

CURRENT TALMUD PASSAGE

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BH

Tishrei: "When You've Completed the Amidah, Please Be Seated"

Many of us will be spending a lot of time in the synagogue during the High Holidays and Sukkot. In the Talmud passage for this month we look at the different prayers that some of the rabbis would say as they concluded the Amidah. The passages we are studying come from Talmud Berachot 16 b - 17 a. (These translations are based on the Soncino edition of the Talmud.). I've numbered some of the phrases, to refer to later on in our discussion

R. Eleazar on concluding his prayer used to say the following:

May it be Your will, Adonai our God,
to cause to dwell in our lot
love and harmony and peace and friendship, [1]
and may You make our borders rich in disciples
and prosper our latter end with good prospect and hope,
and set our portion in Paradise,
and confirm us with a good companion and a good impulse in Your world,
and may we rise early and obtain the yearning of our heart to fear Your name,
and may You be pleased to grant the satisfaction of our desires!

R. Johanan on concluding his prayer added the following:

May it be Your will, Adonai our God,
to look upon our shame,
and behold our evil plight,
and clothe Yourself in Your mercies,
and cover Yourself in Your strength,
and wrap Yourself in Your loving kindness ,
and gird Yourself with Your graciousness,
and may the attribute of Your kindness and gentleness come before You!

R. Zera on concluding his prayer added the following:

May it be Your will, Adonai our God,
that we sin not nor bring upon ourselves shame or disgrace before our ancestors!

R. Hiyya on concluding his prayer added the following:

May it be Your will, Adonai our God,
that our Torah may be our occupation,
and that our heart may not be sick nor our eyes darkened!

Rab on concluding his prayer added the following: [2]

May it be Your will, Adonai our God,
to grant us long life,

a life of peace, a life of good, a life of blessing,
a life of sustenance, a life of bodily vigor,
a life in which there is fear of sin,
a life free from shame and confusion,
a life of riches and honor,
a life in which we may be filled with the love of Torah and the fear of heaven,
a life in which You will fulfill all the desires of our heart for good!

Rabbi on concluding his prayer added the following: [3]

May it be Your will, Adonai our God, and God of our ancestors,
to deliver us from the impudent and from impudence,
from an evil man, from evil plots, from the evil impulse,
from an evil companion, from an evil neighbor, and from the destructive Accuser,
from a hard lawsuit and from a hard opponent,
whether he is a son of the covenant or not a son of the covenant!

[Thus did he pray] although guards were appointed to protect Rabbi.

R. Safra on concluding his prayer added the following:

May it be Your will, Adonai our God,
to establish peace among the celestial family, and among the earthly family,
and among the disciples who occupy themselves with Your Torah
whether for its own sake or for other motives;
and may it please You that all who do so for other motives
may come to study it for its own sake!

R. Alexandri on concluding his prayer added the following:

May it be Your will, Adonai our God,
to station us in an illumined corner and do not station us in a darkened corner,
and let not our heart be sick nor our eyes darkened!

According to some this was the prayer of R. Hamnuna, and R. Alexandri on concluding his prayer used to add the following:

Sovereign of the Universe,
it is known full well to You that our will is to perform
Your will, and what prevents us?
The yeast in the dough and the subjection to the foreign Powers. [4]
May it be Your will to deliver us from their hand,
so that we may return to perform the statutes of Your will with a perfect heart!

Raba on concluding his prayer added the following:

My God,
before I was formed I was not worthy [to be formed],
and now that I have been formed I am as if I had not been formed.
I am dust in my lifetime, all the more in my death.
Behold I am before You like a vessel full of shame and confusion.

May it be Your will, Adonai my God,
that I sin no more, and the sins I have committed before You
wipe out in Your great mercies,

but not through evil chastisements and diseases!

This was the confession of R. Hamnuna Zuti on the Day of Atonement.

Mar the son of Rabina on concluding his prayer added the following: [5]

My God,
keep my tongue from evil and my lips from speaking guile.
May my soul be silent to them that curse me
and may my soul be as the dust to all.
Open my heart in Your law,
and may my soul pursue Your commandments,
and deliver me from evil plots,
from the evil impulse
and from an evil woman
and from all evils that threaten to come upon the world.

As for all that design evil against me,
speedily annul their counsel and frustrate their designs!

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable before You,

Adonai, my rock and my redeemer!

Some of these prayers show up in other places in our prayer rituals today. For example, line [1] is part of the one of the Sheva Brachot, the seven blessings recited at a wedding. [2] is found in our prayer books to be recited on the Shabbat before Rosh Chodesh, announcing the new month. [3] has become part of the daily morning prayers in traditional prayer books.

Of all of these prayers, the one that was chosen to be included in our prayer books today following the Amidah was [5], written in the 4th century by Mar the son of Rabinah. Here is a new translation of the complete text in the siddur. Note that the four lines beginning Do it for the sake of were not part of the original text, but have been added. In his book, the Encyclopedia of Jewish Prayer, Macy Nulman writes that "according to Samuel, reciting these pleas "ensures that ones prayers will be answered."

My God, guard my tongue from evil
and my lips from speaking deceit.
To those who curse me may my soul be silent,
and may my soul be like dust to all.

Open my heart to Your Torah
that my soul may run after Your commandments,
and as for all who plan evil against me,
quickly cancel their deliberation
and ruin their plan.

Do it for the sake of Your Name.
Do it for the sake of Your right hand.
Do it for the sake of Your holiness.
Do it for the sake of Your Torah.
So that Your loved ones be rescued,
save [with] Your right hand and answer me.

May the words of my mouth be pleasing to You
and the meditations of my heart be before You,

Adonai, my Rock and my Redeemer.

May The One who makes peace in the heavens,
make peace for us
and for all Israel,
and we say: Amen.

Background

Rabbi Judy Abrams has provided us with some [background information](#) on this Talmud passage.

This section from the Talmud is a bit long, so there's lots to talk about. Think about these questions, and answer the ones that speak to you.

1. Each of these prayers was said following the Amidah. Think of the themes of the various blessings in the Amidah: Recalling Our Ancestors, Gods Might, Gods Holiness, The Holiness of the Day [on Shabbat and Yom Tov], Seeking Gods Presence in Zion, Giving Thanks for All God Does, and Peace. [The weekday Amidah replaces the blessing recognizing the holiness of the day with 13 other blessings.] How do these prayers differ from the blessings of the Amidah we previously recited?
2. How do we, as R. Hiyya suggests, make Torah our occupation?
3. R. Johanan asks that God "clothe, cover, wrap, and gird" God-self in "mercy, strength, kindness, and graciousness." Psalm 104 acknowledges God similarly: "Bless Adonai, my soul. My God, you are very great; you are clothed with glory and majesty, covered with light as with a garment.." How does the way we dress and address God change our relationship with and understanding of God?
4. Alexandri says that it is "the yeast in the dough and the subjection to the foreign Powers" that prevents us from doing what God asks of us. The yeast in the dough is an analogy for the evil impulse, which like yeast, ferments and goes bad. What else may prevent us from doing what God asks of us?
5. Are some of these prayers more appropriate with which to end the Amidah at various times during the year?
6. Why do you think that the prayer by Mar, the son of Rabinah, was the one chosen for the siddur? When you are saying the Amidah, try reciting one of the other prayers given here instead. Does it have the same effect on you?
7. Let us write our own prayers with which to conclude the Amidah in the margins of this page of the Talmud. Study the style of the rabbis prayers shown here. Many begin it with the formula. May it Be Your Will, Adonai our God . Note the images of light and dark, good and evil, heaven and earth, that are used. Incorporate these images, along with other images and concerns important to you, to create your own prayer to follow the Amidah. Next time you recite the Amidah, try saying your prayer afterward. If you feel comfortable, share your prayer with us, and how you feel saying it.