill a person's obligation to pray; legally, it does not come under the category of prayer at all. In that case, why did the Rabbis attribute significance to the exact formula of this benediction? Let each person devise his own formula! This *baraita* articulates the idea we just expressed. If the praying individual is unable to present before God the entire order of prayer in its authentic form—to arrange God's praise and beg leave to approach Him boldly, to mention the merits of the Patriarchs and God's graciously attending to the deficiencies of every creature—then he is not permitted to petition for his needs. Egoistic supplication outside the framework of the prayer-formula instituted by the members of the Great Assembly is forbidden. For this reason R. Eliezer prohibited any request. He allowed himself only an eschatological prayer: "Do Your will in Heaven above; do what is good in Your eyes." R. Eliezer prohibits even an entreaty for the community. R. Joshua holds that the Rabbis were somewhat more lenient and allowed supplication to God for the nation in general, but not for individualized needs. Others devised a specific formula, which attests to man's poverty of mind and expresses confidence in God's graciousness, following which it would be permissible to petition for fulfillment of the needs of individuals, but not to detail them.

Prayer as Accepted Sacrifice

The last three benedictions do not constitute a distinct unit. Indeed, when we study them carefully we encounter a mixture of petition and thanksgiving. *Retzeh* ("look with favor upon") and *Sim Shalom* ("grant peace") express supplication. *Modim* is thanksgiving. The Tosafists already perceived the dual motif in

the text of the last part of the *Amidah*.¹⁹ *Retzeh* is perhaps the central benediction in the text of *avodah she-ba-lev*. The Mishnah states that the priests in the Temple said this benediction after the offering of the blood of the daily offering (the *tamid*): "They read the Decalogue, [the three sections of *Shema*], and they blessed the people with three benedictions—*emet ve-yatziv* ("true and established," the text recited in our liturgy following the *Shema*), *avodah* (a benediction like *Retzeh*) and *birkat Kohanim* (Mishnah *Tamid* 5:1). The source of this blessing is Lev. 9:22-23, which describes the inauguration of the Tabernacle in the desert: "Aaron lifted up his hands towards the people and blessed them... And Moses and Aaron went out and blessed the people, and the glory of God appeared to all the people." The tannaitic midrash *Torat Kohanim* explains that the first blessing was the priestly benediction (*birkat kohanim*), while the second was a prayer to God to accept the service: They said: "Let the beauty of God be upon us and establish the work of our hands upon us [Ps. 90:17]. And may it be Your will to bestow the *Shekhinah* upon the work of your hands." Thus we find a specific halakha obligating the priests serving in the Temple to pray at the end of the ritual that the order of worship be accepted as satisfactory. This formula of supplication was transferred from its original place in the Temple ritual to the context of prayer. It is founded on the assumption that the *Amidah*, too, constitutes an act of sacrificial worship, if not in actuality then in one's heart. After the conclusion of the prayer rite one prays that God will be satisfied with the prayer and worship of Israel. The original version of the conclusion is "You alone whom we worship in awe" and the parallel formula is "Who accepts the service of His people Israel with mercy." After the destruction of the Temple this formula was exchanged for a new one, which expresses the national vision and yearning for the restoration of the *Shekhinah* (Divine Presence) to Zion.

What indeed is the essence of this prayer, which the Torah commanded at the time when the Temple stood and human

beings offered sacrifice? As noted, the entreaty revolves around the idea of sacrifice. God demands human sacrifice, absolute self-surrender to God. However, God, in His mercy, substituted the flesh and blood of an animal for the action that claims the human body. Yet the spiritual act remains the same. As the smoke of the altar ascends, the human being rises, in his entire being, totally offered to God. Sacrifice and self-binding are here fulfilled. God inhales the odor of fat and blood—not the animal's fat and blood but the person's! Therefore the priests, at the conclusion of the sacrifice pray that God be satisfied with the human sacrifice and accept it, as He accepted the sacrifice of Isaac, even though in actual fact the ram was offered in his stead.

The Tosafists give an interesting explanation of the Talmudic statement by R. Giddel in the name of Rav: "The altar is erected and the angel Michael offers sacrifice upon it" (*Menhot* 110a). Tosafot added: "[T]here is a dispute among the *nidvashim*. Some say that he offers up lambs of fire, and that is what is referred to in the *Amidah*, in the blessing of *avodah* as the "burnt offerings of Israel and their prayers." But some say that it refers to the previous phrase, i.e. "restore the cult to Your house and the burnt offerings of Israel."

According to the first interpretation, the phrase *ve-ishai Yisrael* (the burnt offerings of Israel) does not refer to the physical fire on the altar but to a celestial, transcendent offering, and the sacrifice is the soul, the individual personal being of man. This sacrifice continues to exist today; it did not come to an end with the cessation of the daily offerings. The phrase *ve-ishai Yisrael* is connected to the following word *u-tefillatan* (their prayer) [which would mean, "accept with love the burnt offerings of Israel and their prayers. . ."] The worshipful entreaty persists today as in days of yore. Nothing has changed with the destruction of the Temple and the cessation of literal sacrifice. Now too we sacrifice to God—that great and awesome offering in which man overcomes his being by ascending to the tran-

scendent metaphysical altar. When a Jew says *Retzei* he does not refer to the satisfaction of needs and the fulfillment of the desires about which he poured out his heart in the middle, petitionary section. For this he has already prayed in the previous benediction, *Shema Kolenu* ("Hear our voice"). When he reaches *Retzei* these "petty" matters no longer concern him. His soul is bound up in a great, profound, world-embracing request. He asks God to accept the great sacrifice he has just offered, to accept his being that is returned to God, cleaving unto the Infinite and connecting itself to the Divine throne. God is "satisfied" with this offering. He receives it and restores it to the one who has offered it. The praying individual annuls himself in order to acquire himself. From his prayer man emerges firm, elevated and sublime, having found his redemption in self-loss and self-recovery.

Structure of the Last Three Benedictions

The order of the last three benedictions is the reverse of the opening three. First comes the *Retzei* blessing which is bound up with sacrifice, as in the third of the opening benedictions, the *kedushat Ha-Shem*. The blessing concerning sacrifice takes precedence over all other aspects of prayer, for a simple reason. The idea of sacrifice is the most puzzling. The question it poses—how can prayer exist in the face of an awesome God, separate from the world, negating all worlds—is a most serious one. The answer, that the essence of prayer at this stage is manifested through man's annihilation in transcendent-metaphysical infinity, that everything belongs to God, is an opaque riddle. We do not comprehend the mystery of sacrifice-prayer, and the idea of restoration is also opaque and not understood—it is beyond human intellectual powers. The problem—how can man appear before God and how can one imagine standing before Him—remains in full force. Therefore, from the outset, we are compelled to say about the whole subject of prayer that it is

miraculous from beginning to end. The arrangers of prayer always placed the most difficult element first. They moved from the more difficult to the easier. Therefore we open the last unit of the *Amidah* with a plea for the fulfillment of the sublime, awesome vision—the binding of man and his demise together with his return to existence and being.

Hoda'ah (thanksgiving) corresponds to *Geurot*. As in *Geurot*, the sense of dependency is revealed in this benediction. The human being, sensible of God's omnipotence, on the one hand, and his human misery and frailty, on the other hand, lifts his eyes to God's mercy and providence. From this blessing of gratitude, like that of *Geurot*, emerges the sense of absolute dependence. Man, finding himself in distress, calls out to and thanks God. The praying individual has first fulfilled (in *kedushat Ha-Shem*) the most important action in the framework of *avodah she-ba-lev*—that of consecration and self-render.

Following the acceptance of his request that his sacrifice be accepted, man thanks God for its fulfillment. He adopts the optimistic position that God has hearkened to his prayer. As God has accepted his great sacrifice, surely, his prayer shall emerge into the light. Man is grateful for the past and also for the future. He engages in thanksgiving and prayer, although the future is still wrapped in its mysterious secrecy. In this blessing, the experience of trust reaches its climax. Vision becomes reality, desire becomes fact, prayer becomes complete certitude; this trust is founded primarily on the absolute morality of Divine activity. As He is infinitely merciful, His goodness is unconditional and unlimited; why should He not come to the aid of an abashed, downtrodden person who reaches out to Him? God's might appears in His mercy. The benediction contains the phrases "[You who are] good, for Your mercies are not exhausted, and [You who are] merciful, for Your *hesed* has not ended—we have ever hoped unto You", "Blessed Art Thou, Lord, Whose Name is good and for Whom gratitude is fitting."

At the end of the prayer we return to the benediction of *Avot*, the initial approach of the worshipper to God. Great is his trust in the everlasting God. God's mercies have no bounds. His goodness flows through all being. Indeed, God dwells with him. He is omnipresent; we recognize that reality is enveloped with infinity. What is existence, if not the light of the infinite Facet! What is wealth, if not the gift of God! What do we want? What do we crave? What do we seek?—only cleaving unto Him. The God of Abraham, the God of the universe who relates to being from both without and within, He is the God of peace and blessing and good.

Man begins: "Bestow peace, good and blessing, life and grace, *hesed* and mercy upon us and all Israel Your people." In other words, after all the transformations and oscillations from love and mercy to the experience of dread and human helplessness, after man comes crashing down from the heights of yearning and aspiration to the depths of confusion and terror, after self-negation and self-recovery, after the sacrifice, the binding and the offering on the altar, and after the return to existence—comes again the delightful, joyous and confident experience: God appears as a safe haven and secure abode. The praying individual lies down in green pastures [Ps. 23:2], cleansing himself before God like a son before his father. His tempest-tossed, riven soul finds happiness and serenity, all fear being forgotten. Dread has disappeared; the awesome mystery is past. In their place is a welling up of joy and a yearning for communion with the source of being. Man does not flee from God, but rather races towards Him and resides in the bosom of the *Shekhinah*. All is blanketed in the serenity of peace and quiet. Over all, there flows the blessing of the Infinite; the *hesed* of God descends "like the dew on Mount Hermon" (Ps. 133:3). The world is illuminated with the precious light that flows from the Infinite.

1. For sources, see R. Y. Perla's commentary to *Sefer ha-Mitzvot le-R. Sa'adyah Gaon*, Positive Commandment 2.
2. *Guide* III:51.
3. Notes to Rambam's *Sefer ha-Mitzvot*, Positive Commandment 5.
4. *Hil. Tefillah* 4:1. See *Hiddushai R. Hayyim ha-Levi ad. loc.*: "There are two types of intention with respect to prayer: one is the intention relating to the meaning of the words, which is grounded in the principle of intention; the second is that he should intend that He is standing before God."
5. Whether *kavanah* is necessary for the performance of the *mizvah* to be valid is a matter of dispute. According to many Talmudic sages and decisors, intention must accompany, and is a necessary condition of fulfillment. According to many other decisors, however, lack of intention does not prevent fulfillment of the *mizvah*. But even if intention is required, it is distinct from the action itself. See *Rosh Ha-Shanah* 28b; *Berakhot* 13a; *Pesachim* 114b and parallels, and *Milhamot Ha-Shem* and *Sefer ha-Maor to Rosh Ha-Shanah*.
6. Note, however, that Moses saw and spoke with God not out of terror and trembling but in serenity. See Rambam *ibid.*
7. *Berakhot* (26b), cited by Rambam, *Hil. Tefillah* 1:5; *Hil. Melakhim* 9:1.
8. See *Berakhot* 21a and Tosafot s.v. *R. Yokanon* and *Rif, Berakhot* ch. 4; Rambam, *Hil. Tefillah* 1:6. See also *Orchot Hayyim* 107:4 ("Would that one have proper intention for the three daily prayers...").
9. *Guide* 1:54: "It has been explained to you that the attributes and ways are one, and they are the actions that come from Him in the world..." See also I:59.
10. Rambam, Commentary to Leviticus 1:9.
11. See the story about the death of R. Meir's two sons *Yalkut Shimoni*, Proverbs section 964.
12. Rambam, Leviticus 1:9: "The sprinkling of the blood on the altar corresponds to his own blood, so that a person may consider in doing any of this, that he has sinned against his God, body and soul, and that it is his blood that ought to be spilled and his body that ought to be immolated, were it not for the Creator's *hesed*, who took from him a substitute."
13. *Guide* III:51.
14. *Emunot ve-De'ot* 5:6.
15. *Hil. Tefillah* 4:2.
16. *Guide* III:51: "For of these four, that is the Patriarchs and Moses, it is explained that they unified their thoughts with the divine while occupied with human activities and acquiring possessions."
17. Rambam, *Hil. Yesodei ha-Torah* 10:4.
18. This is the formula utilized in praying for the sick on Shabbat and Yom Tov, when explicit petition is barred (based on *Shabbat* 12a).
19. Tosafot, *Berakhot* 34a, s.v. *al yish'kal adam*.