

Should our prayer be fixed or spontaneous? The sages disagreed.

<p>Mishnah Pirkei Avot 2:13</p> <p>Rabbi Shimon said: Be careful with the reading of the Shema and the Prayer, And when you pray, do not make your Prayer something automatic, but a plea for compassion before God, for it is said: “for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in kindness, and renouncing punishment” (Joel 2:13); and be not wicked in your own esteem.</p>	<p>משנה אבות ב:יג</p> <p>רבי שמעון אומר, הוי זהיר בקריאת שמע ובתפלה. וכשאתה מתפלל, אל תעש תפלתך קבע, אלא רחמים ותחנונים לפני המקום ברוך הוא, שנאמר (יואל ב) כי חנון ורחום הוא ארך אפים ורב חסד ונחם על הרעה. ואל תהי רשע בפני עצמך:</p>
<p>Mishnah Berakhot 4:3-4</p> <p>Rabban Gamliel says: Each and every day a person recites the eighteen blessings. Rabbi Yehoshua says: an abridged eighteen blessings. Rabbi Akiva says: If he is fluent in his prayer, he recites the eighteen blessings, and if not an abridged eighteen blessings.</p> <p>Rabbi Eliezer says: One whose prayer is fixed, his prayer is not supplication.</p>	<p>משנה ברכות ד:ג-ד</p> <p>רבן גמליאל אומר, בכל יום מתפלל אדם שמנה עשרה. רבי יהושע אומר, מעין שמנה עשרה. רבי עקיבא אומר, אם שגורה תפלתו בפיו, יתפלל שמנה עשרה. ואם לאו, מעין שמנה עשרה: רבי אליעזר אומר, העושה תפלתו קבע, אין תפלתו תחנונים.</p>
<p>Babylonian Talmud Berakhot 29b</p> <p>Rabbi Eliezer says: One whose prayer is fixed, his prayer is not supplication. What is fixed? Rabbi Ya'akov bar Idi said Rabbi Oshaya said: anyone for whom his prayer is like a burden upon him. The Rabbis say: anyone who does not recite in the language of supplication.</p> <p>Rabba and Rav Yosef both said: anyone unable to introduce something new in it.</p> <p>Rabbi Zeira said: I could introduce something new but I am afraid that perhaps I will become confused.</p>	<p>תלמוד בבלי ברכות כ"ט ב</p> <p>רבי אליעזר אומר כל העושה תפלתו קבע וכו': מאי "קבע"? אמר רבי יעקב בר אידי אמר רבי אושעיא: כל שתפלתו דומה עליו כמשויו. ורבנן אמרי: כל מי שאינו אומרה בלשון תחנונים.</p> <p>רבה ורב יוסף דאמרי תרוייהו: כל שאינו יכול לחדש בה דבר.</p> <p>אמר רבי זירא: אנא יכילנא לחדושי בה מילתא, ומסתפינא דלמא מטרידנא.</p>

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We have to distinguish between two main types of prayer: prayer as an **act of expression** and prayer as an **act of empathy**. The first type takes place when there is a strong feeling within that leads to prayer, when we are stirred by something and seek words to express our state of mind. But the more common type of prayer is an act of empathy. There need be no prayerful mood in us when we begin to pray. It is through our reading and feeling the words of the prayers, through imaginative projection of our consciousness into the meaning of the words, and through empathy into the ideas with which the words are pregnant, that this type of prayer comes to pass. The ability to express what is hidden in the heart is a rare gift and cannot be counted upon by all people.

Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Moral Grandeur and Spirituality Audacity*, p.350

Three approaches to fixed liturgy?

Approach 1 - Modernize the liturgy

“The traditional rituals must be studied as artistic forms of religious expression, which in every age need to be reexamined from the point of view of their truth and their relevance to the spiritual needs and interests of the times. Whatever is merely archaic and no longer awakens religious thought and emotion, even in those familiar with its traditional meaning, must be discarded.”

Eugene Kohn, *Proceedings of the Rabbinical Assembly, 1953*, p. 187

Approach 2 - Develop ourselves

“The problem is not how to revitalize prayer, the problem is how to revitalize ourselves.... Religious movements in our history have often revolved around the problem of liturgy.... To Kabbalah and Hasidism the primary problem was how to pray; to the modern movements, the primary problem was what to say. What has Hasidism accomplished? It inspired worship in a vast number of Jews. What have the moderns accomplished? They have inspired the publications of a vast number of prayer books.”

We must learn how to study the inner life of the words that fill the world of our prayer book.... It is not enough to have met a word in the dictionary and to have experienced unpleasant adventures with it in the study of grammar. A word has a soul, and we must attain insight into its life....

This is our affliction -- we do not know how to look across a word to its meaning. We forget how to find the way to the word, how to be on intimate terms with a few passages in the prayer book. Familiar with words, we are intimate with none.... The same word may evoke new understandings when we read with an open heart.... What we need is a sympathetic prayer book exegesis.

Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Man's Quest for God*, pp.77, 78, 81 and 83

Approach 3 - The literary approach

The meaning of liturgy exists not so much in the liturgical text per se as in the interaction between liturgical text and the biblical intertext. Meaning, in the mind of the reader, takes place between texts rather than within them.

Reuven Kimelmann, “The Shema Liturgy:”, *Kenishta* 1 (2001) p. 28

Some history:

<p>Sifre Devarim 343 And, likewise, the <i>Amidah</i>, instituted by the early sages for Israel to pray</p>	<p>ספרי דברים שמ"ג ואף שמנה עשרה שתקנו חכמים הראשונים שיהו ישראל מתפללים</p>
<p>Babylonian Talmud Megillah 17b Rabbi Yoḥanan said, and some say that it was taught in a <i>baraita</i>: A hundred and twenty Elders [i.e., the Men of the Great Assembly] among them several prophets, established [the] eighteen blessings in their order.</p>	<p>תלמוד בבלי מגילה י"ז ב אמר רבי יוחנן ואמרי לה במתניתא תנא מאה ועשרים זקנים ובהם כמה נביאים תיקנו שמונה עשרה ברכות על הסדר</p>
<p>Babylonian Talmud Berakhot 33a Rav Shemen bar Abba said to Rabbi Yoḥanan: Now, since [the eighteen blessings of the <i>Amida</i>] were instituted for Israel by the members of the Great Assembly [like the other] blessings and prayers, sanctifications and <i>havdalot</i>.</p>	<p>תלמוד בבלי ברכות ל"ג א אמר ליה רב שמן בר אבא לרבי יוחנן: מכדי אנשי כנסת הגדולה תקנו להם לישראל ברכות ותפלות, קדושות והבדלות.</p>

Some more history and the 19th blessing:

<p>Mishnah Berakhot 4:3-4 Rabban Gamliel says: Each and every day a person recites the eighteen blessings.</p>	<p>משנה ברכות ד:ג-ד רבן גמליאל אומר, בכל יום מתפלל אדם שמונה עשרה.</p>
<p>Babylonian Talmud Berakhot 28b The Sages taught: Shimon HaPakuli {Shimon the flax merchant} arranged the eighteen blessings before Rabban Gamliel in order in Yavne. Rabban Gamliel said to the Sages: Is there any person who knows to institute the blessing of the heretics. Shmuel HaKatan stood and instituted it.</p>	<p>תלמוד בבלי ברכות ל"ג א תנו רבנן: שמעון הפקולי הסדיר שמונה עשרה ברכות לפני רבן גמליאל על הסדר ביבנה. אמר להם רבן גמליאל לחכמים: כלום יש אדם שיודע לתקן ברכת המינים? עמד שמואל הקטן ותקנה.</p>

Lawrence Hoffman, My People's Prayer Book
Elbogen compared the Palestinian fragment [from the Cairo genizeh] with the *Amidah* text the Jews have now. If the blessing on heretics was added later it ought to be the one that was missing from the ancient fragment with eighteen blessings. But it wasn't. Not only was it present; it reflected an older wording from a time before medieval [Jewish] censors. Among the groups singled out for God's wrath were *nostrim*, that is, "Nazareans," Jewish converts to Christianity in the first century. Blessing 15 (on Jerusalem) and Blessing 16 (on the coming of the Messiah) were combined in one blessing with a common synoptic line (the *chatimah*): "Blessed are You ... God of David who builds Jerusalem."

The Morning Service

AMIDAH

SHEMA

CONCLUSION

PESUKEI DEZIMRA

BIRKHOT HASHACHAR

From Lawrence Horrman, *The Amidah*

The Amidah

	Blessings of Praise	
1	אבות ואמהות	Ancestors
2	גבורות	Divine Might
3	קדושת השם	Holiness
	Blessings of Petition	
4	דעת	Knowledge
5	תשובה	Repentance
6	סליחה	Forgiveness
7	גאולה	Redemption
8	רפואה	Healing
9	ברכה השנים	Prosperity
10	קבוץ גלויות	Ingathering of the Exiles
11	משפוט	Justice
12	ברכת המינים	Against informers
13	על הצדיקים	The righteous
14	בנין ירושלים	Rebuilding Jerusalem
15	מלכות בית דוד	Kingdom of David
16	שומע תפלה	Response to prayer
	Blessings of Thanksgiving	
17	עבודה	Temple service
18	הודאה	Thanksgiving
19	שלום	Peace