

**תפילה רב: Educating for Prayer,
Utilizing the Writings of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik (the Rav);
Curricular and Instructional Guidelines**

Moshe Sokolow

There are three parts to this essay. In the first part, we offer a sampling of alternative approaches to overall curriculum design and indicate how each would respond to the pedagogical challenges of prayer and spirituality. In the second, we describe the fundamental, “essential” questions raised by the study and teaching of prayer, and present selections from the writings of the Rav in response. In the third and largest part, we have matched the Rav’s insights on prayer to six specific lessons in Torah according to a didactic format that can be followed by day school—primarily secondary school—teachers.

This essay has its genesis in an invitation from the Van Leer Institute in Jerusalem to participate in a conference on the influence of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, ז"ל, the Rav. I am grateful to Dr. Naftali Rothenberg for issuing the invitation and to Dean David Schnall of the Azrieli Graduate School for supporting my participation and offering to publish the essay as part of the Azrieli Papers.

I would be greatly remiss if I did not acknowledge my debt to my wife Judy and son Shalom whose conceptual understanding and refined literary taste have appreciably augmented my own. My thanks, too, to June Glazer for seeing the essays through publication.

Prologue

The Problem with Prayer: The Rav as Solution

Part One

Curriculum Development: Method and Meaning

Preface to an Eclectic

Mission and Vision

Schwab: The Commonplaces

Educational Objectives

Tyler: The Four Questions
The Paideia Proposal
Understanding by Design

Part Two

The Rav on Prayer

Introduction

Terminology: “Prayer” is a Misnomer

Dialogue and the Covenantal Experience

Tefillah and “Mood”: Rambam and Ramban

Prayer as Petition: The Biblical Evidence

Tehinah vs. Bakkashah: How do we Approach God in Prayer?

Minyan: The Company of Others and the Words of Others

In Review and Conclusion

Part Three

The Instructional Units

Unit One

Adam and the Rain: The First “Needs Assessment”

Unit Two

Avraham and Sodom: Prayer, Intercession, and “Divine Intimacy”

Unit Three

תפילות—אבות תקנום: Personifying our Prayers

Unit Four

Slavery and Redemption: Knowing How to Pray

Unit Five

סמיכת גאולה לתפילה: The Proximity of Redemption and Prayer

Unit Six:

Prayer as Dialogue: Talking with God

Prologue

The Problem with Prayer: The Rav as Solution

It is commonplace that a problem *stated* is well on its way to solution, for statement of the nature of a problem signifies that the underlying quality is being transformed into determinate distinctions of terms and relations or has become an object of articulate thought.

John Dewey¹

There is scarcely a subject that so frustrates modern Orthodox religious education as prayer. Day in and day out—at least once and as often as three times—day schools confront the pedagogical expectation (not to mention the halakhic obligation) of engaging their students in prayer. Abundant anecdotal evidence and a plethora of publications on the subject² testify to the exasperation experienced by many religious educators in their ineffectual attempts to get their students to *daven* (pray) properly. Their most frequent complaint (misbehavior notwithstanding) relates to their perception that their students lack adequate or appropriate *kavvanah* (attitude), a symptom they attribute to a nonchalant attitude towards religion, in general, and towards prayer in particular.

Some day schools tackle the problem head on with formal courses of instruction on prayer. Primary grades concentrate on oral recitation, reading comprehension and the “geography” of the *siddur* (prayerbook); middle-schools focus on laws and customs of the synagogue service; secondary schools deal with the complications introduced by special circumstances such as *Shabbat*, festivals and the days of awe.³ True to form, these

¹ “Qualitative Thought” by John Dewey, in *Philosophy and Civilization* (New York, 1931).

² On-line forums such as LookJed and ATID provide the anecdotes and also address the problem formally. Cf. <http://atid.org/news/25-10-01.asp>, and <http://www.google.com/u/lookstein?q=prayer&sa.x=11&sa.y=2>.

³ Cf. The *Tefillah* Curriculum of the Fuchs-Mizrachi Lower School of Cleveland: <http://www.fuchsmizrachi.org/2004-2005%20parent%20guide.pdf> (p. 61) and the RAMAZ Middle School: http://ramaz.org/school_middle/curriculum_tefillah.cfm. Precious little formal curricular attention is devoted to prayer in modern Orthodox secondary schools—at least insofar as published curricula indicate. This situation contrasts with that which prevails in most community day schools. There, the major emphasis is on prayer as introspection and contemplation, with recitation and

curricular measures tend overwhelmingly to the “cognitive”—academic or intellectual—dimension of education, with comparatively less consideration for the “affective”—emotional or value appreciation—dimension.

We have diagnosed this malaise as a devotional deficit disorder (from which educators themselves are hardly immune!) and have written a detailed prescription of the curricular and instructional steps that day schools may take to enhance the spiritual education of their students.⁴ In the present essay, we shall address the challenge of educating for proper prayer within the larger framework of educating the soul. We shall attempt this by presenting the writings of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik (the Rav), רב"ט, as a palliative to the pervasive inattentiveness and apathy that educators bemoan.

The sobriquet: "the Rav," attests to the status of the late Rabbi Soloveitchik (1903-1993) as the preeminent teacher of those Jews in both the United States and Israel who are known as “modern Orthodox.” His mastery of both traditional Talmudic-halakhic scholarship and modern philosophy, a pedagogy that engaged students intellectually and spiritually, and a felicitous style of both oral and literary presentation made the Rav a watchword in Orthodox Jewish law and lore for more than half a century.

Upon his arrival in the United States from Berlin in 1932, Rabbi Soloveitchik assumed the title of chief rabbi of Boston, where he also founded the Maimonides Day School, whose K-12 coeducational curriculum (girls and boys even study Talmud together!) he personally oversaw. In his more than 40-year tenure as *rosh yeshivah* (rabbinical dean) of Yeshiva University's Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary in New York, it ordained more rabbis than any other comparable institution in modern times. His intellectual attainments included daily *shi'urim* (classes) and frequent public lectures, whose audiences ranged from rabbinical students, ordained rabbis and educators to social workers, mental health workers and just plain *balabatim* (lay people), drawn by his

comprehension of the formal service—let alone *halakhah* and *minhag*—getting comparatively short shrift. E.g., “Students should be encouraged to debate the nature of tefilah and its value.” Cf. <http://www.akibaweb.org/plural.htm#recommendations> (Akiba Community Day School of Philadelphia).

⁴ Moshe Sokolow: “Teaching Spirituality in Day Schools and Yeshiva High Schools,” in Adam Mintz, Lawrence Schifman (ed.): *Spirituality, The Quest for Religious Meaning* (NY, 2004), 235-268.

consummate homiletic skills. A typical *derashah* (lecture) would combine the elucidation of a complex halakhic problem with the clarification of an abstract philosophical concept, delivered in fluent, idiomatic English, or an even more fluent Yiddish that frequently bordered on the lyrical.

Although a hereditary perfectionist—scion of a rabbinical dynasty notorious for its literary reticence—many of the Rav’s philosophical discourses appeared during his lifetime either as books,⁵ or as monographs in *Tradition* magazine⁶ (published by the Rabbinical Council of America). His many public lectures were generally published first in Hebrew and subsequently in English, the earliest such anthology entitled: “Reflections of the Rav.”⁷ Recently, the “Toras HoRav Foundation” has published several posthumous anthologies, and “The Soloveitchik Institute” has published an educators’ guide to several of the Rav’s works.⁸

The subject of prayer is woven throughout the warp and woof of the Rav’s halakhic and hashkafic writings.⁹ Beset by the anxiety of existential loneliness, the Rav welcomed the fellowship provided by what he called “the community of prayer” [*Community*, 19], in which “every individual experiences not only his pain, but also that of countless others” [*op. cit.*, 22]. Describing prayer as “the quintessence of Judaism” [*Worship*, 4]

⁵ *Halakhic Man*, translated from the Hebrew by Lawrence Kaplan (Philadelphia, 1983); *The Halakhic Mind: an Essay on Jewish Tradition and Modern Thought* (NY, 1986).

⁶ Of singular note is his essay “The Lonely Man of Faith,” *Tradition* 7:2 (Summer, 1965). Vol. 17:2 (Spring, 1978) contains five essays.

⁷ Edited by Rabbi Abraham R. Besdin (Jerusalem, 1979).

⁸ *A Study and Program Guide to the Teachings of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik* (Boston, 2003).

⁹ Here is a list of the bibliographical abbreviations we have used in the essay:

- Community: “The Community,” *Tradition* 17:2 (Spring, 1978)
- Worship: *Worship of the Heart; Essays on Jewish Prayer* (NJ, 2003)
- Redemption: “Prayer, Redemption, Talmud Torah,” *Tradition* (*op. cit.*)
- Lonely Man: “The Lonely Man of Faith,” *Tradition* 7:2 (Summer, 1965)
- PRC: David Hartman: “Prayer and Religious Consciousness; an Analysis of Jewish Prayer in the Works of Joseph B. Soloveitchik, Yeshayahu Leibowitz, and Abraham Joshua Heschel,” *Modern Judaism* 23,2 (2003)
- Dialogue: “Prayer as Dialogue,” *Reflections of the Rav* (ed. Abraham Besdin; Jerusalem, 1966)
- Family: *The Family Redeemed* (NY, 2000)
- Teaching: “Teaching with Clarity and Empathy,” *Reflections of the Rav* (ed. Abraham Besdin; Jerusalem, 1966)

and defining it as “the hierarchy of needs, clearly defined and evaluated” [*Redemption*, 67], the Rav offers a prescription for the spiritual malaise affecting prayer that day school education should be able to fill.

Synopsis:

The Rav had an abiding concern for day school education; applying his teachings to the problems of prayer is a “natural.” Prayer is a subject about which he lectured and published copiously.¹⁰ His views on the gamut of existential concerns are deemed authoritative by most modern Orthodox day school educators. Day school students are likely to be attracted to his formulations of the issue in contemporary terms, and, finally, they are likely to be entranced by the lyrical beauty of the terms in which he couches his proffered solutions.

We have selected a half-dozen units in Torah study into which we have interpolated passages from the writings of the Rav that address essential and enduring educational concerns about prayer, apropos of what we regard as the ordinary pedagogical and methodological instruction of the text and its commentaries. It is our expectation that through their exposure to the Rav’s thoughts on prayer throughout the traditional *limmudei kodesh* curriculum, our students will be encouraged to match the Rav’s questions to problems of their own, and judge the answers he proposes by the yardstick of their own intelligence guided by their own experience.

Indeed, the singular relationship between pedagogy and prayer is captured by the following Midrash:

God said to Moses after the incident of the golden calf, “Let go of me, and my anger will rest on them and I will get rid of them.” Is Moses holding back God’s hand, so that God must say “Let go of me”? What is this like? A king became angry at his son, placed him in a small room, and was about to hit him. At the same time the king cried out from the room for someone to stop him. The prince’s

¹⁰ In addition to the bibliography cited just above, there are several hundred pages of handwritten notes in circulation, which were taken during a course on prayer that the Rav taught at Yeshiva University’s Bernard Revel Graduate School of Higher Jewish Studies, during the 1956-57 academic year. Additional secondary sources include Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein: “Prayer in the Teachings of Rav Soloveitchik, zt”l,” [<http://www.vbm-torah.org/archive/ralpray1.htm>].

teacher was standing outside, and said to himself, “The king and his son are in the room. Why does the king say ‘stop me’? It must be that the king wants me to go into the room and effect a reconciliation between him and his son. That’s why the king is crying, ‘Stop me’.” In a similar way, God said to Moses, “Let go of me.” Moses said, “Because God wants me to defend Israel, He says ‘Let go of me’.” And Moses immediately interceded on their behalf.

*(Shemot Rabbah 42:10)*¹¹

¹¹ Translation by Yohanan Muffs: “Who will stand in the breach? A study of prophetic intercession,” *Love and Joy* (NY, 1992), 34.

Part One

Curriculum Development: Method and Meaning

Preface to an Eclectic:

In the expectation that this essay will be read by people who are unfamiliar with curriculum development, we shall try to provide a précis of the practice. A number of theories compete for preeminence in the field of curriculum development; rather than describe them all—however briefly—we will attempt to present an eclectic process that draws upon their several common denominators.¹²

Our preferred definition of curriculum is:

“All the learning which is planned and guided by the school, whether it is carried on in groups or individually, inside or outside the school.”¹³

From this definition, several operative pedagogical and didactic consequences ensue:

- (1) The emphasis on “learning” rather than “teaching” acknowledges the need of the students to take an active role in their own education. Using professional jargon, it testifies to the replacement of the “transmission of knowledge” model—in which knowledge “flows” from the teacher to the student—with something more akin to the “experiential” model, in which students seek to “construct” knowledge from the many sources and stimuli to which they are exposed.¹⁴
- (2) The qualification “planned and guided” indicates that we have to specify in advance what we are seeking to achieve, how we are to go about its implementation, and how we will determine how much of it has been achieved and how well.
- (3) The limitation of curriculum to “the school” is a constant reminder that we are obliged to operate within the real confines of a school, both spatial and temporal. The “school year,” “school day,” and “school building” are no less defining and delineating than subject matter, instructional material, and tools of assessment.

This definition is accompanied by a preferred definition of schoolwork:

¹² For the comprehensive exposition, see the article cited in n. 4, above.

¹³ John Kerr quoted in Kelly, A. V.: *The Curriculum. Theory and Practice* (4e, London, 1983; 1999).

¹⁴ See Roland Barth: *Learning by Heart* (San Francisco, 2001), 32 ff., 48 ff.

“In sum, the business of schools is to produce work that engages students, that is so compelling that students persist when they experience difficulties, and that is so challenging that students have a sense of accomplishment, of satisfaction—indeed, of delight—when they successfully accomplish the tasks assigned.”¹⁵

The following are the common denominators of curriculum development, on which we shall elaborate in the continuation:

1. designating the “larger” purpose of education through a statement of mission or vision;
2. determining who are the “stakeholders” in the educational enterprise, whose views and values it must reflect;
3. choosing and articulating the various “objectives” of the educational process, usually distributed among three “domains:” the cognitive (what the students will know), the affective (what they will value), and the behavioral (what they will be able to do);
4. selecting suitable and (age-)appropriate “subject matter” and stipulating the preferred instructional modalities (“learning experiences”);
5. conducting an “assessment” of the learning that has taken place and a determination of the extent and intensity of its effectiveness.

Mission and Vision:

Procedurally, curriculum development has generally begun with a declaration of educational purpose embodied in a school’s statement of its mission or vision. The formulation of this statement enables the educating parties (see the section on “Commonplaces” that follows) to clarify and articulate their shared assumptions about, and expectations of the educational enterprise. Reference to the statement throughout the development process insures that the curriculum remains “on task.”

¹⁵ Phillip Schlechty: *Inventing Better Schools* (San Francisco, 2001), 58.

We have chosen the mission statement of the Maimonides School of Brookline, MA, as a paradigm¹⁶ both out of deference to the Rav, its founder, and because it captures the essential purpose to which most modern Orthodox day school education is devoted. It reads:

“To produce religiously observant, educated Jews who will remain faithful to their religious beliefs, values, and practices as they take their place as contributing members of the general society. Maimonides provides its students with both an outstanding religious education and an excellent college preparatory secular education in an atmosphere that reinforces their commitment to Torah and observance of Mitzvot.”¹⁷

Pursuant to such a mission, we would expect a school to provide the type of instruction in the subject of prayer that would produce the kind of educated, religious observance to which a student would remain faithful throughout a life that is expected, in large part, to be conducted within the perimeters of a largely secular American society.

Schwab: The Commonplaces

Joseph Schwab, professor of education at the University of Chicago, proposed a model of curriculum development based upon the recognition of “commonplaces” – fixtures that control and mediate the formal educational enterprise. They are: the learner;

¹⁶ A “generic” mission statement would resemble the mission statement of the Association of Modern Orthodox Day School (AMODS), which reads:

We are a group of modern Orthodox day schools and yeshiva high schools that recognize:

- the importance of excellence in both Torah and general studies;
- the preeminence of moral virtue and ethical integrity in personal, business and professional life;
- the equal educational needs of boys and girls, young men and women;
- the centrality of the State of Israel to the religious and national existence of the Jewish people;
- the inherent value of all segments of the Jewish community and the need to work with them to address mutual concerns.

Retrieved from: <http://www.msdc.org/AMODS.cfm?section=For%20Educators>, on April 20, 2005.

¹⁷ Maimonides School, Brookline MA (www.maimonides.org/mission.htm). On the role of the Rav in the establishment of Maimonides, see Seth Farber: *An American Orthodox Dreamer; Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik and Boston’s Maimonides School* (Hanover, 2004).

the teacher; the subject matter; and the milieu.¹⁸ The curricular specialist, who negotiates the needs and desires of each constituency and prevents any single commonplace from monopolizing the discussion and the development, conducts the deliberations.

In day-school terms, a deliberation over a curriculum for prayer would involve:

- An educational psychologist (a.k.a. learning specialist), representing the student, to comment on modalities of learning;
- A master teacher, to advise on available instructional methodologies;
- A member of the school's board of education, to advocate for parental and communal interests;
- A scholar, philosopher, or rabbi, to provide enlightenment and direction on the textual and thematic substance of prayer.

Educational Objectives

Educational goals are traditionally formulated according to “Bloom’s taxonomy.”¹⁹ We shall endeavor, here, to formulate several objectives each in the *affective* (values) and *behavioral* (skills) domains as well as one objective in each of the six levels of the cognitive (knowledge) domain. Our subject matter will be the *Amidah*.

Affective:

1. The student will appreciate the need for prayer as a fundamental religious obligation.
2. The student will appreciate the relationship between prayer and the sacrificial [Temple] order.
3. The student will value the *Amidah* as the core of daily prayer.
4. The student will commit to required prayer—daily and on special occasions—as prescribed by Halakhah.

¹⁸ Joseph Schwab: *Science, Curriculum and Liberal Education* (Chicago 1978), 365.

¹⁹ Benjamin S. Bloom: *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives; the Classification of Educational Goals* (NY, 1956). There are currently several revisions of the taxonomy, some by Bloom’s co-authors and others by his students. The objectives we will formulate (below) follow the classic paradigm.

Behavioral:

1. The student will locate the three daily *Amidah* services in the *siddur*.
2. The student will locate the passages in the *Amidah* that are either altered or replaced on prescribed occasions.
3. The student will demonstrate proper behavior and physical comportment during the recitation of the *Amidah*.

Cognitive:

1. **Knowledge** (remembering information): the student will list the *berakhot* of the *Amidah*.
2. **Comprehension** (explaining the meaning of information): the student will translate the titles of the *berakhot* into English.
3. **Application** (using abstractions in concrete situations): the student will divide the *berakhot* into the categories of *shevah*, *bakkashah* and *hodayah*.
4. **Analysis** (breaking down a whole into components): the student will divide the *bakkashot* into individual and collective petitions.
5. **Synthesis** (forming a new, integrated whole): the student will account for the sequence of all the *berakhot* of the *Amidah*, individually and categorically.
6. **Evaluation** (judging ideas on their merits): the student will elaborate on whether the formulation and arrangement of the *Amidah* is ideal, adequate or unsatisfactory.

Tyler: The Four Questions

While Schwab's construct informs the essence of curriculum deliberation and Bloom's model informs its cognitive psychological considerations, Ralph Tyler guides its practical operation. Tyler²⁰ would have us chart, sequentially, our aims or objectives, our means

²⁰ Ralph W. Tyler: *Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction* (Chicago, 1949; pb ed. 1969).

of implementation and, finally, the process of assessment by which we can evaluate our success. Procedurally, Tyler would have us pose four questions, whose answers would dictate the form and content of the curriculum. They are:

1. What are the purposes of the school?
2. What educational experiences are related to those purposes?
3. What are the organizational methods which will be used in relation to those purposes?
4. How will those purposes be evaluated?

Translated into the “idiom” of prayer, these questions would be reformulated as:

1. How is prayer relevant to the common, current purpose of the school?
2. How do we provide students with the learning opportunities (including course content, instructional methods and experiential dimension) required to accomplish those purposes?
3. How do we organize those learning experiences and distribute them over the students’ tenure in the school to achieve the greatest possible effect with regard to prayer?
4. How will we know whether we have taught the content and processes of prayer effectively, and whether the students have learned them?

An idiosyncratic Orthodox problem with Tyler’s model, however, is the penchant to define curricular objectives in textual terms, rather than the standard “cognitive” and “affective” goals of Bloom’s “Taxonomy.” Ask a 4th grade day school teacher for her curriculum and she invariably answers: The Book of Exodus and The Book of Joshua. An alternative schema that allows us to begin with our textual objectives follows.

Adler: The Paideia Proposal

The *Paideia* group, headed by Mortimer Adler, editor-in-chief of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* and initiator of the “great books” concept, advanced an alternative model of curriculum development. Advocating a revamping of public education, the group devised its own curricular structure – one intrinsically more compatible with traditional day-school education. According to the *Paideia* model, one stipulates the “organized knowledge” to be acquired, the “intellectual skills” of acquisition and analysis, and the

“enlarged understanding of ideas and values” to be derived from the application of those skills to that body of knowledge.²¹

Applying the *Paideia* corollary to Schwab, a curriculum deliberation on education for prayer within day schools would encourage the commonplaces (as delineated above) to direct their remarks to:

- Which subject matter—already part of the traditional curriculum—offers the greatest potential for spiritual development, in general, and prayer, in particular?
- Which learning skills have to be cultivated and refined to make prayer accessible and meaningful?
- What are the spiritual values that the students should discover, deliberate and internalize in the course of their encounter with the texts and themes related to prayer?

The actual deliberations—led by the experienced curriculum designer—and the ongoing follow-up—led by the head of school and master teachers—will provide the optimal situation in which the desirable values of spirituality can be infused into the curriculum for prayer.

Understanding by Design

The most recent entry in the curriculum theory sweepstakes is entitled “Understanding by Design” (abbreviated: *UbD*). While not actually introducing any new components, its value reposes in its restructuring of the entire deliberation featuring a three-part process of development called “backward design:”

1. Identify desired results—consisting of enduring understandings, essential questions, knowledge and basic skills.
2. Determine acceptable evidence—via informal checks, observation and dialogue, quizzes and tests, academic prompts, performance tasks and projects.
3. Plan learning experiences and instruction.²²

²¹ Mortimer Adler: *The Paideia Proposal: An Educational Manifesto* (NY, 1982).

Translating *UbD* into the idiom of prayer, the three steps would be:

1. What are the essential questions we expect our students to pose to the subject of prayer, and what are the enduring understandings we would like them to obtain?
2. How will the students persuade us that they know what we expect them to know about prayer, that they value what we hold dear about it, and that they possess the skills particular to its practice?
3. How do we plan to inculcate those values, practice those skills and obtain that knowledge? In other words, how do we insure that posing those essential questions will obtain those enduring understandings in response?

“Enduring understandings” go beyond discrete facts or skills to focus on larger concepts, principles, or processes, while “essential questions” go to the heart of a discipline, recur naturally in the history of a field and throughout one's learning, and raise other important questions.²³ The success of a curriculum is proportional to the degree to which the “essential” questions it raises find their answers in those particular understandings that meet the definition of “enduring.” As an introduction to the series of instructional units that follow in Part Three, we provide here a selected list of such questions pertaining to prayer—drawn from actual pedagogical experience—and a corresponding list of understandings, which are drawn from the voluminous writings of the Rav.

²² Grant Wiggins, Jay McTighe: *Understanding by Design* (Alexandria Va., 1998). Cf. www.ascd.org/readingroom/books/wiggins98book.html

²³ *Op. cit.*

Essential Questions:

What is prayer and why must I pray at all?

Is everyone capable of prayer? Is anyone?

Why must I pray at fixed intervals and not when the mood/need strikes me?

How can prayer be personalized if I can only use someone else's words?

Why should the presence of a *minyan* make a difference to my personal prayers—isn't it unlikely that we're all praying for the same thing/reason?

What is the relationship between the standardized action (מעשה המצוה) and the inner, experiential, spiritual activity (קיום)? What is the relationship between fixed prayer (קבע) and "spontaneous" prayer (תהנונים)?

What is כוונה in prayer?

What value is there in prayer if its כוונה has been compromised?

Enduring Understandings:

Prayer is the quintessence of Judaism (*Worship*, 4).

Prayer is the doctrine of human needs (*Redemption*, 63).

To pray means to discriminate, to evaluate, to understand; in other words, to ask intelligently (*Redemption*, 67); it is not a function of mood.

You cannot arrange all your prayers in thought alone without speech (*Kuzari*, cited in *Worship*, 6).

Membership in the covenantal community sanctions prayer. Prayer is restricted to the traditional forms and language of the covenantal community (Hartman, *PRC* 109).

The very essence of prayer is the covenantal experience of being together with and talking to God and that the concrete performance, such as the recitation of texts, represents the technique of implementation of prayer and not prayer itself (*Lonely Man*, 35).

[The] intention to discharge one's duty in accordance with God's will... The physical performance divorced from the

inner experience is worthless ... a (Worship, 20-21).
meaningless, stereotyped ceremonial

With these descriptions and illustrations of curricular theory and process in mind, we can now proceed to the second part of our essay. Here, we shall construct several curricular units that are intended to integrate the Rav's ideas about prayer into the traditional study of *Humash/Tanakh*.

Part Two

The Rav on Prayer

Intersections

In order to give greater gravity to the Rav's ideas on prayer, to insure that students have more occasions to encounter them and opportunities to internalize them, and in light of the fact that many day schools do not teach prayer formally beyond primary school, we have designed a series of "intersections" between the Rav and the study of *Humash*. They are:

1. Adam and the Prayer for Rain (Genesis 1-2)
2. Abraham and Sodom (Genesis 18)
3. Prayers were Established by the Forefathers (Genesis, *passim*.)
4. From Slavery to Freedom (Exodus 1-2)
5. The Proximity of Redemption to Prayer (Exodus, *passim*.)
6. God and Moshe: Prayer as Dialogue

In several of these units, we have attempted to focus the instruction and learning on a "didactic dichotomy," i.e., to direct the students' attention to a textual, logical or ideological contradiction, and to accomplish the educational objectives of the lesson via its resolution.

Before we do so, however, we will present a unit that will introduce the Rav's thoughts on prayer in general, thereby setting the stage for the specific, text-bound, units that follow.

In this introductory lesson, we shall attempt to answer some *essential questions* regarding prayer by reading excerpts from several essays by the Rav. While the Rav does not answer these questions in a systematic fashion, his essays are profoundly illuminating and stimulate considerable thought. The sources cited here are open to various interpretations and some thoughts and ideas expressed here—as well as the pedagogic suggestions—are my own.

The questions are [cf. the end of Part One for additional questions]:

1. Why must I pray at all?

2. Is it not presumptuous to assume that God is going to listen to *me*? How do I know if/when He is listening?
3. Why should I continue to pray to Him if I don't get what I pray for?
4. Why must I pray at fixed intervals and not when the mood/need strikes me?
5. How can prayer be personalized if I can only use someone else's words?
6. Why should the presence of a *minyan* make a difference to my personal prayers— isn't it unlikely that we're all praying for the same thing/reason?

Terminology: “Prayer” is a Misnomer

Let us begin with a quick analysis of the technical terms we employ for what we, colloquially, call *davening*.²⁴ We customarily use the English word “prayer” as though it were entirely synonymous with *Tefillah*. A closer look at the etymologies of the two words, however, shows that they are definitely not identical. The verb “to pray” actually means to entreat, or to beseech, and the noun “prayer” means a request or petition. In Hebrew, the corresponding verb is בק"ש, and the noun form *bakkashah*, while properly designating one aspect of *Tefillah*, is hardly synonymous with the entire enterprise.

Tefillah, on the other hand, derives from the verbal root פל"ל, which has the connotation of intervention or arbitration. The noun פלילים (Exodus 21:22), for example, means a court, and the reflexive verbal form להתפלל means to intercede on behalf of, or, possibly, to judge oneself or another.²⁵ A far better English definition of *Tefillah* than “prayer” would be “introspection.” While standing in self-judgment, a person might be inclined to “pray,” that is, to petition God to meet a perceived need. That same person, however, might judge that all his needs have been met, and will incline, instead, to offer God praise rather than petition. If his recent experience includes deliverance from jeopardy, he might “pray” to God with thanksgiving.

We “pray,” then [for the sake of comprehension, we will continue to use the colloquialism], for a variety of purposes, including petition, praise, and thanksgiving. Of these three categories, the one we have selected to treat here, on account of its

²⁴ The etymology of *daven* is highly speculative, and ranges from Aramaic (*de-avinan*=of our [fore]fathers) through Old French (cognate with “divine”) to Turkish.

²⁵ See *Rashi* on Genesis 30:8, s.v. נפתולי אלהים נפתלתי.

prominence, is petition. If we take the *Amidah*, for example, we find that although the first three *berakhot* comprise praise and the last three—thanksgiving, the core (the middle 13 *berakhot*) of this most oft-repeated Jewish prayer consists of petitions. Indeed, the Rav notes: “Petition is the main form of human prayer” [*Worship*, 10-11, 28ff], and: “Even two of the last three benedictions (שיים-שלום and רצה) are of a petitionary nature” [*Redemption*, 65].

Dialogue and the Covenantal Experience

[DIDACTIC NOTE: Among the essential questions we posed at the outset were: Why must I pray at all? How do I know if/when God is listening? Why should I continue to pray to Him if I don’t get what I pray for? Challenge students to answer these questions based upon the following selections from the Rav.]

The very essence of prayer is the covenantal experience of being together with, and talking to, God, and that the concrete performance—such as the recitation of texts—represents the technique of implementation of prayer, and not prayer itself (*Lonely Man*, 35).

Prayer, according to the Rav, is a dialogue between man and God. Here are some of his poignant observations on the nature of that dialogue:

In prayer ... we have a dialogue which is reciprocal and bilateral. Man climbs the mountain toward God while He descends, figuratively, from the mountain top. Two hands embrace, as in a handshake. “And the Lord came down upon Mt. Sinai, on the top of the mountain; and the Lord called Moses to the top of the mountain and Moses went up” (Exodus 19:20)... In prayer both God and man move...

Prayer, we said, is a dialogue, not a monologue. A dialogue exists when one person addresses another, even if the other is temporarily silent. In prophecy, God speaks and man is silent; in prayer, there is the reverse situation. We have the assurance that He is a *shome’a Tefillah* [He hears our prayers], even if He does not accede to our wishes. He is not necessarily a *mekabbel Tefillah* [responsive to our specific requests]...

In prayer we do not seek a response to a particular request as much as we desire fellowship with God. Prayer is not a means for wheedling some benefit from God. Despite our prayer: *utekabbel berahamim uberatzon et tefillatenu* [accept our prayer with compassion and pleasure], it is our persistent hope that this may be fulfilled, but it is not our primary motivation.

Our sages felt that the acceptance of our prayers is beyond our understanding and is governed by unknowable considerations. We do not really understand why some prayers are accepted and others rejected. Nevertheless, prayer in the sense of petition does play a central role in our *Shemoneh Esreh*...

Dialogue means communication, engagement, and interaction. When we pray, God emerges out of His transcendence and forms a companionship with us; the Infinite and the finite meet and the vast chasm is bridged (*Dialogue*, 77-78).²⁶

***Tefillah* and “Mood:” Rambam and Ramban**

[**DIDACTIC NOTE:** Another of the essential questions we posed at the outset was: Why must I pray at fixed intervals and not when the mood/need strikes me? Challenge students to provide an answer by means of the distinction the Rav draws between the positions of *Rambam* and *Ramban* on the origin of the mitzvah of *Tefillah*.]

²⁶ The notion of utilizing prayer to bridge the “finite” and the “Infinite” is quintessentially Hassidic. Indeed, numerous aspects of the Rav’s writings on prayer display a greater affinity to R. Shneur Zalman of Liady (founder of Lubavitch Hassidism) than to R. Hayyim of Volozhin (disciple of the Gaon of Vilna and “father” of the intellectual-scholarly school with which the Soloveitchik family was identified over several generations). The Rav himself acknowledges his debt to Lubavitch *hassidut*, which accumulated over the time he spent as a child with a Lubavitch *melammed*. [Cf. Aaron Rakeffet: *The Rav* (New Jersey, 1999) II, 178: “The Future of Jewish Education in America.”].

The contrasts between the Hassidic and Mitnagdic views on prayer in specific reference to the Rav, have been noted by Norman Lamm: “Study and Prayer; Their Relative value in Hassidism and Mitnagdism,” *Samuel K. Mirsky Memorial Volume* (NY, 1970), 37 ff., and Bezalel Naor: “Two Types of Prayer,” *Tradition* 25/3 (1991), 26 ff.

This felicitous combination of the intellectual and the emotional/experiential is likely to enhance the appeal the Rav’s approach to prayer has for adolescent students.

Rambam (Maimonides) and *Ramban* (Nahmanides) disagree whether the mitzvah of *Tefillah* is *de-oraita* (of Torah origin) or *de-rabbanan* (of rabbinic origin). *Rambam* regards it as a Torah requirement, listing it in his *Sefer haMitzvot* as the fifth of the 613 commandments. *Ramban*, however, considers prayer, in general, to be rabbinic; only prayer in distress (עת צרה) is a Torah imperative.

According to the Rav:

The views of Maimonides and Nahmanides can be reconciled. Both regarded prayer as meaningful only if it is derived from a sense of *tzarah* [distress]. They differ in their understanding of the word (*Dialogue*, 80).

The Rav proceeds to draw a distinction between external distress—caused by poverty, illness, or oppression—and an internal, “existential,” malaise which derives from feelings of insecurity and loneliness (prominent themes in the Rav’s writings). This intellectual and emotional distress, the Rav claims, provoked the Psalmist to exclaim: “מן המיצר קראתי י'ה”, from the straits I call out to God (Psalms 118:5), and they produce the urge to pray.

Out of this sense of discomfiture prayer emerges. Offered in comfort and security, prayer is a paradox, modern methods of suburban worship and plush synagogues notwithstanding. The desire for proximity of wife and children at services comes from a need for security and comfort. Real prayer is derived from loneliness, helplessness, and a sense of dependence (*op. cit.*, 81).

The public distress (the Rav calls it: “surface crisis”), which *Ramban* envisions as a cause for prayer, is the kind which comes suddenly, openly, and strikes everyone. The personal crisis (the Rav calls it “depth crisis”), which *Rambam* views as sufficient cause for prayer, however, can grow gradually, clandestinely, affecting some individuals and not others. Even the most insensitive people will realize when they are in public, common, danger, but only the reflective and introspective will appreciate the onset of a personal crisis.

The Torah bids man actively to combat and possibly eliminate superficial, external crises. The ills of poverty, disease, and war are debilitating and impair our spiritual freedom. The Torah, however, encourages man to embrace the experience of the

“depth crisis.” Thereby does man fully grasp the reality of his condition and become stirred to great heights of the spirit (*ibid.*).

The challenge of a “surface crisis” is met with solutions; a “depth crisis,” on the other hand, can only be met by prayer.

Prayer as Petition: The Biblical Evidence

[**DIDACTIC NOTE:** Thus far we have established that petition is: (a) one of the three principal ways in which we can relate to God from a posture of introspection or self-judgment; (b) the most prominent and most significant of the three. Before continuing with the Rav’s analysis, however, have students turn directly to the *Tanakh* and explore several examples of Biblical petition.]²⁷

1. Moshe (Numbers 12:13)

The most concise petition in *Tanakh* is the one which Moshe recited on behalf of his sister, Miriam. It consists of 5 words: א-ל נא רפא נא לה , which can be divided as follows:

- (a) an address: God
- (b) a petition: cure her

2. Shimshon (Judges 16:28)

A slightly longer and more complex prayer was recited by Shimshon as he stood chained to the pillars in the temple of Dagon:

ה'...זכרני נא, וחזקני נא אך הפעם הזוה...ואנקמה נקם אחת משתי עיני מפלשתים

It may be divided as follows:

- (a) an address: God
- (b) a petition: take note of me and strengthen me this once
- (c) his motivation: that I may avenge myself on the Philistines for the loss of my sight

3. Hannah (I Samuel 1:11 ff.)

²⁷ We are indebted to the systematic and enlightened presentation of these elements in Moshe Greenberg: *Biblical Prose Prayer* (Berkeley, 1983).

Hannah's prayer for a son includes all of the elements we have seen in the previous petitions (address, petition, and motivation), plus a fourth element: self-deprecation:

ה'...אם-ראה תראה בעני אמתך, ונתת לאמתך זרע אנשים, ונתתיו לה' כל ימי חייו...

- (a) the address: Lord of hosts
- (b) self-deprecation: Your oppressed maidservant
- (c) the actual petition: grant Your maidservant male children
- (d) motivation for the petition: that I may devote him to a lifetime of God's service

[In *Berakhot* (31 a-b), Hannah's petition serves as the paradigm for all Jewish prayer.]

4. **Ya`akov** (Genesis 32:10-13)

The most sophisticated prayer of petition in the *Tanakh*, however, is the one which Ya'akov offered on the eve of his reunion with Esav:

ה' האמר אלי שוב לארצך ולמולדתך...קטנתי מכל החסדים ומכל האמת...ועתה הייתי לשתי מחנות...הצילני נא מיד אחי...פן-יבא והכני...ואתה אמרת היטב איטיב עמך...

Here we have no fewer than seven separate elements (including the three we have already observed in the prayers of others):

- (a) an address: God of my fathers
- (b) a description of the addressee: Who commanded me to return home
- (c) a statement of self-deprecation: I am unworthy of even Your grace
- (d) detail of self-deprecation: from the staff with which I crossed the Jordan (on my way to Mesopotamia) I have grown to encompass two camps
- (e) the actual petition: rescue me from Esav
- (f) description of distress: lest he smite me, my wives and children
- (g) his motivation: that You may fulfill Your promise: "I shall surely do well to you"

[NOTE: Additional examples (cited by Greenberg, *op. cit.*) include King Hezekiah (2 Kings 19:15-19) and the sailors in Jonah (1:14). Note that in each and every case we have cited from the *Tanakh*, the "address," with its overtones of praise or thanksgiving, precedes the "actual petition."]

Tehinah vs. Bakkashah: How Do We Approach God in Prayer?

[**DIDACTIC NOTE:** Part of our very first essential question was: “Is it not presumptuous to assume that God is going to listen to me?” In other words, is not prayer an act of “*hubris*” (unforgivable arrogance)? In this section we will see that the Rav’s definition of *tehinah* provides us with an important insight into the way we approach God to petition Him.

Ask the students: Why do we take three steps forward before reciting the *Amidah*? In dealing with this question, refer to Rabbi Saul Berman’s introduction to the R.C.A. edition of the ArtScroll *Siddur*, p. xii, entitled: “An Overview—The ‘Approach’ in Prayer.”]

In an earlier section, we provided an analysis of the word *Tefillah*. Here we must pause to analyze another pair of technical terms: *tehinah* and *bakkashah*. The Rav notes that *bakkashah* designates a claim or a demand, something to which we feel entitled, while he defines *tehinah* (based upon the commentary of *Rashi* on Deuteronomy 3:23) as something we have no reasonable expectation of receiving:

The word *tehinah* suggests an unearned grace, something not due to us... We prefer *tehinah* to *bakashah*, because the latter suggests a claim, a demand. The principal topic of Jewish prayer is *tehinah*; praise and thanksgiving are merely prologues and epilogues... We petition without offering any apologies; it is most legitimate, but the request is always for *mattenat hinam*, a gift which we do not deserve (*Prayer as Dialogue*, 84).

This notion of entreating God for a favor can be tied into the halakhic prescription of how God should be approached in prayer. The *Shulhan Arukh* mandates that three forward steps should be taken prior to the recitation of the *Amidah* (which we have already identified as being, quintessentially, a prayer of *tehinah*). The reason for these three steps is not stipulated. The author of *Sefer Rokeach* (1165-1230), however, suggests that the three forward paces are patterned after the three times the word *va-yiggash* (approach) is utilized in *Tanakh*: once each for Avraham, Yehudah, and Eliyahu.

When Avraham approached God on behalf of Sedom (Genesis 18:23),²⁸ he had no reasonable expectation of having his petition granted. God had declared Sedom an evil city whose wickedness had prompted Him to destroy it. He was already extending a courtesy to Avraham by sparing his nephew, Lot; by what right did Avraham seek to have the entire city spared? Surely not because it was deserving of it!

When Yosef threatened to imprison Binyamin, Yehudah stepped forward to plead for his release (Genesis 44:18). He was so certain that his appeal would be denied that he had already volunteered to be enslaved in his stead. The language he employed (“please, sir..,” “you are just like Pharaoh”) reflects his subservience to Yosef and his recognition that he was asking for something to which the second to Pharaoh would not think him entitled.

Finally, when Eliyahu confronts the priests of Ba`al atop Mt. Carmel, he, too, prays to God for success (1 Kings 18:36). Eliyahu doesn’t merely petition God, however; he tries, as it were, to “coerce” God into granting his request. He sets up a challenge to the priests of Baal and then demands that God back him up. Where does he come up with such audacity?

Rabbi Saul Berman distinguishes between these three plaintiffs based upon three considerations:

- (1) By what right did they pray to God?
- (2) On whose behalf did they pray?
- (3) To which quality of God did they appeal?

The following schematic demonstrates the results of Rabbi Berman’s investigation:

	<u>by what right</u>	<u>for whom</u>	<u>quality of God</u>
<u>Avraham</u>	as <i>ben-brit</i> , a party to a covenant	mankind	justice
<u>Yehudah</u>	as a servant	the Jewish people	mercy

²⁸ See Part Three, Unit Two “Avraham and Sedom.”

<u>Eliyahu</u>	as a prophet, a party to an intimate relationship with God	God Himself	revelation (God's presence)
----------------	--	-------------	--------------------------------

These three examples provide us with an answer to the question of how to approach God with the presumption that our prayers will be answered. We see, now, that there are indeed several grounds on which to base that assumption: God is likely to respond to a party to His covenant, to His faithful servants, and to those with whom He enjoys a special relationship. As Psalms records (99:6): משה ואהרן בכהניו ושמואל בקראי שמו, קראים; אל ה' והוא יענם; "like Moshe and Aharon amongst His priests and like Shemuel amongst those who proclaimed His name; all call out to God, Who answers them."

MINYAN: The Company of Others and the Words of Others

[DIDACTIC NOTE: Two other essential questions we posed at the outset deal with the private vs. public nature of prayer: What advantage does *Tefillah_be-Tzibbur* have over private prayer, and why are the words of the *Siddur* superior to our own? In this final section we will guide students to answer these questions by means of the distinction the Rav draws between *Tefillah* and *tze'akah*, in an essay entitled: "Redemption, Prayer, Talmud Torah," *Tradition* 17/2 (1978).]

We may now draw a final distinction—between *tefillah* and *tze`akah*, two terms for prayer that appear to be used, in *Tanakh*, synonymously. The Rav distinguishes between *tze`akah*, a cry of pain and suffering, and *tefillah*, which is the articulation of need.

Using the slavery in Egypt as the paradigm of suffering and the Exodus as the model of redemption, the Rav draws a lesson in prayer from the story of Moshe.²⁹

What is the connection, he asks, between the episodes in which Moshe protects a Jewish slave and intercedes to stop a quarrel (Exodus 2:11 ff.), and the statement which follows (vs. 23): "And it came to pass in the course of many days... that the Children of Israel sighed on account of their bondage and they cried out..." ? The *Zohar's*

²⁹ See Part Three, Unit Four: "From Slavery to Freedom," and Unit Five: "The Proximity of Redemption to Prayer."

explanation, expanded by the Rav, is that in the state of slavery the Jews were mute, incapable of sound, let alone articulate speech. They knew pain—in the physical sense—but not suffering, which is not a physical sensation, but a spiritual experience; they thought their condition was normative. Only after Moshe demonstrated to them that they were the victims of injustice did their sensitivity return, and, with it, their ability to cry out.

The ability to cry out to God is the prelude to prayer, but not yet prayer itself. Crying out is an awareness of need, as the need of the sufferer for relief, but it does not yet recognize what the Rav calls “a hierarchy of needs.” To cry out to God is to release pent up emotions almost arbitrarily; to pray to God is to have reflected, analytically, on a variety of needs and to prioritize one’s requests intelligently.

Judaism... wants man to cry out aloud against any kind of pain, to react indignantly to all kinds of injustice or unfairness... Whoever permits his legitimate needs to go unsatisfied will never be sympathetic to the crying needs of others... For Judaism, need-awareness constitutes part of the definition of human existence...

Prayer is the doctrine of human needs. Prayer tells the individual, as well as the community, what his, or its, genuine needs are, what he should, or should not, petition God about... In short, through prayer man finds himself. Of course, the very instant he finds himself, he becomes a redeemed being (*Redemption*, 65-66).

Just as man cannot pray for others until he has prayed for himself, so he cannot pray for himself without including others in his prayers. Once he recognizes his responsibility to pray for others, according to the RAV, he has created “a community of prayer.”

What does this mean? It means a community of common pain, of common suffering. The Halacha has taught the individual to include his fellow man in his prayer. The individual must not limit himself to his own needs, no matter how pressing those needs are and how distinguished he is. Halacha has formulated prayer in the plural... Even private prayers, such as those offered on the occasion of sickness, death, or other crises, are recited in the plural...

Knesset Yisrael is a prayerful community, in which every individual experiences not only his own pain, but also that of countless others. I still remember the distress we

young boys experienced when we heard of a pogrom in some Jewish town thousands of miles away. Our anguish was not due to fear, but to sympathy and compassion. We felt the pain of the nation as a whole (*Community*, 19-22).

Halakhah prescribes *tefillah be-tzibbur* as an antidote to man's existential loneliness, but loneliness is but one of the two sides of man's slavish existence; the other is his ignorance.

When I say that man is ignorant, I do not refer to his scientific achievements; in this area modern man is clever and ingenious. What man fails to comprehend is not the world around him, but the world within him, particularly his destiny, and the needs of which he is supposed to have a clear awareness... Because of this misidentification, man adopts the wrong table of needs which he feels he must gratify. Man responds quickly to the pressure of certain needs, not knowing *whose* needs he is out to gratify.

At this juncture, sin is born. What is the cause of sin if not the diabolical habit of man to be mistaken about his own self? ...Does the young man understand his basic needs? If he did, we would have no problem of crime, drugs and permissiveness in general... Modern man is, indeed, existentially a slave, because he is ignorant and fails to identify his own needs (*Redemption*, 61-63).³⁰

Just as the presence of other worshippers alleviates the loneliness of man's existence, the use of liturgical formulas relieves him of the burden of identifying and classifying his needs before making proper petition to have them met. Instead of leaving man to blunder in the maze of real or presumed needs, the Halakhah canonizes them and requires him only to recite them.

In Review and Conclusion

Here, again, are the questions with which we began. Granting our premises that: (a) *Tefillah*, conceptually, is a form of arbitration and self-judgment, yet (b) normative, operative, prayer is petition; here are the answers which the Rav offers:

³⁰ Note the RAV's recurring reference to "needs."

1. Why must I pray at all?

Since petitionary prayer stems from the recognition of need, an intelligent, introspective person imposes upon himself the obligation to pray. The ability to pray, i.e., to engage in spontaneous “needs-awareness,” is one of the distinguishing characteristics of a free, sentient, being.

2. Is it not presumptuous to assume that God is going to listen to me? How do I know if/when He is listening?

By virtue of either: (a) the covenantal relationship (*ben-berit*, modeled by Avraham); (b) the master-servant relationship (Yehudah); or (c) the intimate, *ben-bayit*, relationship (Eliyahu), we have the right and confidence with which to approach God at all times, even for what amount to a *matenat hinam*, a favor we have no right to expect.

3. Why should I continue to pray to Him if I don't get what I pray for?

If we are committed to prayer as dialogue, we should continue to speak to God even in the face of His apparent silence. He offers us no guarantee that He will accept our prayers/petitions (מקבל תפילה), only that He will listen (שומע תפילה).³¹

4. Why must I pray at fixed intervals and not when the mood/need strikes me?

The dispute between *Rambam* and *Ramban* offers an insight into the establishment of fixed intervals for prayer (קבע). Taking *Rambam*'s understanding of prayer as personal need rather than public danger, coupled with the understanding that greater sensitivity is required for *tefillah* than for *tze`akah*, if there were no fixed prayers we would be at risk of praying infrequently or failing to pray at all! Under such conditions, we would be unable to maintain a proper relationship with God.

5. How can prayer be personalized if I can only use someone else's words?

³¹ When the kidnapped Israeli soldier Nahshon Wachsman, הי"ד, was murdered by Palestinian terrorists, his father, Yehudah Wachsman, was asked whether his belief in God had been shaken by God's denial of his, and so many other people's prayers to spare his son. His answer was: מותר לאבא גם לומר לא; a father is also entitled to say: No!

The Rav invites us to understand that it is man's essential ignorance that leads to his misidentification of his own needs, and, ultimately, to sin. Were man left entirely to his own petitionary designs, he might never make the proper requests of God. The formulaic pattern of the *Amidah*, for instance, insures that man's real needs are addressed regularly.

6. Why should the presence of a *minyan* make a difference to my personal prayers? Isn't it unlikely that we're all praying for the same thing/reason?

The Rav cites man's essential loneliness as one of the principal problems of human existence. The presence of a quorum in prayer is an invitation to man to overcome his loneliness, even temporarily. By joining with others in prayer—even by praying alone in the grammatical plural—man creates “community.”

Part Three: The Instructional Units

Unit 1

Adam and the Rain: The First “Needs Assessment”

In this lesson, we shall examine the case of a petition that demonstrates an indispensable principle of the prayer relationship between Man and God, although the prayer’s very existence is only inferred from the Torah text.

Enduring Values³²

The Rav’s quintessential definition of prayer is “to ask intelligently” (*Redemption*, 67), i.e., to conduct an accurate “needs assessment.” The Rav also addresses the singular importance of “petitionary” prayer: “Petition is the main form of human prayer” (*Worship*, 10-11, 28 ff); “Even two of the last three benedictions [of the *Amidah*] are of a petitional nature” (*Redemption*, 65).

In explaining the fundamental dispute between *Rambam* and *Ramban* on the origin of the mitzvah of prayer, the Rav introduces a distinction between “ordinary” prayer (*tefillah*) and “extraordinary” crying-out to God (*tze`akah*), as on the occasion of a public catastrophe. The latter, even according to *Ramban*, originates in Torah law.

Educational Objectives³³

Cognitive: The student will...

- Provide the details of each day’s creation.
- Compare the descriptions of the creation of man and woman in chapters 1 and 2 and relate them to the rule of כלל שאחריו מעשה, אינו אלא פרטו של ראשון that RASHI cites in his commentary to Genesis 2:8.
 - Distinguish (cf. *Lonely Man*) between “Adam I” and “Adam II.”
- Explain the nature of their “crime” and their “punishment.”
 - Distinguish (cf. *Rambam: Guide I:2*) between מורסמות and מושכלות .

Affective: The student will...

³² Formulated according to “Understanding by Design,” as described in Part One and illustrated in Part Two.

³³ Formulated according to Bloom’s “Taxonomy,” as described in Part One.

- Appreciate Man's singular role in creation, as its climax and apex.
- Appreciate that God "needs" man's assistance to bring His creation to completion and perfection.
 - Recognize prayer as a form of assistance
- Sympathize with other people who are in need and pray on their behalf.

Behavioral (Skills): The student will...

- Read the text aloud, with proper pronunciation and punctuation—as indicated by the טעמי המקרא.
- Arrange the differences between the two narratives of creation in a table, to facilitate their comparison and contrast.
- Recognize the prayer for rain as, arguably, the most basic of all human needs.
- Use a concordance to locate the importance of rain elsewhere in the Bible.

The Lesson

Part One: Resolving a Contradiction:

1. In Genesis 1:12, the Torah states:...ותוצא הארץ דשא, עשב מזריע זרע למינהו... indicating that grass had begun to grow on day three of creation.

2. In 2:5, however, it states:

וכל שיח השדה טרם יהיה בארץ, וכל-עשב השדה טרם יצמח; כי לא המטיר ה' אלקים על-הארץ, ואדם אין לעבד את-האדמה,

which implies that there was no vegetation—because there was no precipitation!—prior to the creation of man on day six.

3. The Talmud (*Hullin* 60b) provides a resolution:

מלמד שיצאו דשאים ועמדו על פתח קרקע,
עד שבא אדם הראשון ובקש עליהם רחמים, וירדו גשמים וצמחו;
ללמדך: שהקב"ה מתאוה לתפלתן של צדיקים.

R. Assi resolves this contradiction by positing that the vegetation was kept poised just below the surface of the earth from day three until day six, when Adam came and recited

a prayer for rain. From this resolution, he then infers a momentous theological postulate: *שהקב"ה מתאוה לתפלתן של צדיקים*.³⁴ God craves the prayers of the righteous.

Part Two: Extracting the Significance

Reducing this theological proposition to more existential terms, it places man--rather than the earth--at the focus of creation and indicates that God's principal purpose in creation was not the earth itself but the earth-dweller: Man. Man, for his part, was not intended to emerge upon the background of a completed and perfect world, but to be co-opted into partnering with God in its completion and perfection. God, therefore, did not provide man with merely the opportunity or even just the incentive to pray for the rain that would complete creation; He positively craved man's prayer without which God's own plan and intent would have been frustrated.

The consequences of this realization are exceedingly far-reaching. As much as we are dependent upon Him and His grace, so do His actions depend upon our participation in His worldly enterprise. That would appear to give us considerable leverage to wield in our dealings with Him.³⁵

Part Three: Some Thoughts about the “Complementarity” of Prayer³⁶

In regard to the “regular offerings” (*קרבן תמיד*; Numbers 28:2), God puts us in charge of what He calls: “MY near-offerings (*קרבני*), MY food (*להמי*), MY fire-offerings (*לאשי*), MY soothing savor (*ריח ניחחתי*).”³⁷

This permits—or, perhaps, even mandates—the following syllogism:

1. Sacrifices are God's “food,” and He is dependent on us for His satisfaction.
2. Prayer is the substitute for sacrifice (“*ונשלמה פרים שפתינו*”, Hoshea 14:3).
3. God depends upon our regular prayer just as He previously depended upon our regular sacrifice.

³⁴ This interpretation undoubtedly rests on the Talmudic identification of the root *ה"ה* with prayer: “*אין שיחה אלא תפילה*”. Cf. *Talmud Yerushalmi Berakhot* (4:7:1), *Bereishit Rabba* (68:9), *et. al.*

³⁵ See our elaboration on this point in Unit 2: “Avraham and Sodom.”

³⁶ The state or quality of being complementary, defined as: “mutually supplying each other's lack” (Webster).

³⁷ Translations follow Everett Fox: *The Five Books of Moses* (NY, 1995).

Our prayer then, is decidedly NOT a one-sided affair, in which we beseech God for unmerited divine assistance, favor or grace. On the contrary, it is part of a pact, a covenant if you will, between parties who, however unequal in capacity, are nonetheless mutually dependent.³⁸

Part Four: Some Halakhic Consequences

Ordinarily, the nature of petition restricts its recitation to weekdays; hence, the elimination of the intermediary *berakhot* from the *Amidah* of *Shabbat* and *Yom Tov*. The same principle appears to govern the similar restriction against the recitation of *Avinu Malkeinu* on *Shabbat*:

ונוהגין לומר "אבינו מלכנו" על הסדר, ואם הוא שבת—אין אומרים אותו (רמ"א, תקפ"ד:א).
הטעם—שאין שואלין צרכים בשבת (משנה ברורה, שם, ס"ק ד).

It is customary to recite *Avinu Malkenu* in its proper place. If it is *Shabbat*, however, it is not recited.

The reason is that we do not recite petitionary prayers on *Shabbat*.

A fine distinction, however—one that is in tune with the Rav's distinction between prayer and crying-out—is drawn by R. Shlomo Zalman Auerbach with regard to other forms of existential “needs assessments:”

שאלה: אם כן, מדוע מותר לשאול את צרכיו בראש השנה, הרי גם בראש השנה אסור להצטער, ככתוב:
"חדות ה' היא מעוזכם"?

תשובה: "מתריעים בשבת" (תענית ג:ז). רואים שעל צרות גדולות מותר להתפלל גם בשבת. ובראש
בשנה, שהוא יום הדין ואנחנו בצרה גדולה, מותר גם לשאול את צרכיו.

Q: Why, then, is it permissible to recite petitions on *Rosh ha-Shanah* when it is equally inappropriate to experience distress...?

A: It is permissible to “sound the alarm” on *Shabbat*. It is permissible to pray on account of great (public?) distress even on *Shabbat*. On *Rosh ha-Shanah*, the Day of Judgment, on which we are all in great distress, it is thus permissible to petition.³⁹

And in a similar vein:

³⁸ Further on “complementarity,” cf. Unit 6: “Prayer as Dialogue.”

³⁹ 351 עמ' א, כרך א, עמ' 351. ועלהו לא יבול (ירושלים, תשנ"ט), כרך א, עמ' 351.

כתבו האחרונים דמותר לומר בשבת אלהי עד שלא נוצרתי, יהי רצון וכו', דאינו אסור שאלת צרכיו אלא כשמבקש על חולי, או פרנסה, ודומה לו—שיש צער לפניו. אבל חרטת עוונות טוב לומר בכל יום כיון שאינו בלשון וידוי (משנה ברורה, ס' רפ"ה, ס"ק כב).

Others have written that it is permissible on *Shabbat* to recite *Elohai ad shelo notzarti*, or *yehi ratzon*, because the only petition that is prohibited is on account of illness or livelihood, where there is evident distress. It is appropriate, however, to express remorse daily, since it is not, strictly speaking, a “confession.”

Unit 2

Avraham and Sedom: Prayer, Intercession, and “Divine Intimacy”

Enduring Values

- Avraham, the first of the *Avot*, is cited in the Torah several times as “calling out in God’s name” (e.g., Genesis 12:8), apparently an early designation for prayer. So accomplished did Avraham become at prayer, that he became a paradigm of intercessory prayer in his own lifetime. After chastising the Philistines on account of Sarah, God advises Avimelekh to “return the man’s wife; indeed, he is a prophet and can intercede on your behalf and you will live” (20:7).⁴⁰
- Recognition of the *Avot* as paradigms of prayer may also account for the Halakhic ruling (by *Rambam*, via R. Hayyim) that *kavvanah* is only required of *birkhat avot*, the first blessing of the *Amidah*.
- In time of need, we would do well to turn to a righteous person to assist us through prayer.

Educational Objectives

Cognitive: The student will...

- Describe the situations in which Avraham (and other *Avot*) interceded with God, via prayer, on behalf of themselves or on behalf of others.
 - Cite God’s reaction to their intercession and characterize it.

⁴⁰ By “intercessory” prayer, we mean prayer offered on another’s behalf. Our use of this concept is informed by Yohanan Muffs: “Who will stand in the breach? A study in prophetic intercession,” *Love and Joy* (NY, 1992).

- Describe the strengths of character or leadership that the *Avot* (Avraham in particular) brought to their task.
 - Contrast the qualities that characterized Avraham with those of Yitzhak and Yaakov, particularly as regards their contributions to prayer.
- Describe Avraham's confrontation with God over Sedom and its consequences.
- Compare Avraham's willingness to confront God over the fate of Sedom with Noah's resignation over the fate of the world.
- List the principle characteristics of petitionary/intercessory prayer in the Bible and cite several paradigms of same.

Affective: The student will...

- Recognize the "intimacy" that the *Avot* (and other, singular, Biblical characters) enjoyed with God.
- Appreciate how incredible it was for Avraham to confront God over Sedom.
- Appreciate that God essentially invited his opposition, as He essentially invites intercession at all times.
- Value the qualities of the *Avot* and seek to emulate them.
- Recognize prayer as instrumental in interceding with God.
- Sympathize with other people who are in jeopardy and recognize the need to intercede on their behalf.

Behavioral (Skills): The student will...

- Read the text aloud, with proper pronunciation and punctuation—as indicated by the *ta`amei ha-mikra*.
- Identify the verbs that designate forms of intercession (e.g., ,גישה, עמידה, שיחה, , פגיעה) and translate them into English, utilizing an appropriate dictionary, if necessary.
- Use a concordance to locate appearances of such verbs elsewhere in the Bible.
- Correctly identify other contexts in which these verbs signify intercession.

The Lesson

Part One: Why tell?

In Genesis 18, God is about to destroy the cities of Sodom and Amorah on account of their great iniquity and the cry that has ascended to Him. At what appears to be the last moment, He recalls that He is not supposed to launch such a catastrophe as this without providing prior notice to His servant: “Am I going to hide from Avraham what I am about to do?” (18:17). Given the information, Avraham proceeds to remonstrate with God, praying and pleading for Sodom. The question, of course, is: Did God expect Avraham to respond otherwise? If it was His intention to destroy the cities, why open the door to negotiation?

In fact, the same question can be asked of any of a number of instances reported in Tanakh in which God informs people of their own, or others', fate, only to have them argue with Him over His decision and attempt to intercede with Him on behalf of the intended victims. [Moshe, Shemuel, Yesha`ayahu and Yonah come quickly to mind.] It is as though God does not really want to carry out His verdict and He is looking to be talked out of it; He invites prayer.⁴¹

Part Two: The Paradox of Prophecy

In the specific case of the prophet, however, this partnership [in the previous lesson, we entitled it “complementarity”] has a paradoxical outcome: The prophet, who is—at first—the medium for the transmission of the divine threat of punishment for transgression, becomes—in the continuation—an advocate for the defendant before the Chief Justice, interceding in order to have his sentence mitigated.

The fulfillment of this function is what inspired prophetic intercessory prayer: Prophetic prayer is the most characteristic indication of the prophet's total intellectual independence and freedom of conscience. The divine strong hand does not lobotomize the prophet's moral and emotional personality. Prophecy does not tolerate prophets who lack heart, who are emotionally anaesthetized. Quite the contrary, one could even argue that, historically speaking, the role of intercessor is older than the messenger aspect of prophecy. After all, Abraham is not a prophetic messenger, yet he is considered a prophet nonetheless. His prophetic nature manifests itself only in

⁴¹ See the point made in Unit One, Part One: “God craves the prayers of the righteous.”

his prayer... [Gen. 20:7]. There is no better example of prayer and petition than that of Abraham in the case of Sodom, which distinguishes itself in its unbridled audacity against heaven: “Shall the Judge of the world not do justice?” (Gen. 18:25).⁴²

Part Three: Precedent

This curious, counterintuitive situation has a precedent. In Unit One: “Adam and the Rain,” we stipulated that Man is God’s partner in creation. Before man would pray for rain, there was no apparent vegetation; without man’s active and consensual participation, creation is incomplete.

Man’s responsibility to assist God to realize the full potential of creation didn’t end with his expulsion from the Garden of Eden; it continues, undiminished, throughout history and is still ongoing today.

Part Four: The Right Approach

Avraham’s intercession at Sedom is a paradigm of yet another feature associated with *Tefillah*: the right way to approach God. When the impending fate of Sedom is first revealed to him, the Torah describes his approach to God using the word *va-yiggash*, literally—to approach. R. Eliezer ben Yehudah Roke’ah (c. 1165-c. 1230) observes that the same word is used to describe the approaches made by two other Biblical figures, Yehudah (Genesis 44:18) and Eliyahu (1 Kings 18:36), prior to their own acts of intercession. He concludes that the three steps forward we customarily take before the *Amidah* match the strides taken by these three figures.

[NOTE: A detailed examination of all three cases was presented in Part Two, in which we posed three questions to each of the three cases: By what right was the approach made? On whose behalf? Appealing to which qualities of God?]

Part Five: Petition and Regular Prayer

⁴² Muffs, *op. cit.*, 11.

The example of Avraham at Sedom illustrates yet another principle of prayer--the integration of petition (*bakkashah*) into the fixed liturgical order (*tefillah kevu`ah*). The Rav has written:

It [prayer] consists of both experiencing the complete helplessness of man, his absolute dependence upon God, and the performance of the ritual of prayer, of reciting fixed texts (*Family*, 40).

Does *avodah she-ba-lev* exhaust itself in standardized action, in the recital of a fixed text thrice daily, or in an inner experiential reality, in spiritual activity?... The physical deed of reciting a fixed text serves only as a medium through which the experience finds its objectification and concretion. It is not to be identified with the genuine act of praying, which is to be found in an entirely different dimension, namely, in the great, wondrous God-experience (*Worship*, 19-20).

As the three messengers leave Avraham and turn towards Sedom, the Torah (18:22) describes Avraham as: “Still standing before God” (עודנו עומד לפני ה'). *Targum Onkelos* renders the word עומד as: משמש בצלו, engaged in prayer.

- In what kind of prayer was he already engaged prior to God’s revelation to him of the fate of Sedom?
- What is the relationship between this preexisting prayer and the petition on behalf of Sedom that follows?

The *Netziv* replies: “This was his regular everyday prayer (תפילה קבועה).” Only in the following verse (23; ויגש אברהם) does he begin to pray specifically for Sedom. He elaborates:

The Torah informs us about all these details to teach us that one should pray for something only as part of his regular prayer, since that is the most propitious time (עת רצון). As the Talmud records (*Avodah Zarah* 7b): “When does the verse apply: ‘A prayer of a lowly man when he is faint? When ‘He pours forth his plea (שיחו) before God’” (Psalms 102:1). That is to say, during regular prayer, which is called a plea (שיחה)... For this reason, Avraham did not have to preface his prayer [for Sedom] with praise [of God] as the law requires, since he was already engaged in regular prayer, which contains praise (*הרחב דבר*, *ad. loc.*).

[NOTE: The *Netziv* contrasts Avraham's petition on behalf of Sedom with Yaakov's petition on his own behalf (32:10 ff.), noting that since Yaakov was not otherwise engaged in prayer, his petition had to commence with praise of God. See Unit Three: "Tefillot Avot Tikkenum" (Part Three), where we deal with Yaakov's petition in detail.]

Part Six: Petition within Prayer; A Halakhic Dimension

In an essay entitled: *Semikhat Ge'ulah li-Tefillah*,⁴³ which deals, *inter. alia.*, with the relationship of petition (*bakashah/ tehinah*) to prayer (*tefillah*), the Rav asks, rhetorically: How can man—short-lived and anxiety-ridden—approach the King in petition and supplication? The entire matter of prayer is a gift of a gracious God to mortal man... [Therefore,] it is forbidden to cry out to God without utilizing the form and framework of prayer (42).

Citing the statement of R. Simlai: "One should always arrange his praise of God [first] and afterwards he may pray" (*Avodah Zarah* 7b), he stipulates two points about *Tefillah*:

(A) There is an obligation to pray; one is obliged to pray and gratify his creator, and place his petition before Him.

(B) One may not petition for his needs outside of the framework of [fixed] prayer.

By inserting his petition for Sedom into the context of his regular [fixed] prayer, Avraham serves as a paradigm of this principle.

⁴³ שיעורים לזכר אבא מרי, ז"ל (Jerusalem, 1985; vol. 2), 35-57. See Unit Five: "The Proximity of Redemption to Prayer."

Unit 3

תפילות—אבות תקנום

Personifying our Prayers

Enduring Values

- תפילות—אבות תקנום (*Berakhot* 26b). The prayers of the *Avot* are the “historical precedent” on which the כנסת הגדולה based our *Tefillah*. “We find that our forefathers, Moses and the prophets prostrated themselves before God in prayer, spoke with Him conversationally, revealed to Him their innermost secrets and forced Him as it were, to meet their needs; they both argued and demanded” (*Ra`ayonot*, 245).
- “The fact that we commence the recital of the “eighteen benedictions” by addressing ourselves to the G-d of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, is indicative of the covenantal relationship which, in the opinion of our sages, lies at the very root of prayer” (*Lonely Man*, 35).
- Recognition of the *Avot* as paradigms of prayer may account for the Halakhic ruling (by *Rambam*, via R. Hayyim) that *kavvanah* is required only of the first blessing of the *Amidah*, known as אבות.

Educational Objectives

Cognitive: The student will...

- Describe the situations in which Avraham and other *Avot* interceded with God, via prayer, on their own behalf or on behalf of others.
 - Cite God’s reaction to their intercession and characterize it.
- Describe the strengths of character or leadership that the *Avot* (Avraham in particular) brought to their task.
 - Contrast the qualities that characterized Avraham with those of Yitzhak and Yaakov, particularly as regards their contributions to prayer.
- Cite the three classic “approaches” to authority that were made by the *Avot* and translate them into the requirements we follow prior and subsequent to prayer.

- List the principal characteristics of petitionary/intercessory prayer in the Bible and cite several paradigms of same.

Affective: The student will...

- Recognize the “intimacy” that the *Avot* (and other, singular, Biblical characters) enjoyed with God.
- Appreciate that God essentially invites intercession at all times.
- Value the qualities of the *Avot* and seek to emulate them.
- Recognize prayer as instrumental in interceding with God.
- Sympathize with other people who are in jeopardy and be prepared to intercede on their behalf.
- “The very essence of prayer is the covenantal experience of being together with and talking to God and that the concrete performance, such as the recitation of texts, represents the technique of implementation of prayer and not prayer itself” (*Lonely Man*, 35).

Behavioral (Skills): The student will...

- Read the text aloud, with proper pronunciation and punctuation—as indicated by the טעמי המקרא.
- Identify the verbs that designate forms of intercession and approach (e.g., גישה, עמידה, שיחה, פגיעה) and translate them into English, utilizing an appropriate dictionary, if necessary.
- Use a concordance to locate appearances of such verbs elsewhere in the Bible.
- Demonstrate the proper approach to, and recession from the *Amidah*.

The Lesson

Part One: Conformity and Individuality

While we have a tendency to speak of the *Avot*, collectively, as though they were interchangeable, the truth is that with all the similarities in their actions and reactions each of them possessed distinctive traits of character and personality. Each of those traits, in turn, can be identified with the Jewish people, as an entity, giving palpable proof to what *Ramban* designated: מעשה אבות—סימן לבנים.

The two statements that follow capture the essence of their similarities and differences in a manner particularly well-suited for the understanding of *Tefillah*.

A. *Berakhot* 26b

Avraham established shaharit...

Yitzhak established minhah...

Yaakov established ma`ariv...

B. *Pesahim* 88a

Avraham appears on a mountain...

Yitzhak appears in a field...

Yaakov appears in a house...

We shall now proceed to clarify what the Sages intended to convey via these associations.

Part Two: The Characterizations⁴⁴

Avraham was called עברי because he had the capacity to confront his idolatrous environment with his belief in one God.⁴⁵ The light he shed on true faith and belief is represented by the *shaharit* prayer, which is recited after dawn, and the standard he set for others to follow is represented by a mountain, which is visible even at a distance. Avraham's conduct both in his emigration to God's Promised Land, as well as his itinerary after his arrival, are models of devotion to the cause of monotheism and its dissemination.

Avraham expresses the historical chapter in which the people of Israel bears God's name throughout the world and the gentile nations relate to them as a 'divine prince' in their midst.

Yitzhak represents continuity. He strengthened the structure that Avraham erected, thereby insuring that it would not be just a passing phase. Even the wells that he dug received the same names that had been conferred on them by Avraham. Since his lot was not one of innovation, Yitzhak often appears passive—as in the case of the *akeidah*, and in the arrangement of his marriage to Rivkah. This passivity/continuity is represented

⁴⁴ We base these remarks upon the insights provided by the staff of Herzog Teachers' College (Har Etzion) in their teachers' guide to *Bereishit-Shemot* (5758), p. 27.

⁴⁵ כל העולם כולו מעבר אחד והוא מעבר אחד (*Bereishit Rabba* 42:8).

by the *minhah* prayer, which is recited at twilight—a time that is neither entirely day nor night, and by the field, which represents something at once both stable and unyielding.

Yitzhak expresses the humdrum chapters in national life; the periods in which the nation resided in its land, living according to the heritage of its fathers.

Yaakov's life, from birth and on, is characterized by struggle; hence, the attribution to him of *ma`ariv*, the prayer that is recited only by night—in darkness. He succeeds, however, by drawing clear lines of demarcation that keep his restless family intact, and inside. Whereas Avraham and Yitzhak are represented by a mountain and a field—symbols of expansiveness—Yaakov's symbol is the house; enclosed and, perhaps, even forbidding.

Yaakov's life spans the dark periods of national exile. The gathering within the house is the necessary result of the ongoing emergency that characterizes Yaakov's life.

Part Three: Models of Petition

As Yaakov is about to be reunited with Esav, he addresses God with an urgent plea for deliverance from what he describes as impending doom and destruction. This prayer (Genesis 32:10-13), which serves as a model of what Moshe Greenberg has called “Biblical Prose Prayer,”⁴⁶ is the only such model to contain all seven elements we have come to expect of petition: address, description (of addressee), self-deprecation, detail (thereof), petition, distress, and motivation.

Address:	אלקי אבי אברהם ואלקי אבי יצחק
Description	האמר אלי, שוב לארצך ולמולדתך
Self-deprecation	קטנתי מכל החסדים ומכל האמת
Detail	כי במקלי עברתי את הירדן הזה
Petition	הצילני נא מיד אחי, מיד עשו
Distress	כי ירא אנכי אתו פן יבא והכני
Motivation	ואתה אמרת היטב איטיב עמך

⁴⁶ Cf. n. 27, *supra*.

[NOTE: The other models presented by Greenberg, consist of Moshe (Numbers 12:13), Samson (Judges 16:28), Hannah (1 Samuel 1:11 ff.), and the sailors aboard Jonah's ship (1:14).]⁴⁷

In Unit Two: “Avraham and Sedom” (Part Five), we presented the explanation of the *Netziv* that Avraham didn't need to begin his petition with praise of God because he was already engaged in regular (fixed) prayer. Yaakov, on the other hand, had to begin his petition by praising God because he was not otherwise engaged in prayer. Why were their situations different? Since Avraham entertained his guests at noon (18:1) and they arrived at Sedom in the evening (19:1), his plea to God—which followed his separation from his guests—had to have been in the afternoon, at which time he would have been reciting *minhah*.

Yaakov, on the other hand, had spent the day making frantic preparations for his encounter with Esav and subsequently he goes to sleep (32:14). It would appear that he had already recited *minhah* and felt he could not delay his petition until the next regular prayer time arrived.

Part Four: Another Comparison

There are similarities and differences among the *Avot* other than those we contrasted in Part Two. Avraham's stance before God is referred to as עמידה (rising up; 19:27), Yitzhak's is called שיחה (conversation, discussion; 24:63), and Yaakov's is פגישה (encounter; 28:11).

These three verbs, as expounded by Rabbi Avi Weiss, signify three distinct actions that ought to characterize our *Tefillah*.

As one rises up, it is important to remove all the clutter, all the disturbances that could impede one's ability to communicate with God...In conversation, one must obviously comprehend the contents of his/her words... [and] it is important to feel God's presence.⁴⁸

The last two elements: comprehending the prayers and feeling God's presence, are the twin pillars of the Rav's definition of *kavvanah*. Based upon a distinction first drawn

⁴⁷ We have dealt with these examples at greater length in Part Two: “Prayer as Petition; the Biblical Evidence.”

⁴⁸ *A Taste of Torah, Va-yetze*, 5759. <http://www.hir.org/torah/rabbi/5759/vayetze59.htm>, downloaded on May 17, 2005.

by R. Hayyim Brisker, *kavvanah* is said to comprise the understanding of the liturgy coupled with the awareness that one is standing in the presence of divinity.

חידושי ר' חיים הלוי על הרמב"ם

(הלכות תפילה פרק ד, הלכה א)

תרי גווני כוונות יש בתפילה.

האחת: כוונה של פירוש הדברים, ויסודה הוא דין כוונה.

ושנית: שיכוון שהוא עומד בתפילה לפני ה'.

Unit 4

Slavery and Redemption: Knowing how to Pray

Enduring Values

- In explaining the fundamental disagreement between *Rambam* and *Ramban* on the origin of the mitzvah of prayer,⁴⁹ the Rav introduces a distinction between “ordinary” prayer (*tefillah*) and “extraordinary” crying-out to God (*tze`akah*), as on the occasion of a public catastrophe. The latter, even according to *Ramban*, originates in Torah law.
- According to the Rav, slavery is characterized by silence (*Redemption*, 59). Since slaves have only biological needs (as opposed to “human” ones), they may cry out, but they do not pray. Yet, only when they find their voice in prayer can they be redeemed.

[NOTE: The Rav makes the same point about the experience of Holocaust survivors (*Redemption*, 57) and a similar lesson could be constructed for a Jewish history class.]

- Indeed, the Rav identifies the oft-repeated mitzvah of *סיפור יציאת מצרים* as a paradigm of the equation: redemption=speech (*op. cit.*, 56). This characterization serves several purposes for the Rav, among them the distinction between *tefillah* and *tze`akah*, a distinction that plays a significant role in his support for *Rambam*'s position on the Torah origin of prayer.
- “The very essence of prayer is the covenantal experience of being together with and talking to God and that the concrete performance, such as the recitation of texts, represents the technique of implementation of prayer and not prayer itself” (*Lonely Man*, 35).

Educational Objectives

Cognitive: The student will...

- Compare and contrast the role of slaves in at least two of the following regions.

⁴⁹ We have dealt with this question at greater length in Part Two.

- Ancient Egypt
- Roman Empire
- Pre-Colombian Mesoamerica
- Plantations in the U.S.A⁵⁰
- Describe the conditions of slavery imposed on the Jews in Egypt, and how the Jews responded to them.
 - List the verbs in Shemot 1-2 that describe forms of articulation, assess their significance, and note their appearance in the context of prayer elsewhere in the Bible.
 - Cite God's reaction to their response (Exodus 3:23-25) and characterize it.
- Describe the strengths of character or leadership that Moshe and Aharon brought to their task.
 - Contrast the relationship between Moshe and Aharon described in 4:16 with that described in 7:1 and draw a conclusion from their equation.
 - Compare Moshe's demurrals at the burning bush (3:11; 4:2, 10, 14) with his demurrals subsequent to the initial confrontation (6:12, 30).
- Describe the initial confrontation with Pharaoh and its consequences.
- Contrast prayer and crying-out in light of the Rav's explanation of the disagreement between *Rambam* and *Ramban* on the origin of the mitzvah of prayer.

Affective: The student will...

- Appreciate the enormity of the oppression and slavery in Egypt, and of our redemption.
- See the hand of God in both the slavery and redemption.
- Value the qualities of leadership in Moshe and seek to emulate them.
- Recognize prayer as instrumental in the process of redemption.

⁵⁰ Such questions are standard fare for such examinations as AP World History.

- Recognize the exodus from Egypt as a universal symbol of deliverance from suffering and oppression.⁵¹
- Sympathize with other people who experience slavery [or other forms of oppression and injustice] and pray for their redemption.
- Appreciate that “modern man is, indeed, existentially a slave, because he is ignorant and fails to identify his own needs” (*Redemption*, 63).

Behavioral (Skills): The student will...

- Read the text aloud, with proper pronunciation and punctuation—as indicated by the *ta`amei ha-mikra*.
- Identify the verbs that designate forms of articulate speech (e.g., קרא, צעק, זעק) and translate them into English, utilizing an appropriate dictionary, if necessary.
- Use a concordance to locate appearances of such verbs elsewhere in the Bible.
- Correctly identify other contexts in which these verbs signify forms of prayer.

The Lesson

Part One: A discussion of slavery

The Jews in Egypt were rendered mute by their oppression and the process of their redemption was consequently delayed. At this point, students will be asked to recite observations of slavery from history and literature (e.g., *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, *The Gulag Archipelago*) and characterize the common denominators of the experience of slaves. These observations will be compared and contrasted with those of the *peshat* of Exodus 1:13-14 and with *Midreshei Aggadah* on the subject [e.g., Louis Ginsberg: *Legends of the Jews*]. Particular attention will be paid to the several interpretations of עבודת פרך and to the reappearance of פרך in the laws of Israelite servitude (Leviticus 25: 43, 46, 53).

Part Two: Crying Out vs. Praying

We shall next look through the early portions of Exodus for the appearance of verbs that denote the articulation of sound. We will distinguish between verbs that only

⁵¹ E.g., Michael Walzer: *Exodus and Revolution* (NY, 1985), which examines the “political meanings” of the exodus narrative and the uses to which it has been put in modern times.

indicate calling or crying-out, and verbs that are synonymous with prayer. This will enable us to conclude—with the Rav, and his source in the *Zohar*—that the appearance of Moshe and the hope that he symbolized enabled the Hebrew slaves to find their voice, pray to God, and secure their promised redemption.

The verbs we will identify include: אנ"ח, זע"ק, שו"ע, נא"ק, צע"ק.

Part Three: Redemption in Stages

The *Zohar* divides the redemption into three stages: (1) slavery=total silence; (2) redemption begins with sound, but no words; (3) total redemption=sound+words.

The textual focus here will be on Exodus 2:23, which indicates that prior to the arrival of Moshe on the scene, the Jews had not called out to God because they lacked the “need awareness” for freedom. The protest that Moshe lodged with Pharaoh over their treatment, while initially unsuccessful, heightened their sensitivity to their own needs. In this context, we will also examine the reasons Moshe gave for declining his mission, paying particular attention to their relationship to the capacity for speech.

Part Four: To “Know” is to Empathize

A special focus of this lesson will be Exodus 2:25: וירא אלקים את בני ישראל, וידע; אלקים; “God saw the Israelites and God knew.” What did He see, and what did He know? There is a broad range of commentary on this question that is relevant to the Rav’s definition and qualification of prayer.

- (1) *Onkelos*. וגלי קדם יי' שעבודא דבני ישראל, ואמר במימריה למפרקהון יי'. The enslavement of the Israelites was exposed before God, and He decided to extricate them.
- (2) *Sa`adiah*. ורחמהם. ונט"ר אללה אלי בני אסראיל, ורחמהם. God observed the Israelites and had compassion on them.
- (3) *Rashi*. נתן עליהם לב, ולא העלים עיניו מהם. He paid attention to them and didn't overlook them.
- (4) *Ibn Ezra* (long version). וירא, שהיו המצרים עושים בגלוי; וידע, העשוי בסתר. He saw that the Egyptians were [oppressing them] openly, and He knew what was being done secretly.
- (5) *Ibn Ezra* (short version). Philosophers have stated that there are two categories of knowledge: knowledge of things that exist (דעת היש), and knowledge of things that will be (דעת העתיד).

(6) *Ramban*. Rashi's interpretation is true to the *peshat*. Initially, God hid His countenance from them and left them vulnerable. Now, He heard their cry and noticed them—i.e., He no longer hid Himself from them; He knew of their affliction and what they required. The text tells of several causes of their redemption: “God heard their cry,” “God recalled His covenant,” “For I have known his affliction” (3:7), because they were not yet worthy of redemption--although the time had come—as Ezekiel prophesied (20:6-10). It was only on account of their anguished cry that He compassionately accepted their prayers.

(7) *Sa`adiah Gaon*, in his commentary on Psalms 1: 6, enumerates no fewer than 12 (!) uses of the verb ע"ד.⁵²

Out of all these nuanced definitions, we may suggest the following interpretation—one particularly well-suited for the purposes of education:

“To know” is a multifaceted enterprise. In the *cognitive* domain, it includes awareness and comprehension (and other items in Bloom's taxonomy⁵³); in the *affective* domain, it embraces intimacy and commitment. In the metaphysical domain indicated by our verse, however, it signifies empathy. God was already “aware” of their predicament, and “committed” to their redemption; with the latest chapter in their travail, He became one with their suffering: עמו אנכי בצרה.

Part Five: To “Teach” is to “Empathize”

Apropos of empathy, it is worthwhile noting that the Rav regarded empathy as a prerequisite for successful pedagogy.

In an essay entitled: “Teaching with Clarity and Empathy” (*Reflections*, 150-159), he distinguishes between the role that Moshe played after the sin of the golden calf and the one he later played after the sin of those who craved meat (קברות התאווה). To the former, Moshe reacted as a teacher, by making forceful pronouncements and taking forthright and powerful action. This, the Rav explains, was a suitable response to an incident involving idolatry.

⁵² Curiously, his translation here: “to show compassion,” is not one of them.

⁵³ See our description of the taxonomy in Part One.

The latter incident, however, was characterized by paganism and hedonism, and the “intellectual” approach of argument and persuasion that Moshe took towards the golden calf would have been ineffectual. To counter this threat, Moshe had to become an אומן, a nursing father.

Besides teaching, he would have to reach out emotionally to the people, nurture them through their national infancy, with patient, sympathetic understanding and empathy... Our age is demonstrably pagan... It consists of uninhibited *peritzut* (indulgence). The teaching role may have been sufficient in the past to counter the allurements of other religions, philosophies, and the pseudo-ideologies which still abound nowadays... We must have, in addition to teaching: dedication, personal commitment, for otherwise the burden is unbearable; *selflessness*, a readiness to subordinate personal career and egotistical ambitions; and *empathy*, an ability to teach with feeling, not only with clarity (*Reflections*, 157-158).⁵⁴

Part Six: What else Can we “Know”?

According to *Rambam*, we have an obligation to “know” God. Indeed, the very first laws of the *Mishneh Torah*, הל' יסודי התורה, begin with the stipulation that “the most fundamental principle and the pillar of all knowledge is to know (לידע) that there is a first cause...” What sort of knowledge does that obligation entail? Are we to “know” Him the way He “knows” us?

The answer of philosophy has generally been that one knows God through the ability to provide rational proofs of His existence. The Rav, however, is critical of such proofs because they lack the experiential dimension he believes is indispensable to the true religious experience. He asks:

Does the loving bride in the embrace of her beloved ask for proof that he is alive and real? Must the prayerful soul clinging in passionate love and ecstasy to her Beloved demonstrate that He exists? ...

⁵⁴ Cf.: “Engaging the Heart and Teaching the Mind,” *Reflections* 160-168. Regarding the Rav’s combination of the intellectual and the emotional/experiential, see our note 26, *supra*.

Maimonides' term לידע transcends the bounds of the abstract *logos* and passes over into the realm of the boundless intimate and impassioned experience where postulate and deduction, discursive knowledge and intuitive thinking, conception and perception, subject and object, are one (*Lonely Man*, 32-33, note).

[The Rav also notes that *Rambam* begins by describing God in (“aboriginal”) experiential terms and only in the fifth halakhah of יסודי התורה does he introduce a philosophical (Aristotelian) proof for His existence.]

Unit 5

סמיכת גאולה לתפילה

The Proximity of Redemption to Prayer

To illustrate the variety of methodological presentations of which the Rav's writings on prayer avail themselves, we shall alter the format of this unit to meet the requirements of a lesson whose focus is on *Halakhah* and *Hashkafah*, rather than on *Humash*.

* * *

אמר ר' יוחנן : איזהו בן עולם הבא? זה הסומך גאולה לתפילה של ערבית (ברכות ד ע"ב)

R. Yohanan said: Who merits the world to come?

Whoever brings nigh redemption to prayer in the *Arvit* service (*Berakhot* 4b).

Preface:

The *Netziv*'s observation that Avraham was already engaged in תפילה קבועה, fixed prayer, prior to presenting his petition on behalf of Sedom,⁵⁵ provides us with an opportunity to discuss two additional dimensions of prayer—one hashkafic and one halakhic—that we will consign under the rubric of סמיכת גאולה לתפילה. The hashkafic dimension pertains to the juxtaposition of praise and petition within the *Amidah*, while the halakhic dimension pertains to the proximity of praise to petition within the juxtaposition of the *Amidah* and קריאת שמע וברכותיה.

The commentaries of *Rashi* and the *Tosafot* to the statement of R. Yohanan with which we began this section, will prove enlightening.

Rashi (s.v. Whoever brings nigh redemption... [in the *ma`ariv* service]):

- How much more so if he does it in *Shaharit*, because the essence of the redemption from Egypt occurred during *Shaharit*, to wit: “On the morrow of the *Pesah* the Jews left” (Numbers 33:3).

⁵⁵ See Unit Three: “Avraham and Sedom” (Part Five).

- David, in Psalms, alluded to bringing nigh redemption to prayer, by saying “God is my rock and redeemer” (Psalms 19:15), to which he brought nigh “God will answer you on a day of distress” (20:2).
- The *Talmud Yerushalmi* in *Berakhot* states: To whom can we compare one who does not bring redemption nigh unto prayer? To a courtier who knocks on the king’s door and leaves before the king opens the door. Here, too, he has left.
- Rather, one should bring God nigh to himself and appease Him with praise and encomium on account of the exodus. God will come nigh unto man, and as a result of that proximity man can place his petitions before Him.
 - “Man was commanded to redeem himself in order to attain full being. This can be achieved only through prayer. ונצעק אל ה', ‘and we cried unto God’. The redemption from Egypt was initiated through prayer” (*Redemption*, 64-65).⁵⁶

Tosafot (s.v. R. Yohanan says)

- If bringing nigh redemption unto prayer in *Shaharit* precludes any interruption between them, how does *Arvit* accommodate two—and possibly even three—interruptions?
- What about our own practice to recite יראו עינינו and other verses after השכיבנו? (Is that not an intrusion on the proximity?) It would appear that since they are a rabbinic enactment they constitute an “extended redemption” (גאולה אריכתא) [implemented in order to enable all the congregants to return home together after the service].
- In addition, those verses contain 18 references [אזכרות- to God]—complementing the 18 blessings of the *Amidah*—apropos of which they also enacted the closing of יראו עינינו.
- The Halakhah follows R. Yohanan, whose position is supported by a ברייתא, and the *Halakhot Gedolot* also rules in his favor.

⁵⁶ See Unit Four: “Slavery and Exodus”

- Therefore, it is prohibited to talk between the גאולה blessing of *Arvit* and the *Amidah*.
- The *Siddur* of R. Amram Gaon, however, stipulates that the recitation of *Kaddish* between redemption and prayer of *Arvit* signifies that we do not require them to be brought nigh at that time, because the *Arvit* service is optional.
- This is problematic. R. Yohanan's position here indicates that he regards *Arvit* as mandatory, and in a disagreement between R. Yohanan and Rav [who rules it is optional] we would be bound to follow R. Yohanan, so it is best to adopt a stringent position and beware of talking in between.
- Alternately, if there is a contradiction in Halakhah—we generally rule that *Arvit* is optional while here we appear to follow R. Yohanan who maintains it is mandatory—we would have to say that even if R. Yohanan agreed with Rav that *Arvit* is optional, he still requires that [redemption and prayer] be brought nigh, in which case we would do well to do so, too.

The Hashkafic Dimension.⁵⁷

The proximity to redemption transforms prayer from a manner of expressing oneself in words into a veritable spiritual activity; a commitment to God and an acceptance of His moral authority. Redemption is the goal of the covenant, and *Shema`* is its epitome. Man has no right to come before God in quest of redemption without owning up to his covenantal commitments. As the Rav writes:

Through prayer, they [Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David and Solomon] achieved the covenant with God, and through prayer, we expect eventually to realize that covenant (*Redemption*, 55).

To promote this realization, Halakhah imposed the requirement that redemption and prayer be seamless, and yet the intention required of the recitation of *Shema`* is not identical to that which is required of the *Amidah*. Whereas *Shema`* confers upon man the “ontological (existential) legitimacy” of a moral being engaged in a moral task, the *Amidah* actually negates the value of human existence by forcing man to appear before

⁵⁷ Cf. *Lonely Man*, 41, note.

God as a humble, even enslaved, supplicant. The condition that the Talmud (*Berakhot* 14b-15a), designates קבלת עול מלכות שמים, accepting the yoke of heavenly majesty, combines these two contradictory elements “into one comprehensive awareness of man who is at the same time the free messenger of God and His captive as well.”

The Halakhic Dimension:⁵⁸

We will enter the halakhic dimension via a “didactic dichotomy” based upon the question introduced by *Tosafot* (above):

If bringing nigh redemption unto prayer in *Shaharit* precludes any interruption between them, how does *Arvit* accommodate two—and possibly even three—interruptions?

Tosafot resolve the question by recourse to the concept of “an extended [blessing of] redemption;” we shall deal with it by stipulating that the blessing of redemption—in both *Shaharit* and *Arvit*—is a prerequisite (מתיר) for the recitation of the *Amidah*.⁵⁹ In the following passage, the Rav explains how the relationship between the obligation to pray and its performance is different from that of other mitzvot and their performance.

...*Tefillah* differs from all other mitzvot in which a person is obligated. With respect to other mitzvot, first the obligation of its performance falls upon the person. That obligation then transforms his [subsequent] action into the performance of a mitzvah, and awards it a special status.

For example, a person assumes an obligation [to recite] a blessing following his nourishment and this obligation begets the [mitzvah] object of the grace after meals. So it is with regard to praise and thanksgiving; personal obligation is made manifest in the [subsequent] articulation of a blessing...

Tefillah, however, being a feature of [seeking divine] compassion and not a permanent [mitzvah performance] fixture, reverses the sequence. The blessings of prayer do not achieve the status of blessing—with all its signification and prerequisites—by means of an individual’s obligation but on their own accord. There exists an object of *Tefillah* in its fixed liturgy that is totally independent of personal

⁵⁸ “בענין סמיכת גאולה לתפילה,” *שיעורים לזכר אבא מרי ז”ל* (ירושלים, תשמ”ה), לה וכו’

⁵⁹ This parallels the point made earlier in the Hashkafic Dimension.

obligation, [an object] whose prerequisite derives from its independent status as [seeking divine] compassion. Even if a person has already fulfilled his obligation [towards formal prayer], the signification of prayer as [seeking divine] compassion has not been removed... the obligation derives from the fact that it exists as an object of prayer in reality (*Shi`urim*, 40).

It is on account of this distinction that the Rav maintains that women share with men the personal obligation to pray, despite prayer belonging to the category of time mandated mitzvot from which women are generally exempt.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ It is our intention to develop this particular point in a unit devoted to Hannah's prayer in 1 Samuel chapter 2. In this context, we also plan to examine the Rav's recorded and reported views on women's prayer groups and their educational implications.

Unit 6

Prayer as Dialogue: Talking with God

Enduring Values

In *The Lonely Man of Faith*, the Rav stipulates that “Adam II” requires a community to promote his redemption. The relationship between man and God in this community, which the Rav labels “covenantal,”⁶¹ is characterized by their proximity and even equality. As he writes there:

We meet God in the covenantal community as a comrade and fellow member. Of course, even within the framework of this community, God appears as the leader, teacher, and shepherd. Yet the leader is an integral part of the community, the teacher is inseparable from his pupils, and the shepherd never leaves his flock...The covenant draws God into the society of men of faith (30).

In this lesson, we shall see that the historical dialogue between God and Moshe, as well as the ongoing dialogue between God and ourselves, epitomizes a form of what we have called “complementarity,”⁶² an idea that constitutes an indispensable principle of the prayer relationship between Man and God.

Educational Objectives

Cognitive: The student will....

- Compare the descriptions of the creation of man and woman in chapters 1 and 2 and relate them to the rule of כלל שאחריו מעשה, אינו אלא פרטו של ראשון.⁶³
 - Distinguish (a la Soloveitchik) between “Adam I” and “Adam II.”
 - Discriminate between an “I-Thou” and an “I-Thou-He” relationship
 - Describe the qualities and characteristics of the community that the Rav calls covenantal, existential or faith.
- Locate the *kapporet* in the *mishkan* and describe its function.
- Locate and discuss the passages in Torah that direct Moshe how to communicate with God.

⁶¹ See Unit One: “Adam and the Rain” (Part Three).

⁶² *Op. cit.*

⁶³ Cf. *Rashi*, Genesis 2:8.

- Suggest what the words כופר , כפורת and כיפורים have in common.

Affective: The student will...

- Appreciate Man's singular role in creation, as its climax and apex.
- Appreciate that God and Man meet on intimate and complementary terms in a covenantal/prayer community.
- Appreciate the opportunities of יום הכיפורים to enter into a dialogue with God based on the principle of complementarity

Behavioral (Skills): The student will...

- Read the text aloud, with proper pronunciation and punctuation—as indicated by the *ta`amei ha-mikra*.
- Arrange the differences between the two narratives of creation in a table, to facilitate their comparison and contrast.
- Locate verbs and nouns in Tanakh that derive from the root כפ"ר and determine their semantic relationship.

The Lesson

Part One: Complementarity and Kavvanah

The concept that our prayer and God's satisfaction are mutual⁶⁴ appears to be the basis for a Talmudic prescription for the proper “direction of the heart” (כוונת הלב) to which prayer should be addressed:

תלמוד בבלי מסכת ברכות דף ל עמוד א

היה עומד בחוץ לארץ - יכוין את ליבו כנגד ארץ ישראל שנאמר:
(מלכים א' ח') והתפללו אליך דרך ארצם.

היה עומד בארץ ישראל - יכוין את לבו כנגד ירושלים, שנאמר:
(מלכים א' ח') והתפללו אל ה' דרך העיר אשר בחרת;

היה עומד בירושלים - יכוין את לבו כנגד בית המקדש, שנאמר:
(דברי הימים ב' ו') והתפללו אל הבית הזה;

⁶⁴ Cf. Unit One: “Adam and the Rain” (Part Three).

היה עומד בבית המקדש - יכוין את לבו כנגד בית קדשי הקדשים, שנאמר:
 (מלכים א' ח') והתפללו אל המקום הזה;
 היה עומד בבית קדשי הקדשים - יכוין את לבו כנגד בית הכפורת;
 היה עומד אחורי בית הכפורת- יראה עצמו כאילו לפני הכפורת;
 נמצא: עומד במזרח - מחזיר פניו למערב, במערב - מחזיר פניו למזרח,
 בדרום- מחזיר פניו לצפון, בצפון - מחזיר פניו לדרום;
 נמצאו כל ישראל מכוונים את לבם למקום אחד.

One standing in the Diaspora should direct his heart towards the Land of Israel... in the Land of Israel--towards Jerusalem... in Jerusalem--towards the Temple... in the Temple--towards the Holy of Holies... in the Holy of Holies--towards the *kapporet* ...One standing behind the *kapporet* should pretend he is before it.

The result is that one standing in the east—faces west; west—faces east; south—faces north; and north—faces south.

The result is that all Israel direct their hearts towards one place.

Q. Why did the *kapporet* become the narrowest focus of the prayers of all Israel?

(שמות פרק כה: כב) ונועדתי לך שם ודברתי אתך מעל הכפרת מבין שני הכרבים אשר על ארן העדת את כל אשר אצוה אותך אל בני ישראל:

I shall meet with you there, and I shall speak with you from above the *kapporet*, from between the two *keruvim*, which are atop the Ark of the Covenant...

(במדבר פרק ז:פט) ובבא משה אל אהל מועד לדבר אתו וישמע את הקול מדבר אליו מעל הכפרת אשר על ארן העדת מבין שני הכרבים וידבר אליו:

When Moshe entered the tent of meeting to speak with Him, he heard the voice discoursing with him from above the *kapporet* atop the Ark of the Covenant, from between the two *keruvim*...

A. Because it was from the *kapporet* that the voice of God emanated in addressing Moshe, it is to that selfsame *kapporet* that Israel addresses its voice in prayer.

Part Two: Kofer, Kapporet, Kapparah, and Yom ha-Kippurim

The root כפ"ר is a homonymous one in the Bible. The aspect with which we will deal, here, is the one signifying the noun "pitch" (כופר), and the verb "to coat [with pitch; see Gen. 6:14: וכפרת אותה מבית ומחוץ בכופר: "coat it, inside and out, with pitch"]. By metaphorical extension, this verb also designates "to cover over, pacify, or propitiate" (see Gen. 32:21: פניו: אכפרה "I shall pacify/ propitiate him"), whence we derive the noun "ransom, or price of life" (כופר לנפש; Exodus 21:30: ... אם כופר יושת עליו... "Should ransom be designated, he shall pay the price of his life").

Coming closer to our purpose--both textually and contextually--is Exodus 32:30: אולי אכפרה בעד חטאתכם...; "You have erred/sinned grievously...perhaps I can cover over your error/sin." *Rashi, ad. loc.*, appreciating both the literal and metaphorical usage of כפ"ר, comments: החטא; להבדיל ביניכם ובין החטא; "I shall place a coating, or filling, at the site of the 'sin' to keep you disengaged from it." כופר, in these terms, is the stuff with which we fill in the chinks in our spiritual armor that חטא causes to develop.

When do we apply this כופר? On the "Day of Atonement," a word that has a decidedly delicious derivation from the Middle English "at one," meaning: "agreed." *Yom ha-Kippurim* is--literally as well as homiletically--a "Day of At-one-ment," or, recasting *Rashi's* metaphor, a "Day of Bonding." By closing the apertures of the soul and sealing them against erosion due to the friction of error and sin, man becomes one with God and that is his ultimate כפרה.

The כפורת was a slab of pure gold that reposed atop the Ark of the Covenant in the Tabernacle (Exodus 25:17 ff.), fitted to its outer dimensions. Its relationship to the usages of כפ"ר that we have already demonstrated is illustrated by its translation, in older English versions (based upon the Septuagint and the Vulgate), as: "mercy seat," deriving its name from the notion of propitiation. In order to secure כפרה for the Jewish people on יום הכיפורים, Aaron is instructed to sprinkle the blood of the sin-offering (חטאת) "on and before the כפורת" (Leviticus. 16:15-16).

Part Three: Conclusion

Just as Moshe, at Sinai, stood in the cleft of the rock clutching the tablets of the Law, as God, in a cloud, first revealed His attributes of compassion and grace, so was

Aharon instructed to seek atonement for the Jewish people by replicating the circumstances of Moshe's revelation. The *kapporet* replaced the “cleft of the rock” (נקרה) (הצור) in which Moshe stood, and the “cloud of incense” (ענן הקטורת) replicated the “thickness of the cloud” (עב הענן) from within which God spoke.

We, who have neither the cleft of the rock nor the "mercy seat," and who can produce neither genuine clouds nor those of incense, must rely upon the סדר התפילה, the order of prayer, invoking the thirteen attributes of grace and compassion, and the סליחות, the liturgical order of *Yom ha-Kippurim*, invoking God's juridical capacity to pardon and atone.

As the Talmud reports (*Rosh ha-Shanah* 17b):

אמר רבי יוחנן: אלמלא מקרא כתוב אי אפשר לאומרו, מלמד שנתעטף הקדוש ברוך הוא כשליה צבור, והראה לו למשה סדר תפלה. אמר לו: כל זמן שישראל חוטאין - יעשו לפני כסדר הזה, ואני מוחל להם.

R. Yohanan said: Were it not an explicit verse, we would be unable to express it... God wrapped Himself as an emissary of the congregation and showed Moshe the order of service, saying: Whenever the Jews sin, let them perform this service before me and I shall forgive them.

Finally, it was only after Adam sinned and was banished from Eden that he was assigned the task “to work the earth whence he was taken” (Genesis 3:23). Assumedly, this is the juncture at which he prayed. Additional significance, then, attaches to the fact that immediately thereafter God sets up two *keruvim* “to guard the way to the tree of life” (3:24). These are, arguably, the same two *keruvim* that crowned the *kapporet*, from between whose outstretched wings God spoke. The hermeneutic circle is, again, complete. In the words of the *Netziv* (3:23):

The purpose of Creation—that the glory of God should fill the earth—was hereby completed insofar as everything was now dependent upon Man’s deeds, by way of reward and punishment.⁶⁵

⁶⁵ As I write these concluding lines, the city of New Orleans struggles to cope with the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina and people have begun to ask the same question that was asked after the lethal tsunami struck Indonesia last year: “How could a compassionate God allow this to happen?” I believe that some of the insights we have obtained from the Rav and from his sources of information and inspiration can provide a response to this question.

The Talmud (*Ta`anit* 22b) records:

תנו רבנן: על כל צרה שלא תבוא על הצבור מתריעין עליה, חוץ מרוב גשמים. מאי טעמא? -
אמר רבי יוחנן: לפי שאין מתפללין על רוב הטובה.

The Rabbis taught: On the occasion of every distress that befalls the public, we sound the alarm [i.e., we call for prayer and fasting]—with the exception of excessive rain.

Why? R. Yohanan says, because we do not offer prayers over an abundance of good.

According to the explanation we provided in Unit One: “Adam and the Rain,” God created a world with the potential for natural growth, but did not enable this potential to be realized until man appreciated it and made provision for it through prayer. As recorded by the Talmud (*Hullin* 60b):

מלמד שיצאו דשאים ועמדו על פתח קרקע,
עד שבא אדם הראשון ובקש עליהם רחמים, וירדו גשמים וצמחו

Vegetation was poised to emerge from below the earth’s surface until Adam came and sought compassion on their behalf [through prayer], the rain fell, and they grew.

The result, as we elaborated in this last unit, was the establishment of a relationship of mutuality (we called it “complementarity”) between man and God that makes us partners in creation *provided* we fulfill our proprietary responsibilities, paramount among which is the obligation of *לשמרה ולעבדה*; to cultivate the earth and to guard it. Prayer, as the Rav maintains, is the means of intelligent “needs analysis” and, as such, it is the handiest instrument of ongoing communication within our relationship with God. And from God’s perspective, prayer is the means by which He obtains our “input” into the creative process and by which He charts and grades our spiritual progress. In the words of R. Assi: “God craves the prayers of the righteous” (*שהקב”ה מתאוה לתפלתן של צדיקים*).

And as the *Netziv* wrote:

The purpose of Creation—that the glory of God should fill the earth—was hereby completed insofar as everything was now dependent upon Man’s deeds, by way of reward and punishment.

New Orleans is not the first city that man has built on a particularly precarious site. It is neither the first time that he has taken measures to protect such a city against the “elements,” nor the first time that his mistaken priorities have led to the thwarting of his intent and the destruction of his endangered city.

The city of Babylon, according to the Torah’s record, was situated in “a valley in the Land of Shin`ar” (*שניער*; Genesis 11:2), which was so called, our Sages tell us, because *שם ננערו מתי המבול*; there the victims of the flood had collected (*Bereishit Rabba* 37:4). Man persisted in its construction, despite the obvious disadvantages, on account of his confidence in its construction with *ראשו בשמים*; its head in the clouds, which, according to our Sages, implied man’s determination to “beat the odds” by outsmarting God.

אמרו אחת לאלף ושש מאות חמשים ושש שנים הרקיע מתמוטט כשם שעשה בימי המבול, בואו ונעשה לו סמוכות:

They said: The sky falls in once every 1656 years, as evidenced by the flood. Let us build something to prop it up (*Rashi, ad. loc.*).

Man’s hubris, his awful arrogance in the face of God’s intent, led to the confounding of his plans and the cessation of the construction: *ויחדלו לבנות העיר* (v. 8). But man is nothing if not persistent and in London, Amsterdam and New Orleans, he has thrown caution to the winds and challenged God by constructing cities against the dictates of “nature.” If he is prudent, he invests wisely in building and maintaining the proper

infrastructure and escapes “nature’s” direst consequences. From time to time, that prudence is supplemented by serendipity and a timely finger in the dike prevents catastrophe. If he acts imprudently and impudently, however, squandering precious time and resources on other, and more selfish projects, then he is—proverbially and poignantly—hoist with his own petard.

Rain, as the Talmud carefully considers, is a blessing at *all* times and prayers for rain remain unaffected by the consequences that may ensue. God, in His cosmic beneficence, let it rain. Man, in his individual and institutional arrogance, built a city on a site that was singularly susceptible to flooding and then allowed the levees to deteriorate.