

1. Jacob Chinitz, *My Problem with the Amidah*, Judaism (Summer 2006)

Our central prayer, the amidah, in its weekday form, exemplifies at the highest level the combination of prayer as praise and as petition... In the middle we have what are called the *Bakashot*, the specific petitions in which we ask for knowledge, repentance, forgiveness, redemption, healing, prosperity, ingathering, restoration of the judges... My problem with the Amidah and these 13 Benedictions of Petition are that they conflict with our theology. The impression created is one of total reliance on G-d, to whom we pray and send our petitions, after praising Him and before finally thanking Him. Yet our theology does not advocate this total reliance on G-d for the fulfillment of such *Bakashot*...

We ask, we petition, we beg, for 12 blessings, and add a 13th seeking a positive answer to our prayers. In reality, however, these blessings are determined, at least in part, by our fulfilling the obligations that belong to us. Do we have the right to ask for that which G-d asks of us?

The first revolution: A fixed amidah

2. Nechemiah 7:66, 13:24

The entire community, in total, was 42,360.

Their children, half of them spoke Ashdodit and could not speak Judean, or the language of every nation.

3. Mishnah, Shekalim 5:3

There were four types of seals in the Temple, on which was written *Calf, Ram, Goat, Sinner*. Ben Azzai said there were five. They were inscribed in Aramaic.

4. Talmud, Megilah 17b

Shimon haPekuli arranged eighteen blessings before Rabban Gamliel in Yavneh. Rabbi Yochanan said: 120 sages, including several prophets, set the structure of the eighteen blessings.

5. Maimonides, Laws of Prayer 1:4

When the Jews were exiled among the nations during the time of evil Nevuchadnezzar, they mixed into the Persians, Greeks and other societies. Their children were born in the lands of the nations, and their languages were confused, the language of each a mixture of many languages. When one would speak, he could not recite all he needed to say in one tongue, but in a mixture of tongues...

When Ezra and his court observed this, they enacted eighteen structured blessings. The three initial blessings praise G-d, and the three closing blessings are of thanks. The intermediate blessings contain requests for all needs, as central blessings meant to include all individual and communal needs. This way, the prayers would be structured in the mouths of each person, and each person would learn the prayers, and so the prayers of these poor speakers would be complete, like the prayers of people whose command of the language is pure...

6. Mishnah Berachot 4:4

Rabbi Eliezer said: One who makes his prayer 'fixed' – his prayer is not a proper plea.

Rabbi Yehoshua said: One who is in a dangerous place recites a short amidah, saying, "G-d, save Your nation, the remnant of Israel. At all times of the year may their needs be before You. Blessed are You, G-d, who hears prayer."

7. Talmud, Avodah Zarah 8a

Rav Yehudah son of Rav Shemuel bar Shelat cited Rav: Although they have said that one may make all of his requests in "He who hears prayer", one who wishes to add at the end of each blessing in keeping with its theme may do so.

Rabbi Chiya bar Ashi cited Rav: Although they have said that one may make all of his requests in "He who hears prayer", one who has an ill person in his home may mention it in the blessing for the sick, and one who needs *parnasah* may mention it in the blessing of the years.

Rabbi Chiya bar Ashi cited Rav: Although they have said that one may make all of his requests in "He who hears prayer", one who wishes to recite more after his prayer may even add a prayer like that of Yom Kippur.

8. Talmud, Shabbat 115b

Those who record blessings are as though they were burning Torah.

The second revolution: Communal Prayer

9. Kings I 8:30

You shall hear the pleas of Your servant and Your nation Israel, which they will pray toward this place, and You will hear in Your residence in the heavens...

10. Mishnah Taanit 4:2

How could a person's offering be brought, without him present? The early prophets enacted 24 shifts, and for each shift there were *kohanim*, *leviyyim* and *yisraelim* gathered in Jerusalem.

11. Talmud, Berachot 7b

Rav Yitzchak said to Rav Nachman: Why didn't the master come to the synagogue to pray? He replied: I couldn't.

He said: Let the master gather 10 and pray! He replied: It is difficult.

He said: Let the master tell the leader to have someone inform him when the community prays! He replied: Why?

He said: For Rabbi Yochanan cited Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai to say: What is the meaning of Psalms 69:14, "And I, this is my prayer to You at a time of [Divine] desire?" When is a time of desire? When the community prays.

12. Rabbi Moshe ben Yosef diTrani (Mabit), Beit Elokim, Shaare haYesodot 38

From the time of our master Moses until the Great Assembly, the *Shechinah* was revealed at the site of offerings, and prophecy remained in Israel, and each individual's prayer and blessing to G-d for his benefit from this world was heard. To me, this is why Jews did not gather in their places of dwelling in those days, evening and morning and afternoon, at a special site, to pray as a community. Rather, each one prayed individually wherever it happened – for we do not find in the Prophets or Writings a communal prayer, until after the destruction, when the Great Assembly enacted eighteen blessings and the sacred recitations that require a *minyan*. Granted that Moses enacted for Israel that they should read from the Torah... but as far as prayer, which did not have one form for all but rather each person spoke according to the purity of his tongue, it appears that each person prayed privately, wherever he could.

13. Talmud Yerushalmi, Berachot 4:4

One must designate his site in the synagogue. Why? Samuel II 15:32 says, "And David came to the front," not "where he prayed [once] to G-d" but "where he would [continually] pray to G-d."

14. Deuteronomy 12:11

In the place your G-d will choose for His Name to reside, there you shall bring that which I instruct you to bring – your burnt offerings, celebration offerings, your tithes...

Returning to the opening question

15. Chaggai 1:2, 2:3-5

This nation has declared: The time has not come, the time for the house of G-d to be built!

Who among you remains who saw this house in its initial glory, and what do you see now? It is like nothing in your eyes! Now be strong, Zerubavel, this is the word of G-d. And be strong, Yehotzadak, the High Priest! And be strong, nation of the land! This is the word of G-d! Do, for I am with you; this is the word of G-d, Lord of Hosts. The pact I made with you when you left Egypt, and My spirit, stands among you; do not fear!

16. Zechariah 7:3, 4:10

Shall I cry in the fifth month, abstaining, as I have done these many years?

Who degrades the day of small things? They will rejoice!... These represent the eyes of G-d, roaming the entire Earth!

17. Talmud, Berachot 33a

The Great Assembly enacted for Israel blessings, prayers, *kiddush* and *havdalah*...

Summary

- Fixed prayer is a controversial response to widespread ignorance, and it is a minimum
- Communal prayer is a response to the end of the *korban* and the scattering of the Jews
- The prayers established by the Great Assembly are geared toward boosting spirits after the Babylonian Exile