



# Jewish Mindfulness?

## History of the Word

### 1. New York Times Magazine

The New York Times Magazine | <http://nyti.ms/1FECFW8>

Magazine

## The Muddled Meaning of ‘Mindfulness’

First Words

By VIRGINIA HEFFERNAN APRIL 14, 2015

Most newly stylish coinages carry with them some evidence of grammatical trauma. Consider “affluencer,” “selfie,” “impactful.” Notes of cynicism and cutesiness come through. But every now and then a bright exception to this dispiriting routine appears. A rookie word makes its big-league debut, a stadium of pedants prepares to peg it with tomatoes and — nothing. A halfhearted heckle. The new word looks only passably pathetic. Maddeningly, it has left.

“Mindfulness” may be that hefty word now, one that can’t readily be dismissed as trivia or propaganda. Yes, it’s current among jaw-grinding Fortune 500 executives who take sleeping pills and have “leadership coaches,” as well as with the moneyed earnest, who shop at Whole Foods, where Mindful magazine is on the newsstand alongside glossies about woodworking and the environment. It looks like nothing more than the noun form of “mindful” — the proper attitude toward the London subway’s gaps — but “mindfulness” has more exotic origins. In the late 19th century, the heyday of both the British Empire and Victorian Orientalism, a British magistrate in Galle, Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), with the formidable name of Thomas William Rhys Davids, found himself charged with adjudicating Buddhist ecclesiastical disputes. He set out to learn Pali, a Middle Indo-Aryan tongue and the liturgical language of Theravada, an early branch of Buddhism. In 1881, he thus pulled out “mindfulness” — a synonym for “attention” from 1530 — as an approximate translation of the Buddhist concept of *sati*.

The translation was indeed rough. *Sati*, which Buddhists consider the first of seven factors of enlightenment, means, more nearly, “memory of the present,” which didn’t track in tense-preoccupied English. “Mindfulness” stuck — but may have saddled the subtle *sati* with false-note connotations of Victorian caution, or even obedience. (“Mind your manners!”)

“Mindfulness” finally became an American brand, however, a hundred years later, when the be-here-now, Eastern-inflected explorations of the ‘60s came to dovetail with self-improvement regimes. In the 1970s, Jon Kabat-Zinn, a molecular biologist in New England and a longtime meditator in the Zen Buddhist tradition, saw in Rhys Davids’s word a chance to scrub meditation of its religious origins. Kabat-Zinn believed that many of the secular people who could most benefit from meditation were being turned off by the whiffs of reincarnation and other religious esoterica that clung to it. So he devised a new and pleasing definition of “mindfulness,” one that now makes no mention of enlightenment: “The awareness that arises through paying attention on purpose in the present moment, and non-judgmentally.”

Under cover of this innocuous word, Buddhist meditation nosed its way into a secular audience bent on personal growth and even success strategies. The idea that people might overcome psychological and physiological shortcomings with self-induced comforting thoughts had already taken hold by other names: positive thinking, the recovery movement, self-help. In her scathing 1992 critique of this idea, “I’m Dysfunctional, You’re Dysfunctional,” Wendy Kaminer might have been describing the dissemination of mindfulness as a kind of shorthand for betterment when she talked about how to write a self-help book: “Package platitudes about positive thinking, prayer or affirmation therapy as surefire, scientific techniques.”

## Definition of MINDFULNESS

### 1. Merriam-Webster Dictionary

- 1: the quality or state of being **mindful**
- 2: the practice of maintaining a nonjudgmental state of heightened or complete awareness of one's thoughts, emotions, or experiences on a moment-to-moment basis; *also* : such a state of awareness

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something simple and rote—making an omni-plet, say, or folding clothes—it can be a very big deal if your brain is trying to sort out a complex problem, Miller says.

### ALERT OVERLOAD

One recent study found that it can take your brain 15 to 25 minutes to get back to where it was after stopping to check an email. And Miller's own research shows that you don't get better at this sort of multitasking with practice. In fact, people who judged themselves to be expert digital multitaskers tended to be pretty bad at it, he says.

"You're not able to think as deeply on something when you're being distracted every few minutes," Miller notes. "And thinking deeply is where real insights come from."

There seems to be an easy solution to this: when you're working on something complicated, switch off your phone and email.

That could work for some people. But there's evidence that as your brain becomes accustomed to checking a device every few minutes, it will struggle to stay on task even when it's not interrupted by digital alerts. "There's something called 'phantom text syndrome,'" Atchley says. "You think you hear a text or alert, but there isn't one."

Although phantom texts can afflict adults, Atchley says this phenomenon is pretty much universal among people under the age of 20—many of whom wouldn't recognize a world that doesn't include smartphones. Even if you don't hear phantom alerts, you may still find yourself reflexively wanting to check your device every few minutes for updates, which disrupts your concentration regardless of whether you ignore that impulse.

### FINDING FOCUS

Your ability to focus aside, a 2014 study appearing in the journal *PLoS One* found that people who spend a lot of time "media multi-

tasking"—or juggling lots of different websites, apps, programs or other digital stimuli—tend to have less gray matter in a part of their brain involved with thought and emotion control. These same structural changes are associated with obsessive-compulsive disorder, depression and anxiety disorders, says that study's first author, Keop Kce Loh, who conducted his research at University College London.

Atchley says that research suggests that lots of device use bombards your brain's prefrontal cortex, which plays a big role in willpower and decision-making.

"The prefrontal cortex prevents us from doing stupid things, whether it's eating junk food or texting while driving," he explains.

He says this part of the human brain isn't "fully wired" until one's early 20s—an issue that has him worried about how heavy device use may be affecting children and adolescents.

So what's the antidote? Spending time in nature may counteract the focus-draining effects of too much tech time, indicates research that Atchley and Strayer published in 2012. Meditation may also offer focus-strengthening benefits.

Strayer says putting your phone on silent and setting your email to deliver new messages only every 30 minutes are ways to use your devices strategically and "not be a slave to them."

Of course, there are plenty of benefits associated with the latest and greatest technologies. Ease and convenience of staying in touch with friends is a big one. But many open questions remain when it comes to the true cost of our digital distractions.

"Imagine Einstein trying to think about mathematics at a time when part of his brain was wondering what was going on with Twitter," Atchley says. "People make incredible breakthroughs when they're concentrating very hard on a specific task, and I wonder if our devices are taking away our ability to do that."

**People who judged themselves to be expert digital multitaskers tended to be pretty bad at it.**

grouch weight loss through a set of rules (eat this, don't eat that), mindful eating forces you to pay attention to externals," says Wolaver. "What we should be doing is listening to our bodies: Are we hungry or are we full? Do we need food or something else?"

These sound like obvious questions. But it's no easy feat to simply stop eating the way you're accustomed to, explains Jennifer Daubenmier, an assistant professor at the Osher Center for Integrative Medicine at the University of California, San Francisco.

On a basic level, dieters understand what they should and should not eat, she says. But actually following through often requires a skill set they haven't yet mastered.

"It's really easy to eat for pleasure rather than for hunger," says Daubenmier. "I think many diet programs fail because people don't know how to stop eating this way."

Becoming better attuned to your body's signals may weaken this eating-for-fun instinct; binge eating, less emotional eating and decreased body weight.

#### WEIGHT LOSS AND HEALTH GAINS

It also seems to support long-term health. In a study published in the journal *Obesity* in March 2016, Daubenmier and her colleagues observed a connection between mindfulness and lasting physiological benefits. The nearly 200 obese adults in their study were all asked to follow the same diet and exercise regimen. Half the group was given additional information on nutrition and exercise, while the other half was taught mindful eating techniques, as well as yoga, meditation and breathing exercises. To learn to eat mindfully, participants were instructed to eat one raisin. Afterward, the researchers asked them to reflect on it: Did the raisin make them feel full? On a scale of 1 to 10, how full did they feel? What signs of fullness was their body giving them? Grath-

ally, this exercise was repeated with more tempting foods.

At the end of the study, both groups lost comparable amounts of weight. But six months later, the mindfulness group had healthier levels of "good" HDL cholesterol and lower levels of triglyceride (a type of blood fat that can increase the risk of clogged arteries and heart disease). One year after the study, they also had lower blood-sugar levels. This suggests

## By promoting self-compassion, mindful eating may inhibit stress-related bingeing.

that mindfulness may trump traditional dieting when it comes to establishing long-term healthy habits you can stick with.

Having to think so hard about food may sound a little odd, if not impractical. Many of us frequently eat meals on the go or in small windows of time. But this mode of dining can eventually become second nature, insists Michael Mantzios, a lecturer in health psychology at Birmingham City University in England. He's seen it himself in his research: In a study published in *Psychology & Health* that he co-authored, participants appeared to internalize the message of mindful eating and apply it subconsciously over time.

They were divided into two groups: half practiced meditation and half logged their meals in a food diary. The diary group was given a list of mindful questions to answer as they ate, such as "How does this meal taste?" and "How kind are you to yourself now that you ate this meal?" To Mantzios's surprise, the food-diary group maintained their weight loss even more successfully than the meditation group—and many of the food-diary participants weren't even writing down their answers.

"Some were keeping the diary open to remind themselves of how they should approach their meal," he says. In other words, once they understood how to eat mindfully, the journal's mere existence was enough to prompt them to consider their food in a more thoughtful way.

"If you keep practicing [mindful eating], you'll get to the point where it becomes habitual," says Mantzios. "In other words, you will become mindlessly very mindful."

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HERE'S A CERTAIN SORT OF person mind-body expert Alice Domar sees all too often: the type with a high-octane life who has no idea that her stress levels are sabotaging her health. "One woman had two kids and worked 80 hours a week," reveals Domar, who is the executive director of the Demar Center for Mind/Body Health in Waltham, Mass. "She came to me because she was thinking of trying for a third child and was concerned about her irregular periods—but when I took a complete history, I found out that she had a host of physical symptoms, including frequent headaches and insomnia. It never occurred to her that they had anything to do with her intense lifestyle."

That's the insidious thing about stress: it infiltrates our bodies even as our heads are spinning. And it's ever-present; the American Psychological Association reports that 34% of Americans say their stress levels have shot up in the past year. Left untreated, stress can lead to serious illness, including heart disease, depression, anxiety and diabetes. It could even speed up the spread of breast and ovarian cancers, research suggests. Unnamed tension may also pop up as aches and ails that make us feel crummy on a daily basis.

As annoying as those eye twitches and stomach knots are, we should be thanking our bodies for the heads-up, doctors say. "Physical symptoms that accompany stress are part of the body's warning system," notes Darshan Mehta, the medical director of Massachusetts General Hospital's Benson-Henry Institute for Mind Body Medicine in Boston. They nudge you to take better care of yourself. Ahead, everything you've ever wondered about how stress affects your system but were too frazzled to ask.

## Why does stress have a physical effect if it's a mental thing?

Forget your Tyrant boss; blame the woolly rhinoceros. "Stress activates a psychophysiological response—the mind perceives a threat or emergency, and your body reacts," according to Michael McKeay, who was a psycholo-

gist at the Cleveland Clinic. You're probably familiar with the fight-or-flight effect; your system churns out the stress chemicals adrenaline, norepinephrine and cortisol, causing your heart to race and blood pressure to increase as oxygen goes to your large muscles. In the Stone Age, this response would save us from danger. Today it basically causes our brain to overreact, interpreting mildly stressful situations (like planning a holiday dinner for 25 people) as run-for-the-hills emergencies. Over time, constantly cycling into a revved-up state can cause wear and tear on the heart, muscles and brain.

In 2012, researchers from Carnegie Mellon University discovered why frequently having high levels of cortisol can do damage. Cortisol helps turn off inflammation in the body, but prolonged stress makes immune cells insensitive to the hormone's regulatory effect. As a result, the inflammatory response that the immune system normally launches to protect the body goes into overdrive. That excess inflammation may lead to anything from the common cold to, in the long run, heart attacks, stroke and autoimmune disorders. A 2014 study revealed that people under significant pressure at work had a 45% higher risk of Type 2 diabetes.

## Do events such as a death or divorce affect you more than everyday hassles?

Both acute stress and the daily kind can do harm, weakening your immunity and triggering flare-ups of migraines, irritable bowel syndrome and arthritis. "Chronic activation of your stress response can contribute to disease," Mehta says. One study from Pennsylvania State University discovered that people who got distressed by little annoyances were more likely to have chronic health conditions such as arthritis-induced pain 10 years later.

A key aid to weathering life's dramas: friends. Research shows that when faced with a big upset, many of us cope by leaning on social supports, which dramatically reduces stress and strengthens resilience. Thing is, little hassles have a way of getting under your

## Torah and Mindfulness

### 2. Talmud Bavli, Sukkah 53a

תניא, אמרו עליו על הלל הזקן כשהיה שמח בשמחת בית השואבה אמר כן: אם אני כאן - הכל כאן, ואם איני כאן - מי כאן.

## Mindfulness in Judaism

### 3. Jewish Meditation, Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan, Chapter 5

There is ample evidence that meditative practices were widespread among Jews throughout Jewish history. References to meditation are found in major Jewish texts in every period from the biblical to the premodern era. One reason that this has not been universally recognized is that the vocabulary of meditation has been lost to a large degree, especially during the last century.

Until the rise of the Jewish Enlightenment, mysticism and

intellectualism had equal status within Judaism. The ostensible goal of the Enlightenment, however, was to raise the intellectual level of Judaism, and positive as this may have been, it was often done at the expense of other Jewish values. The first values to fall by the wayside were Jewish mysticism in general and meditation in particular. Anything that touched upon the mystical was denigrated as superstition and occultism and was deemed unworthy of serious study.

Even Kabbalah, which contains mysticism par excellence, was reduced to simply an intellectual exercise; its deeper meanings were totally lost. In earlier chapters we discussed how many phenomena experienced in a meditative state cannot be understood rationally. This premise was not recognized by the nineteenth-century rationalists, and even the ineffable became the subject of philosophical discussion.

For this and other reasons, all references to meditation vanished from mainstream Jewish literature about 150 years ago. This is true even in Chasidic literature, where meditation initially played a central role. Because of this antimystical trend, even Kabbalistic works published after around 1840 show a surprising lack of even the slightest mention of meditation. After a century of indifference, even the meanings of key words were forgotten.

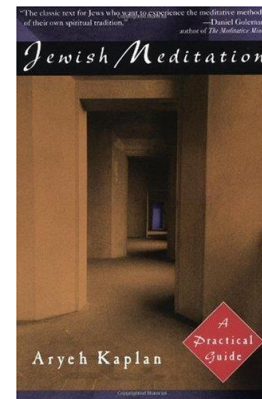
In earlier literature, by contrast, references to meditation are abundant. This is true even in the Bible, although one has to

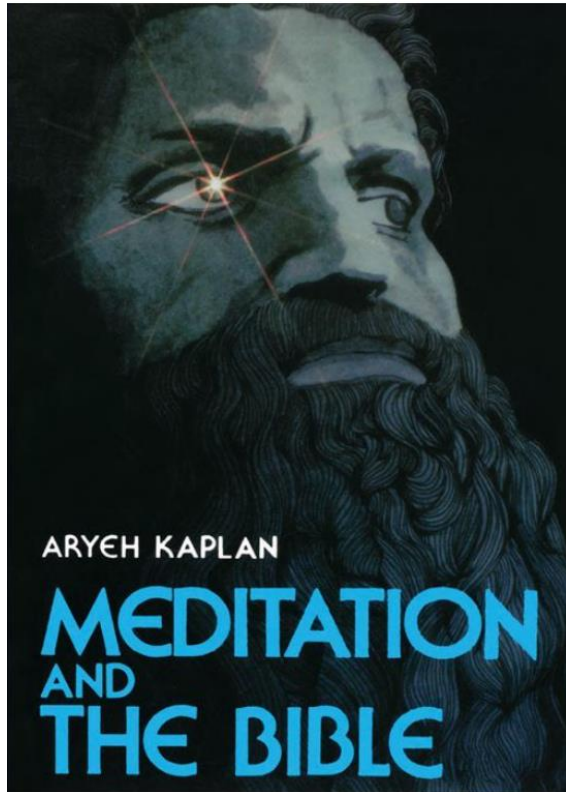
resort to a kind of “verbal archaeology” to discover the true meaning of key words.

In any case, it appears from both biblical and postbiblical sources that meditation was central to the prophetic experience, and that this experience was attained in the meditative state. The Bible states explicitly that the prophets used chants and music to attain higher states of consciousness. Careful philological analysis of certain key words in the Bible suggests that they refer to specific meditative methods. This subject formed the basis of my first book on the subject, *Meditation and the Bible*. However, since the discussion consists largely of analysis of Hebrew words, it is beyond the scope of this book.

From the literature, it seems evident that a prophet would almost always experience his first prophetic experience while in a meditative state. Later, however, it would become possible for him to experience prophecy without meditation. Sometimes prophecy would come to a prophet unexpectedly and without warning. This probably involved a phenomenon sometimes referred to as “flashback.” After a person has become adept at reaching higher levels of consciousness through meditation, he can occasionally reach such levels spontaneously as well. This seems to be evident in the experiences of a number of prophets.

There is also evidence that during the period when the Bible was written (until approximately 400 B.C.E.), meditation was





# MEDITATION AND THE BIBLE

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Rabbi Abraham Maimonides writes that there are two types of isolation (*hitbodedut*), external and internal. External isolation is nothing more than physical seclusion, but internal isolation refers to the meditative process, where one isolates himself both spiritually and mentally.

Such meditation is seen as the highest of all practices, being the method used by the prophets to attain their revelation. The prophets frequently engaged in physical seclusion, but the main purpose of such external isolation was as preparation for internal isolation or meditation, which brought one to the highest step on the ladder of revelation. Such a state of internal isolation is seen, not only as a means to attain revelation, but as actually being the revelation itself.

A number of Biblical verses are seen by Rabbi Abraham as referring to such a meditative state. It is the perfection from within the heart for which King David prayed when he said, "A pure heart create for me, O God" (*Psalms 51:12*). It was also the attainment of Aseph, regarding which he sang, "My flesh and heart fade away, while God becomes the Rock of my heart and my portion forever" (*Psalms 73:26*). These verses refer to the purity of the mind and heart, when they are cleansed of all things other than the Divine. When a person attains such a state, the Divine Essence is actually seen as entering the mind and dwelling in it.

#### 4. Rambam, Hilchos Avodah Zarah 1:1-3

During the times of Enosh, mankind made a great mistake, and the wise men of that generation gave thoughtless counsel. Enosh himself was one of those who erred.

בימי אנוש טעו בני האדם טעות גדולה ונבערה עצת חכמי אותו הדור ואנוש עצמו מן הטועים היה, וזו היתה טעותם, אמרו הואיל והאלהים

The method through which this is attained is also clearly described: "This level is achieved through a cessation of activity on the part of the perceptive faculty, completely, or at least for the most part, divorcing it from the soul. The motivating force of the consciousness is thus divorced from all worldly concepts and is inclined toward the Divine. The intellect then becomes enveloped in the Divine, and the imagination which is associated with the meditative faculty becomes activated through contemplation in God's creation, gazing at the mighty things that bear witness to their Creator."

The main method of meditation as outlined by Rabbi Abraham, thus involves the contemplation of nature. A person can contemplate the greatness of the sea, marveling at the many creatures that live in it. One can gaze at a clear night sky, allowing his mind to be completely absorbed by the glory of the stars. Through such intense contemplation, one can attain a meditative state directed toward the Divine.

This is seen as the level of Aseph, one of the co-authors of the Psalms, who purified his heart and mind, cleansing it of all things other than the Divine. It is regarding this state that he said, "My flesh and heart fade away." When he divorced his consciousness from everything but God, he said, "Who have I in heaven? And with You, I have no desire on earth" (*Psalms 73:25*).

Although the entire psalm is not discussed, many other verses

Their mistake was as follows: They said God created stars and spheres with which to control the world. He placed them on high and treated them with honor, making them servants who minister before Him. Accordingly, it is fitting to praise and glorify them and to treat them with honor. [They perceived] this to be the will of God, blessed be He, that they magnify and honor those whom He magnified and honored, just as a king desires that the servants who stand before him be honored. Indeed, doing so is an expression of honor to the king.

After conceiving of this notion, they began to construct temples to the stars and offer sacrifices to them. They would praise and glorify them with words, and prostrate themselves before them, because by doing so, they would - according to their false conception - be fulfilling the will of God.

This was the essence of the worship of false gods, and this was the rationale of those who worshiped them. They would not say that there is no other god except for this star.

This message was conveyed by Jeremiah, who declared (10:7-8): "Who will not fear You, King of the nations, for to You it is fitting. Among all the wise men of the nations and in all their kingdoms, there is none like You. They have one foolish and senseless [notion. They conceive of their] empty teachings as wood;" i.e., all know that You alone are God. Their foolish error consists of conceiving of this emptiness as Your will.

After many years passed, there arose people - false prophets - who told [their nations] that God had commanded them to say: Serve this star - or all the stars - sacrifice to it, offer libations to it, build a temple for it and make an image of it so that all people - including the women, the children, and the common people - could bow to it.

He would inform them of a form that he had conceived, and tell them that this is the image of the particular star, claiming that this was revealed to him in a prophetic vision. In this manner, the people began to make images in temples, under trees, and on the tops of mountains and hills.

People would gather together and bow down to them and the [false prophets] would say: This image is the source of benefit or harm. It is appropriate to serve it and fear it. Their priests would tell them: This service will enable you to multiply and be successful. Do this and this, or do not do this or this.

Subsequently, other deceivers arose and declared that a specific star, sphere, or angel had spoken to them and commanded them: Serve me in this manner. He would then relate a mode of service [telling them:] Do this, do not do this.

Thus, these practices spread throughout the world. People would serve images with strange practices - one more distorted than the other - offer sacrifices to them, and bow down to them. As the years passed, [God's] glorious and awesome name was forgotten by the entire population. [It was no longer part of] their speech or thought, and they no longer knew Him. Thus, all the common people, the women, and the children would know only the image of wood or stone and the temples of stone to which they were trained from their childhood to bow down and serve, and in whose name they swore.

ברא כוכבים אלו וגלגלים להנהיג את העולם ונתנם במרום וחלק להם כבוד והם שמשים המשמשים לפניו ראויין הם לשבחם ולפארם ולחלוק להם כבוד, וזהו רצון האל ברוך הוא לגדל ולכבד מי שגדלו וכבודו, כמו שהמלך רוצה לכבד העומדים לפניו וזהו כבודו של מלך, כיון שעלה דבר זה על לבם התחילו לבנות לכוכבים היכלות ולהקריב להן קרבנות ולשבחם ולפארם בדברים ולהשתחוות למולם כדי להשיג רצון הבורא בדעתם הרעה, וזה היה עיקר עבודת כוכבים, וכך היו אומרים עובדיה היודעים עיקרה, לא שהן אומרים שאין שם אלוה אלא כוכב זה, הוא שירמיהו אומר מי לא ייראך מלך הגוים כי לך יאתה כי בכל חכמי הגוים ובכל מלכותם מאין כמוך ובאחת יבערו ויכסלו מוסר הבלים עץ הוא, כלומר הכל יודעים שאתה הוא לבדך אבל טעותם וכסילותם שמדמים שזה ההבל רצונך הוא.

ואחר שארכו הימים עמדו בבני האדם נביאי שקר ואמרו שהאל צוה ואמר להם עבדו כוכב פלוני או כל הכוכבים והקריבו לו ונסכו לו כך וכך ובנו לו היכל ועשו צורתו כדי להשתחוות לו כל העם הנשים והקטנים ושאר עמי הארץ, ומודיע להם צורה שבדה מלבו ואומר זו היא צורת הכוכב פלוני שהודיעוהו בנבואתו, והתחילו על דרך זו לעשות צורות בהיכלות ותחת האילנות ובראשי ההרים ועל הגבעות ומתקבצין ומשתחווים להם ואומרים לכל העם שזו הצורה מטיבה ומריעה וראוי לעובדה וליראה ממנה, וכהנייהם אומרים להם שבעבודה זו תרבו ותצליחו ועשו כך כך ואל תעשו כך וכך, והתחילו כזבים אחרים לעמוד ולומר שהכוכב עצמו או הגלגל או המלאך דבר עמהם ואמר להם עבדוני בכך וכך והודיע להם דרך עבודתו ועשו כך ואל תעשו כך, ופשט דבר זה בכל העולם לעבוד את הצורות בעבודות משונות זו מזו ולהקריב להם ולהשתחוות, וכיון שארכו הימים נשתכח השם הנכבד והנורא מפי כל היקום ומדעתם ולא הכירוהו ונמצאו כל עם הארץ הנשים והקטנים אינם יודעים אלא הצורה של עץ ושל אבן וההיכל של אבנים שנתחנכו מקטנותם להשתחוות לה ולעבדה ולהשבע בשמה, והחכמים שהיו בהם כגון כהניהם וכיוצא בהן מדמין

The wise men among them would think that there is no God other than the stars and spheres for whose sake, and in resemblance of which, they had made these images. The Eternal Rock was not recognized or known by anyone in the world, with the exception of a [few] individuals: for example, Chanoch, Metushelach, Noach, Shem, and Ever. The world continued in this fashion until the pillar of the world - the Patriarch Abraham - was born.

After this mighty man was weaned, he began to explore and think. Though he was a child, he began to think [incessantly] throughout the day and night, wondering: How is it possible for the sphere to continue to revolve without having anyone controlling it? Who is causing it to revolve? Surely, it does not cause itself to revolve.

**He had no teacher, nor was there anyone to inform him. Rather, he was mired in Ur Kasdim among the foolish idolaters. His father, mother, and all the people [around him] were idol worshipers, and he would worship with them. [However,] his heart was exploring and [gaining] understanding.**

**Ultimately, he appreciated the way of truth and understood the path of righteousness through his accurate comprehension.** He realized that there was one God who controlled the sphere, that He created everything, and that there is no other God among all the other entities. He knew that the entire world was making a mistake. What caused them to err was their service of the stars and images, which made them lose awareness of the truth.

Abraham was forty years old when he became aware of his Creator. When he recognized and knew Him, he began to formulate replies to the inhabitants of Ur Kasdim and debate with them, telling them that they were not following a proper path.

He broke their idols and began to teach the people that it is fitting to serve only the God of the world. To Him [alone] is it fitting to bow down, sacrifice, and offer libations, so that the people of future [generations] would recognize Him. [Conversely,] it is fitting to destroy and break all the images, lest all the people err concerning them, like those people who thought that there are no other gods besides these [images].

When he overcame them through the strength of his arguments, the king desired to kill him. He was [saved through] a miracle and left for Charan. [There,] he began to call in a loud voice to all people and inform them that there is one God in the entire world and it is proper to serve Him. He would go out and call to the people, gathering them in city after city and country after country, until he came to the land of Canaan - proclaiming [God's existence the entire time] - as [\[Genesis 21:33\]](#) states: "And He called there in the name of the Lord, the eternal God."

When the people would gather around him and ask him about his statements, he would explain [them] to each one of them according to their understanding, until they turned to the path of truth. Ultimately, thousands and myriads gathered around him. These are the men of the house of Abraham.

שאיין שם אלוה אלא הכוכבים והגלגלים שנעשו הצורות האלו בגללם ולדמותן אבל צור העולמים לא היה שום אדם שהיה מכירו ולא יודעו אלא יחידים בעולם כגון חנוך ומתושלח נח שם ועבר, ועל דרך זה היה העולם הולך ומתגלגל עד שנולד עמודו של עולם והוא אברהם אבינו.

כיון שנגמל איתן זה התחיל לשוטט בדעתו והוא קטן והתחיל לחשוב ביום ובלילה והיה תמיה היאך אפשר שהיה הגלגל הזה נוהג תמיד ולא יהיה לו מנהיג ומי יסבב אותו, כי אי אפשר שיסבב את עצמו, ולא היה לו מלמד ולא מודיע דבר אלא מושקע באור כשדים בין עובדי כוכבים הטפשים ואביו ואמו וכל העם עובדי כוכבים והוא עובד עמהם ולבו משוטט ומבין עד שהשיג דרך האמת והבין קו הצדק מתבוננתו הנכונה, וידע שיש שם אלוה אחד והוא מנהיג הגלגל והוא ברא הכל ואין בכל הנמצא אלוה חוץ ממנו, וידע שכל העולם טועים ודבר שגרם להם לטעות זה שעובדים את הכוכבים ואת הצורות עד שאבד האמת מדעתם, ב ובן ארבעים שנה הכיר אברהם את בוראו, כיון שהכיר וידע התחיל להשיב תשובות על בני אור כשדים ולערור דין עמהם ולומר שאין זו דרך האמת שאתם הולכים בה ושיבר הצלמים והתחיל להודיע לעם שאין ראוי לעבוד אלא לאלוה העולם ולראוי להשתחוות ולהקריב ולנסך כדי שיכירוהו כל הברואים הבאים, וראוי לאבד ולשבר כל הצורות כדי שלא יטעו בהן כל העם כמו אלו שהם מדמים שאין שם אלוה אלא אלו. כיון שגבר עליהם בראיותיו בקש המלך להורגו ונעשה לו נס ויצא לחרן, והתחיל לעמוד ולקרוא בקול גדול לכל העולם ולהודיעם שיש שם אלוה אחד לכל העולם ולו ראוי לעבוד, והיה מהלך וקורא ומקבץ העם מעיר לעיר ומממלכה לממלכה עד שהגיע לארץ כנען והוא קורא שנאמר ויקרא שם בשם ה' אל עולם, וכיון שהיו העם מתקבצין אליו ושואלין לו על דבריו היה מודיע לכל אחד ואחד כפי דעתו עד שיחזירו לדרך האמת עד שנתקבצו אליו אלפים ורבות והם אנשי בית אברהם ושתל בלבם העיקר הגדול הזה וחבר בו ספרים והודיעו ליצחק בנו

He planted in their hearts this great fundamental principle, composed texts about it, and taught it to Isaac, his son

5. Sfas Emes, Lech Lecha

**רמב"ן** הקשה שנאמר לך לך בלי שנוכר מקודם  
חיבתו. ובוזה"ק נראה כי זה עצמו השבח  
ששמע זה המאמר לך לך שנאמר מהשי"ת לכל  
האנשים תמיד כמ"ש וי לאינן דשינתא בחוריהון  
ואאע"ה שמע וקיבל. וממילא נקרא רק הדיבור אליו  
כי הלא לא נמצא מיוחד לשמוע. רק הוא אבל  
בודאי זה השבח בעצמו שהי' מוכן לקבל המאמר:  
ב"ה [תרל"ד]

### What it Prophecy?

6. Rambam, Yesodei HaTorah 7:1

מיסודי הדת לידע שהאל מנבא את בני האדם, ואין הנבואה חלה אלא על חכם גדול בחכמה גבור במדותיו ולא יחא יצרו מתגבר עליו בדבר בעולם אלא הוא מתגבר בדעתו על יצרו תמיד והוא בעל דעה רחבה נכונה עד מאד, אדם שהוא ממולא בכל המדות האלו שלם בגופו כשיכנס לפרדס וימשך באותן הענינים הגדולים הרחוקים ותהיה לו דעה נכונה להבין ולהשיג והוא מתקדש והולך ופורש מדרכי כלל העם ההולכים במחשכי הזמן והולך ומזרו עצמו ומלמד נפשו שלא תהיה לו מחשבה כלל באחד מדברים בטלים ולא מהבלי הזמן ותחבולותיו **אלא דעתו פנויה תמיד למעלה קשורה תחת הכסא להבין באותן הצורות הקדושות הטהורות ומסתכל בחכמתו של הקדוש ברוך הוא כולה מצורה ראשונה עד טבור הארץ ויודע מהו גדלו, מיד רוח הקודש שורה עליו, ובעת שתנוח עליו הרוח תתערב נפשו במעלת המלאכים הנקראים אישים ויהפך לאיש אחר ויבין בדעתו שאינו כמות שהיה אלא שנתעלה על מעלת שאר בני אדם החכמים כמו שנאמר בשאול והתנבית עמם ונהפכת לאיש אחר.**

7. Derech H', IV:3:4

[ד] [קנח] וְאִמְנָם לְמַעַלָּה מִכָּל זֶה יֵשׁ מַעַלָּה אַחֲרָת, וְהִיא הַנְּבוּאָה;  
וְעֵינֵיהָ שִׁיגֵיעַ הָאָדָם וְיִתְקַשֵּׁר בְּבוֹרָא יִתְבַּרְךָ שְׁמוֹ וְיִתְדַבֵּק בּוֹ  
[קנח] דְּבִקּוֹת מִמֶּשׁ, בְּאִפְּן שִׁיגֵישׁ הַהִתְדַבְּקוֹת וְיִשִּׁיג מֵה שֶׁהוּא  
מִתְדַבֵּק בּוֹ, [פח] דִּיְהִינּוּ – [קנח] כְּבוֹדוֹ יִתְבַּרְךָ שְׁמוֹ, עַל הַדְּרָךְ שֶׁנִּבְאָר  
לְפָנֵים, וְיִהְיֶה הַדְּבָר [קנח] בְּרוּר אֲצִלּוֹ [פח] וּמְרֻגָּשׁ מִמֶּנּוּ בְּלִי סִפְק  
כָּלל, [צ] כְּדָרְךָ שֶׁלֹּא יִסְתַּפֵּק בְּדָבָר גִּשְׁמִי שִׁיגֵישׁהוּ כְּחוּשָׁיו.  
[צא] וְהִנֵּה עֶקֶר הַנְּבוּאָה הוּא – [קנח] הַשִּׁיג הַדְּבִקּוֹת וְהַקְּשֵׁר הַזֶּה,  
עוֹדוֹ בְּחַיִּים, שְׁזֶה שְׁלֵמוֹת גְּדוֹל וְדָאִי; [צב] וְאוֹלָם יִתְלַוֶּה לְזֶה  
[קס] יִדְיַעוֹת וְהַשְּׁפָלוֹת, כִּי אִמְנָם יִשִּׁיג עַל יְדֵי זֶה [קסא] עֵינֵינִים  
אֲמִתִּים [קסב] וְנִכְבְּדִים מְאֹד, מִסְתְּרֵי סוּדוֹתָיו שֶׁל הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא,  
וְיִשִּׁיגֵם בְּבוֹר, [צג] כְּדָרְךָ הַהִשְׁפָּלָה הַנִּשְׁפָּעֵת שֶׁנִּכְרְנוּ, [צד] וּבִיּוֹתֵר כִּחַ  
מִבְּעֵלֵי רוּחַ הַקְּדוֹשׁ, וְכִמוֹ שֶׁנִּבְאָר עוֹד בְּסִיעֵתָא דְשְׁמֵיא.



8. Derech H', IV:3:4 Schools of Prophets

[ב] וממה שצריך שתדע, שהנה לא יגיע הנביא אל המדרגה העליונה בפעם אחת, אבל יעלה מעלה אחר מעלה, עד הגיעו אל הנבואה השלמה. (ק"ג) ויש בדבר התלמודות, כמו כל שאר החכמות והמלאכות, שיעלה האדם במדרגותיהן עד שיעמד על ברינו. וזה ענין (ק"ג) [קפד] "בני הנביאים", שהיו עומדים לפני הנביא להתלמד בדרכי הנבואה מה שהיה מצטרף לזה.

How Many Neviim Were There?

9. Talmud Bavli, Megillah 14a

כדתניא: הרבה נביאים עמדו להם לישראל, כפלים כיוצאי מצרים, אלא, נבואה שהוצרכה לדורות - נכתבה, ושלא הוצרכה - לא נכתבה.

The End of Prophecy: Us

10. Seder Olam, Perek 32

## סדר עולם

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(יג) והצפיר השעיר מלך יון וגו' הוא המלך הראשון (דניאל ח כא) . [ו] ועמד מלך גבור וגו' וכעמדו תשבר וגו' (שם יא ג) , הוא אלכסנדרוס מקדון שמלך י"ב שנה, יב) עד כאן היו הנביאים (יד) מתנבאים ברוח הקדש, מכאן ואילך, הם אונן ושמע דברי חכמים (משלי כב יז),

באור והנהות הנר"א

לכם ירושה שישית, פירוש לעתיד  
לבא: יב) עד כאן היו הנביאים,  
פירוש משהרגו את הוצר הרע בטלה  
הנבואה: יג) שאל אביך זה הנביאים

11. Talmud Bavli, Brachos 33a

אמר ליה רב שמן בר אבא לרבי יוחנן מכדי אנשי כנסת הגדולה תקנו להם לישראל ברכות ותפלות קדושות והבדלות

## 12. Jewish Meditation, Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan, Chapter 5

the most select individuals. The Great Assembly, which represented the first Jewish leadership in the Second Commonwealth, thus decreed: "The discipline of the chariot may be taught only to individual students (one at a time), and they must be wise, understanding with their own knowledge."

The Great Assembly also realized that the general populace would need a meditative discipline. But rather than have it be something loose and unstructured, they needed a discipline with a structure common to the entire Jewish nation, one that would serve as a means of uniting the people. It would have to contain the hopes and aspirations of the nation as a whole, to reinforce the unity of the Jewish people.

The meditative discipline that was composed by the Great Assembly ended up as the Amidah, a "standing" prayer consisting of eighteen sections, which would be repeated silently, in an upright position, three times each day. It is true that nowadays the Amidah is thought of more as a prayer than a meditative device, but the most ancient sources regard it as a meditation. Indeed, the Talmud verifies that this was its original intention.

This also explains why the Great Assembly legislated that the same prayer be repeated three times each day. People often complain that saying the same prayer over and over is tedious and uninspiring. For anyone familiar with mantra meditation, however, the opposite is true. All types of mantra meditation

involve repetition. In mantra meditation, the device repeated is a word or a phrase, and it can be repeated over and over for weeks, months, or even years on end.

The Amidah was meant to be repeated three times every day from childhood on, and essentially the same formula would be said for an entire lifetime. The Amidah could therefore be looked upon as one long mantra. In many ways, it has the same effects as a mantra, lifting the individual to a high meditative level of consciousness. As we shall, there is an entire literature that describes how the Amidah can be used in this manner. But most important, there is ample evidence that it was originally composed as the common form of meditation to be used by the entire Jewish nation.

From Talmudic times through the Middle Ages, an extensive literature dealing with Jewish meditation was written. Virtually every method found in general meditation can be found in ancient Jewish texts, as well as a number of methods that are found nowhere else. Indeed, a comparative study of meditative methods shows that the Jewish systems may have been among the most advanced in the world.

The Talmud speaks at length of meditation and meditative experiences, referring to it as the discipline of the chariot or "entering Paradise." There are numerous anecdotes about Talmudic sages, such as Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai and Rabbi

Earlier, we defined meditation as controlled thinking. In this sense, *kavanah* would be the most generic Hebrew term for meditation.

The word *kavanah* is most often used in relation to prayer or worship. In Judaism, as we shall see, the line between worship and meditation is often a very fine one. Many elements of the worship service are specifically designed to be used as meditations, to reach higher states of consciousness. We have discussed this usage with regard to the Amidah, but it is also true of a number of other prayers.

When one has *kavanah* in worship, one is allowing the words of the service to direct one's consciousness. The mind is brought to the state of consciousness defined by the prayer one is reciting. In this respect, the prayer is used to direct the consciousness.

The word *kavanah* is also associated with various actions, especially those involving fulfillment of the commandments or rituals. Here, too, *kavanah* denotes clearing the mind of extraneous thought and concentrating totally on the action at hand. The act itself becomes the means through which the person's consciousness is directed.

In addition to the general concept of *kavanah*, various Jewish devotional works, especially those of a Kabbalistic nature, contain collections of specific *kavanah* meditations, or *kavanoth*, for various rituals. These *kavanoth* are used to direct the mind along

the inner paths defined by the esoteric meaning of the ritual.

Another important Hebrew term associated with meditation is *hitbonenuth*. Translated literally, this word means "self-understanding." It reflects a somewhat different type of meditation.

Normally, we look at things dispassionately and objectively. I may look at a leaf and even examine it very closely, but it does not affect me in any way. I am exactly the same person after as I was before. It does not change my state of consciousness at all. My mind is the same looking at the leaf as it would be otherwise.

However, I may also look at the leaf with the aim of using it to attain a higher level of consciousness or a greater degree of self-awareness. I would then be using the leaf as a means to achieve "self-understanding," or *hitbonenuth*.

The great Jewish philosopher Moses Maimonides (1135-1204) speaks about using *hitbonenuth* meditation while contemplating God's creation. One can achieve a profound love for God through such contemplation. This is effective precisely because it is not merely a simple contemplation of various aspects of God's creation, but is understanding oneself as part of this creation. When one sees God's creation, and understands one's own role as part of it, one can develop a deep and lasting love for God. Who has not gone out into the fields on a clear night and gazed at the stars, yearning to unlock their secret? One thinks about the vast,

The general impression one gains from studying these texts is not only that meditation was practiced by Jews, but that for quite a number of centuries it was a very important ingredient of Judaism. Clearly, Jewish meditation has been part and parcel of Judaism throughout the ages.

## Tefilah: Examples in Halacha

### 13. Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 1:1

הגה: שויתי ה' לנגדי תמיד (תהילים טז, ח), הוא כלל גדול בתורה ובמעלות הצדיקים אשר הולכים לפני האלהים, כי אין ישיבת האדם ותנועותיו ועסקיו והוא לבדו בביתו, כשיבתו ותנועותיו ועסקיו והוא לפני מלך גדול, ולא דבורו והרחבת פיו כרצונו והוא עם אנשי ביתו וקרוביו, כדבורו במושב המלך. כ"ש כשישים האדם אל לבו שהמלך הגדול הקדוש ברוך הוא, אשר מלא כל הארץ כבודו, עומד עליו ורואה במעשיו, כמו שנאמר: אם יסתר איש במסתרים ואני לא אראנו נאם ה' (ירמיה כג, כד), מיד יגיע אליו היראה וההכנעה בפחד השי"ת ובושתו ממנו תמיד (מורה נבוכים ח"ג פ' נ"ב), ולא יתבייש מפני בני אדם המלעיגים עליו בעבודת השי"ת. גם בהצנע לכת ובשכבו על משכבו ידע לפני מי הוא שוכב, ומיד שיעור משנתו יקום בזריזות לעבודת בוראו יתברך ויתעלה (טור).

### 14. Biur Halacha, ad loc.

\* הוא כלל גדול בתורה וכו' - הרוצה לקיים שויתי כראוי ידרז לקיים מה שנכתב בשם ספר החינוך ומפני גודל חביבותם העתיקים כמה גדולים בספריהם וז"ל החינוך [בהקדמתו ובסימן כ"ה כ"ו תי"ז תי"ח תל"ב תפ"ז] שש מצות חיובן תמיד לא יפסקו מעל האדם אפילו רגע אחד כל ימיו וכל זמן וכל רגע שיחשוב בהן קיים מ"ע ואין קץ למתן שכר המצות ואלו הם. א) להאמין שיש אלוה אחד בעולם שהמציא כל הנמצאות ומחפצו ורצונו הוא כל מה שהוא עכשיו ושהיה ושהיה לעדי עד ושהוא הוציאנו ממצרים ונתן לנו התורה וזהו מ"ע דכתיב אנכי ה' אלהיך אשר הוצאתיך וגו' ופירושו תדעו ותאמינו שיש לעולם אלוה המשגיח שהרי הוצאתיך מארץ מצרים. ב) שלא נאמין בשום אלהים זולתו שנאמר לא יהיה לך אלהים אחרים על פני ואפילו מודה שהקב"ה שולט על הכל רק שידמה בדעתו שמסר הנהגת העולם למלאך או לכוכב ה"ז מודה בע"ז ועובר על לא יהיה לך אלהים אחרים על פני אלא יאמין שהקב"ה בעצמו ובכבודו משגיח בכל העולמות ואין לשום נברא כח לעשות דבר בלתי רצונו ולכן נקרא הקדוש ברוך הוא אלהי האלהים. ג) לייחדו שני שמע ישראל ה' אלהינו ה' אחד ופירושו שמע ישראל ודע כי ה' שהוה את הכל ברצונו והוא אלהינו המשגיח בכל העולמות הוא ה' אחד בלי שום שיתוף. ד) לאהוב המקום ב"ה שנאמר ואהבת את ה' אלהיך וגו' וכיצד יגיע האדם לאהבה הוא ע"י התורה וכדאיתא בספרי לפי שנאמר ואהבת אני יודע כיצד לאהוב את המקום ת"ל והיו הדברים האלה אשר אנכי מצוך היום על לבבך שמתוך כך אתה מכיר את מי שאמר והיה העולם כלומר שע"י ההתבוננות בתורה יכיר את גדולתו של הקדוש ברוך הוא שאין לו ערך ולא קץ ותתיישב האהבה בלבו בהכרח. וענין המצוה שיראה האדם להשים כל מגמתו וכל מחשבתו אחר אהבת השי"ת ויעריך בלבו כי כל מה שיש בעולם מעושר ובנים וכבוד הכל הוא כאין נגד אהבתו ית' ויגיע תמיד בבקשת חכמת התורה למען ישיג ידיעה בה'. והקובע את מחשבתו בעניינים הגשמיים ובהבלי העולם שלא לש"ש רק להתענג ולהשיג כבוד ביטל עשה זו ועונשו גדול. ה). להיות יראת השי"ת על פניו תמיד לבלתי יחטא וע"ז נאמר את ה' אלהיך תירא ומי שבא דבר עבירה לידו חייב להעיר רוחו ולתת אל לבו באותו הפרק שהקב"ה משגיח בכל מעשי בני אדם אף אם היו במחשבת מעשיהם וישיב להם נקם לפי רוע המעשה וכדכתיב אם יסתר איש במסתרים ואני לא אראנו נאום ה' וגו'. ו) שלא נתור אחר מחשבת הלב וראיית העינים שנאמר ולא תתורו אחרי לבבכם וגו' ואמרו חכמים אחרי לבבכם זו אפיקורסות ואחרי עיניכם זו זנות ובכלל אפיקורסות הוא כל מחשבות זרות שהם היפך דעת התורה ובכלל זנות הוא מי שהוא רודף אחר תאות העולם מבלי שיכוין בהם כלל לכוונה טובה כלומר שלא יעשה אותם כדי שיעמוד בריא ויוכל להשתדל בעבודת בוראו רק כוונתו תמיד להרבות תענוגים גדולים לנפשו. כ"ז לקטתי מלשונו הנחמד בקצרה וקילורין הם לעינים ואשרי המקיימים כראוי ועיין בח"א כלל א' שהאריך ג"כ בהם:

### 15. Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 1:4

טוב מעט תחנונים בכוונה, מהרבות בלא כוונה.

### 16. Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 98:1

צריך שיהיה לו כוונה בתפלתו, ובו ה' סעיפים.

סעיף א

המתפלל צריך שיכוין בלבו (א) פירוש המלות שמוציא בשפתיו; ויחשוב כאלו שכינה כנגדו; ויסיר כל המחשבות הטורדות אותו עד שתשאר מחשבתו וכוונתו זכה בתפלתו

### 17. Mishna Berura, ad loc.

(א) פירוש המילות -ואל יכוין האדם בשמות ויהודים רק יתפלל כפשוטו להבין הדברים בכונת הלב אם לא מי שהוא בא בסוד ד' ויודע לכוין ביה בלבא ורעותא ודחילו דאל"ה ח"ו מקלקל בזה הרבה עיין מ"א בשם הזוהר ובתשובת רש"ל סימן צ"ח כתב באורך והעיד על הר"ש שאמר אחרי שלמד סתרי הקבלה שהוא מתפלל כתינוק בן יומר. ועיין בפני יהושע ר"פ א"ע שכתב דאלו הכונות המבוארים כאן בשו"ע א"א לכוין בשעת התפלה רק קודם ובתפלה צריך לכוין פירוש המלות עי"ש:

## Brachos

18. The Collected Writing of R. Hirsch, Vol. 2 p. 181

Our Sages understood how to transplant the seeds of these special days into the realm of everyday life, thus transforming every aspect of daily life that touches us into a never-ceasing source of strength.

Most prominent among all the institutions ordained by our Sages is that of the *Berachoth*, with which they meant to transfer the "Divine service" from the periphery of the Temple and the altars into the activities and pleasures of everyday life. Our Sages were well aware of the incalculable worth of this *Berachoth*-institution: **האי מאן דבעי למהרי** He that wishes to make progress toward the lofty goal of moral perfection should be particularly careful to observe the laws pertaining to *Berachoth*.

19. The Sages Vol. 1, Rabbi Binyamin Lau, p. 10-11

### *The enactment of prayers and blessings*

The renewal of life in the land of Israel spurred the leadership to actualize the teachings of the prophets as part of the religious reform. This required the enactment of edicts, decrees, and customs. The most well-known of these dealt with the institutionalization of religious life:

The Men of the Great Assembly enacted blessings and prayers, sanctifications and *Havdalot*, for Israel. (*Berakhot* 33a)

This sentence from the Talmud embodies a wealth of material concerning the activities of the Men of the Great Assembly. The single phrase "blessings and prayers" encompasses almost the entirety of our religious world. Can a person be religious without reciting blessings and prayers?

Our daily routine is almost inconceivable in their absence, since one's entire daily connection to God is summed up in these two words, "blessings" and "prayers." Without a blessing or a prayer we have no stable meeting point with God, and are left only with spontaneous overtures at times of grace, of joy or, heaven forbid, of crisis. The Men of the Great Assembly understood that the life of simple people far from the Temple – a rural farmer perhaps – had no spiritual dimension or possibility of touching the holy. They saw that only by formalizing the relationship between the individual and his Creator would all people have access to their inner spiritual lives. Prayer and blessings introduced a framework of basic religious consciousness into the religious world of the layman. This was a revolution that called upon every Jew to participate actively in the service of God, rather than simply to rely on the knowledge that sacrifices were being offered in the Temple on his behalf.

Every month of our Jewish calendar year has received from Jewish Law or from Jewish history some unique characteristic by which it makes its own special impact upon our minds and spirits. Marcheshvan is the only month that has not been favored with such a gift. While the preceding month offered us so many deeply stirring days designed to bestir within us solemnity and rejoicing and generated an abundant treasure of *mitzvot* whose truths form the very foundations of our lives—Marcheshvan has no other message for us except that, after a month of such an abundance of special days, we should start out on the everyday path of Jewish life. However, it is the routine of everyday life which reflects our true existence, preceding and following those festivities from which they receive their value and significance.