

Feeling Safe

Jewish Values in Liturgy—March 2020

Virtually each morning (*with the exception of special days like Shabbat and Yom Tov when Tachanun is omitted*), following the repetition of the Silent Devotion, the congregation recites the prayer known as “Nefilat Apayim” (lit. falling down on the face.) It derives its name from a portion of its being prayed with the pray-er in a bent-over position, resting upon his forearm. Once the individual straightens up, the conclusion of the prayer includes the following three statements, each beginning with the word, “Shomeir”:

- 1) O Guardian of Israel! Protect the remnant of Israel. Let not Israel be destroyed. Those who proclaim: Hear O Israel! (Devarim 6:4.)¹
- 2) O Guardian of the unique nation! Protect the remnant of the unique people. Let not the unique nation be destroyed. Those who proclaim the Oneness of Your Name: HaShem Is our God, HaShem—the One and Only! (Ibid.)²
- 3) O Guardian of the holy nation! Protect the remnant of the holy people! Let not the holy nation be destroyed. Those who proclaim three-fold sanctifications to the Holy One. (Yeshayahu 6:3.)³⁴

The central portion of the weekday Amida,⁵ known as the “Bakasha” (*supplication*), demonstrates how dependent on the Divine each of us is by our addressing to Him our most basic needs. The thirteen blessings of this section of the prayer are in the form of requests, e.g., for intelligence,⁶ repentance,⁷ health,⁸ prosperity,⁹ and the ingathering of exiles.¹⁰ The juxtaposition of the Tachanun prayer close on the heels to the completion of the Amida, implies that we have been made to feel so dependent upon

¹ “Hear, O Israel: the LORD our God...” a citation from the Shema prayer recited during Shacharit, Ma’ariv, and the prayer before retiring for the night.

² “... the LORD Is One.” See fn. 1.

³ “Holy, Holy, Holy Is HaShem...” repeated a) in the first blessing before the Shema in Shacharit; b) the Kedusha section of the repetition of the Amida; c) the “U’Va LeTziyon” prayer at the end of Shacharit; d) the Kedusha section of the repetition of the Amida for Mincha, and e) the blessing after Shema in Ma’ariv.

⁴ The Complete ArtScroll Siddur, p. 137.

⁵ Lit. “the standing,” referring to the body-language of the supplicator.

⁶ You graciously Endow man with wisdom and Teach insight to a frail mortal. Endow us graciously from Yourself with wisdom, insight and discernment. Blessed Are You, HaShem, gracious Giver of wisdom.

⁷ Forgive us, Father, for we have erred; Pardon us, our King, for we have willfully sinned, for You Pardon and Forgive. Blessed Are You, HaShem, the gracious One Who Pardons abundantly.

⁸ Heal us, HaShem—then we will be healed; Save us—then we will be saved, for You Are our praise. Bring complete recovery for all our ailments, for You Are God, King, the faithful and compassionate Healer. Blessed Are You, HaShem, Who Heals the sick of His People, Israel.

⁹ Bless on our behalf--O HaShem, our God—this year and all its kinds of crops for the best, and Give dew and rain for a blessing on the face of the earth, and Satisfy us from Your Bounty, and Bless our year like the best years. Blessed Are You, HaShem, Who Blesses the years.

¹⁰ Sound the great Shofar for our freedom; Raise the banner and Gather our exiles and Gather us together from the four corners of the earth. Blessed Are You, HaShem, Who Gathers in the dispersed of His People, Israel.

--The Complete ArtScroll Siddur, pp. 103-7.

God by having to direct our requests to Him, that we now plead with Him to Protect us from those who seek to destroy the Jewish people.¹¹ What good would God's Blessings be if we were made to cease requesting them, and didn't survive to see their possible fulfillment?

Furthermore, in each of these three passages from the Tachanun prayer, a justification for the survival of the Jews is given based upon their regular invocation of God's Name, His One-ness, and His Holiness. It is reminiscent of the final passage of the Amida, where we articulate that Granting our requests will not only serve as a benefit to ourselves, but also for God Himself!

...Act for Your Name's Sake; Act for Your Right Hand's Sake; Act for Your Sanctity's Sake;
Act for Your Tora's Sake...

--The ArtScroll Complete Siddur, p. 119.

In other words, were we to be obliterated, who would continue to proclaim God's Existence and His Holiness to the world? In the words of the Psalmist (*included in the beginning of the morning prayers' "Pesukei D'Zimra"*): (Tehillim 30:10) "What profit is there in my blood, when I go down to the pit? Shall the dust praise Thee? Shall it declare Thy Truth?"

But at the same time as the proclamations of the Jewish people serve as a justification for their being Protected by God, it begs the question regarding all those Jews who do not pray or, for that matter, even believe in their special role within the Creation. Does the Promise of Divine Shielding extend only to those who recite Shema and Kedusha regularly?

I have always felt that rather than having a single "Shliach Tzibbur" (*lit. "surrogate for the congregation"; fig. the leader of communal services*), each of those who attend services are the "Shluchai Tzibbur" for those who either cannot, or even choose not to. The Rabbinic principle "Kol Yisrael Areivim Zeh BaZeh" (*all of Israel are guarantors for one another*) serves not only to justify reciting blessings for those who haven't as yet recited a blessing even though one had already completed the Commandment—see Shulchan Aruch, Orech Chayim 8, Mishneh Berurah #14—but also for those who for one reason or another don't come to the service altogether. We are being taught to request God's Protection for the entire Jewish people, including those completely unknown to us--and perhaps even unknown to themselves!-- with respect to requesting HaShem's Protection for all. What better way to engender a radical interpretation of: (VaYikra 19:18) "...And you shall love your neighbor as yourself..."

¹¹ Addressing such a request to God on a daily basis might appear to be alarmist in nature, but a passage that we annually recite as part of the Haggada at the Pesach Seder observes that in fact, this has unfortunately been a regular feature of Jewish history down through the ages:

... It is this (*the Divine Promise in Beraishit 15:13-6*) that has stood by our ancestors and us. It is not only one that has risen up against us to destroy us. Rather, in every generation, they rise against us to annihilate us. However, the Holy One, Blessed Be He, Saves us from their hand...