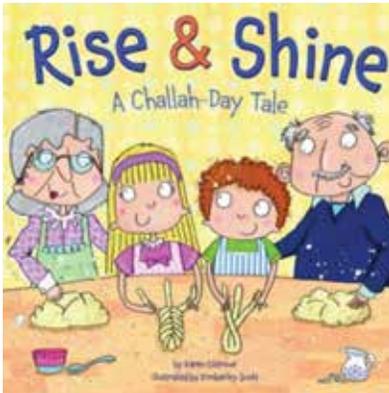


Global Day of Jewish Learning

Curriculum: Creating Together



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A Project of the Aleph Society



Written by: Yaffa Epstein

Opening and Introductions (10 minutes)

Today we are part of the Global Day of Jewish Learning and this year's theme is Creating Together. Our particular session will be focused on a piece of Talmud that deals with how the Amidah—also known as the silent meditation and perhaps the most important prayer the Rabbis created—came into being. The Amidah has always been a project of collaboration. Today we are going to follow its development.

The Amidah prayer is the backbone of every single Jewish prayer service, whether on weekdays, Shabbat, or holidays. On weekdays it contains 19 blessings, although originally it contained only eighteen blessings, and was thus given the name “*Shemonah Esreh*” which means eighteen. The word Amidah means to stand—because it is recited standing up, unlike the *Shma* prayer which is recited sitting/reclining.

It is a matter of great debate how and when it began.

Today's lesson will look at three options:

1. The Forefathers
2. The Men of the Great Assembly
3. The Rabbis after the Destruction of the Second Temple

Each option here stresses different elements and aspects of what and why we pray.

➤ Ask:

1. Think about something that you created with other people. What was that process like?
2. What is meaningful and special about working together? What is difficult about working together?
3. Can a work of art or a work of great religious meaning be created in a group? Doesn't an artist need to work alone in conceiving his/her vision?

Text #1: U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor Quote (5 minutes)

➤ Ask one of the participants to read Text #1 aloud.

We don't accomplish anything in this world alone and whatever happens is the result of the whole tapestry of one's life and all the weavings of individual threads form one to another that creates something.

➤ Ask:

1. According to Justice O'Connor, what is essential for the creative process? Do you agree/disagree and why?
2. What does “alone” mean? Can someone accomplish something “alone”?

All people create things in a context of both their experiences and their relationships. There is a tension here. On the one hand, the individual voice is necessary and important—“the individual threads.” On the other hand, the individual voice is not enough, we need to recognize the significance of our personal relationships.

Part 1: The Development of Prayer (25 minutes)

In this section, we will look at a selection of Jewish sources from the Talmud that explore the authorship of the Amidah.

Facilitator's Note: Explain the concept of Chavrutah

- Partnered learning
- Turn to the person or two people next to you
- Usually one person reads the text out loud and the other listens and then switch. Then they should discuss the questions on their sourcesheets for further reflections.
- Why?
 - Allows you to come to an understanding of the text on your own first
 - Allows you to hear the multiplicity of perspectives that exist in the text
 - Throughout the chavrutah study, there are guided questions for the pairs to consider within their source sheets. You may choose to use some of those questions to direct your conversation throughout.

Text #2: Babylonian Talmud Berakhot 26b

אִיתְמַר, רַבִּי יוֹסֵי בְרַבִּי חֲנִינָא אָמַר: תְּפִלוֹת
אֲבוֹת תִּקְנָנוּ; רַבִּי יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בֶּן לֵוִי אָמַר:
תְּפִלוֹת כְּנֶגֶד תְּמִידֵין תִּקְנָנוּ.

The dispute between the Rabbis and Rabbi Yehuda with regard to the times beyond which the different prayers may not be recited is rooted in a profound disagreement, also manifest in a later amoraic dispute. **It was stated: Rabbi Yosei, son of Rabbi Hanina, said:** The practice of praying three times daily is ancient, albeit not in its present form; **prayers were instituted by the Patriarchs.** However, **Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said that the prayers were instituted based on the daily offerings^{HB}** sacrificed in the Holy Temple, and the prayers parallel the offerings, in terms of both time and characteristics.

This source represents a fundamental debate about the essence of prayer.

➤ Ask:

1. According to this source—who created the daily prayers?
2. Rabbi Yose claimed that the Patriarchs created prayer. What does this teach me about prayer?

By stating that the three daily prayer services correspond to the Forefathers (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob), the Rabbis are attempting to teach us that prayer is as old as Judaism itself and serves as a personal expression. Prayer is modeled after three forefathers and not a single individual.

R. Yehoshua Ben Levi takes this idea in a different direction. He believes that the prayer service corresponds to the daily sacrifices offered in the Temple. He is trying to teach us that prayer is communal in nature (the sacrifices were offered on behalf of the entire community).

Some background information:

- There are three daily prayers every day—*Shacharit* (morning), *Mincha* (afternoon), and *Maariv* (evening).
- The word *Tamid* means constant as this sacrifice was offered every single day.

Text #3: Babylonian Talmud Berakhot 33a

אָמַר לִיהוּ רַב שְׁמֵן בַּר אֲבָא לְרַבִּי יוֹחָנָן: מִכְּדֵי
אֲנִישֵׁי כְּנֶסֶת הַגְּדוּלָּה תִּקְנוּ לָהֶם לְיִשְׂרָאֵל, בְּרִכּוֹת
וְתַפְלוֹת קְדוּשׁוֹת וְהַבְּדִלוֹת, נִחְזִי הֵיכָן תִּקְנוּ.

Regarding this, Rav Shemen, Shimon, bar Abba said to Rabbi Yohanan: Now, since the eighteen blessings of the *Amida* prayer and the other prayer formulas for prayer were instituted for Israel by the members of the Great Assembly just like all the other blessings and prayers, sanctifications and *havdalot*; let us see where in the *Amida* prayer the members of the Great Assembly institutedⁿ to recite *havdala*.

Some background information:

Wikipedia—Great Assembly

The Great Assembly (כְּנֶסֶת הַגְּדוּלָּה) or **Anshei Knesset HaGedolah** (אֲנִישֵׁי כְּנֶסֶת הַגְּדוּלָּה), “The Men of the Great Assembly”), also known as the **Great Synagogue**, was, according to Jewish tradition, an assembly of 120 scribes, sages, and prophets, in the period from the end of the Biblical prophets to the early Hellenistic period (approximately 500-200 BCE).

Among the developments in Judaism that are attributed to them are the fixing of the Jewish Biblical canon, including the books of Ezekiel, Daniel, Esther, and the Twelve Minor Prophets; the introduction of the triple classification of the oral law, dividing the study of the Mishnah (in the larger sense) into the three branches of midrash, halakot, and aggadot; the introduction of the Feast of Purim; and the institution of the prayer known as the “Shemoneh ‘Esreh” as well as the synagogal prayers, rituals, and benedictions.

According to this source, prayer was the product of an eclectic group of people; the Men of the Great Assembly were scribes, sages, and prophets. In addition, the daily prayer was established as law by the judicial body of the time.

➤ Ask:

1. According to this source—who created the prayers?
2. Do you think this source supports or contradicts the debate we saw earlier about the forefathers vs. the sacrifices?

Text #4: Babylonian Talmud Berakhot 28b

תָּנוּ רַבָּנַן: שָׁמְעוֹן הַפְּקוּלִי הִסְדִּיר
שְׁמוֹנָה עָשָׂר בְּרָכוֹת לְפָנֵי רַבִּין
גַּמְלִיאֵל עַל הַסֵּדֵר בִּיבְנָה. אָמַר לָהֶם
רַבִּין גַּמְלִיאֵל לְחַכְמֵי: בְּלוּם יֵשׁ אָדָם
שִׂידַע לְתַקֵּן בְּרַבַּת הַמֵּינִים? עַמְד
שְׁמוּאֵל הַקָּטָן וְתַקְּנָהּ,

In light of the previous mention of the blessing of the heretics, the Gemara explains how this blessing was instituted: **The Sages taught: Shimon HaPakuli¹ arranged the eighteen blessings**, already extant during the period of the Great Assembly, **before Rabban Gamliel**, the *Nasi* of the Sanhedrin, **in order^N in Yavne**. Due to prevailing circumstances, there was a need to institute a new blessing directed against the heretics. **Rabban Gamliel said to the Sages: Is there any person who knows to institute the blessing of the heretics**, a blessing directed against the Sadducees? **Shmuel HaKatan**, who was one of the most pious men of that generation, **stood and instituted it**.

Facilitator's Note:

This conversation is understood to have taken place soon after the destruction of the Second Temple (70 C.E.). As such, it is very probable that this is actually the creation of the Amidah. Once the Temple was destroyed, we were no longer able to bring daily sacrifices. The Rabbis see prayer as a replacement for the daily sacrifices.

Shimon Hafakuli is not well known in the Talmud. In fact, he is only found in two places, in both places as the creator of the Amidah.

➤ Ask:

1. According to this source—who establishes the eighteen blessings (i.e. the Amidah)?
2. What does it mean to “arrange” the eighteen blessings?
3. How does this source contradict what we have already seen?
4. What is the significance of a relatively unknown person, possibly a flax merchant, being credited with the creation of the Amidah?

Perhaps the Rabbis wanted this prayer to come from one of the people, more grassroots, and less top down. However, the prayer is still stated in front of the entire court of Rabban Gamliel, i.e. there is still legislative and judicial approval of the individual's presentation.

Shmuel Hakatan's role is also a significant one. There was a request for something that the entire Sanhedrin was missing, and an individual was necessary to create this specific prayer.

Some background information:

The prayer about the Apostates is a blessing that requests that our enemies be destroyed. In the context of the Destruction of the Second Temple, it is understandable why we would need a blessing like this. It also emphasizes how prayer is, and should be, a reaction to actual events going on around us.

Text #5: Babylonian Talmud Megillah 18a

But, since the one hundred and twenty elders (i.e. the Men of the Great Assembly) and within them some of the Prophets, formalized the order of prayer. What did Shimon the Fakuli arrange? They forgot them, and he went back and arranged them.

תלמוד בבלי מסכת מגילה יח.
וכי מאחר דמאה ועשרים זקנים, ומהם כמה
נביאים, תקנו תפלה על הסדר, שמעון הפקולי
מאי הסדיר? שכחום וחזר וסדרום.

➤ Ask:

1. How does this source resolve the conflict we have seen about who created the Amidah?
2. Why does this source stress the Prophets creating the Amidah? What does this teach us about how the Rabbis see the creation of the Amidah?
3. What does it mean that a prayer can be forgotten? What does this teach you about the Rabbis' perspective on Prayer?

This source contradicts both Text #3 and Text #4.

This is not uncommon in Rabbinic Literature—and represents the fact that the Rabbis have inherited different versions and traditions. A large element in the Rabbinic project is the reconciliation of differing traditions. There are several interesting points that are brought up in this source. We point out that prophets were involved in the creation of the Amidah. This is interesting because it involves a claim that God was involved in the creation of the Amidah. In other words, perhaps the Rabbis here are attempting to claim that God has informed us how to pray and exactly what to say.

There is a difference between creating and arranging the Amidah. According to this version, Shimon Hafakuli was not necessarily the original creator of the Amidah, but he was involved in its arrangement. We also are introduced to the idea that traditions and prayers can be forgotten.

To recap, there are several Rabbinic perspectives on who created the Amidah prayer. The way we describe who created the Amidah prayer directly reflects how we understand the purpose of Prayer.

Part Two: Prayer and Community (10 minutes)

Text #6: Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz: *A Guide to Jewish Prayer*

➤ Ask one of the participants to read aloud.

Moreover, private prayer by its very nature is based upon the “I”. True, this “I” is confronting the divine “Thou,” yet even so it still retains a considerable amount of egotism. “I need something,” “I want,” “I request,” and sometimes even “I thank,” are all different expressions of the “I” as the center of all else. Communal prayer blurs this egotistic attitude by making the communal collectivity the subject offering up prayer, in which the individual is merely one component.

Moreover, the very fact that communal prayer includes such a large variety of requests and supplications, which by their nature do not express the immediate needs of the worshipper himself, in itself makes him more conscious of the problems of others. One who is not ill is reminded of others suffering from illness, while one who is unconcerned with rain becomes conscious of those for whom rainfall is a vital necessity. This very sharing of concerns with others adds another dimension to prayer—the link with and relationship to other people.

The fixed prayer text admittedly restricts self-expression. But for most people the problem lies not in the limitations imposed by the prayer text but, on the contrary, in the difficulty of finding a channel for expressing their innermost thoughts. A person surely does not need flowery phrases or a grand style to address God; “God wants the heart” rather than polished rhetoric. The main issue, therefore, is not the formulation of words, but the definition and clarification of concepts. What prevents man from expressing himself properly in prayer is not the lack of beautiful words and well-turned phrases but the lack of words altogether. The fixed prayer text thus serves as a means of expressing thoughts that man cannot think clearly for himself or of feelings that are so blurred and confused that they do not even assume to form of thought.

➤ Ask:

1. What does Rabbi Steinsaltz think about the importance of community in prayer?
2. How does the way prayer is structured and phrased affect the person praying?
3. What is the ultimate purpose of communal prayer according to Rabbi Steinsaltz?

Text #7: Moshav Band Lyrics for “Wake Up” (5 minutes)

➤ Ask someone to read aloud.

Wake up your own soul
And wake up your friend's
Shoo off the devil
And stay out of harm's way

There's a pain that's been aching and it keeps getting stronger
There's a hungry young child with a tear in his eye

When it all gets revealed, there may be nothing left here
You see most of my heroes, they've faded away.
It's clear from their last note that tells us goodbye
And I'm sure there's a way to undo the thread of sorrow
And cut the lines that let us this far.

Wake up your own soul
And wake up your friend's
Shoo off the devil
And stay out of harm's way

There's a secret that's written all over your soul
If you wanna detect it, that shouldn't be hard
There's a mystical song and it hums in your mind
And a flag to declare that you stand on your feet.

Creating the Amidah: How our Defining Prayer Came into Being

► Ask:

1. What is the message in this song?
2. Do you agree with the idea that we have the power to awaken other people's spiritual lives? What does it mean to help create a spiritual community?
3. In what ways do you see a connection between the song and Rabbi Steinsaltz's ideas that prayer allows us to connect to community?

Conclusion (5 minutes)

The Amidah has always been a project of collaboration. Prayer becomes both a collaborative project and a builder of community, as it allows us to have a shared voice, and project. Not only was the creation of prayer a collaborative process but the way that we often choose to pray, communally, is also recognizing the importance of collaboration within prayer itself. Communal prayer is a mechanism to move beyond thinking only of ourselves and to include the needs of our entire community.

Facilitator's Note:

You may want to end this unit by inviting the participants to compose their own prayer, either together or individually. Create several groups of 3–4 people. Leave some people to work on their own. Ask them to share their prayers with the entire group. What differences do you see between a prayer written by an individual and a prayer written collaboratively?

Creating the Amidah: How our Defining Prayer Came into Being

Text #1: Sandra Day O'Connor, Supreme Court Justice

“We don’t accomplish anything in this world alone and whatever happens is the result of the whole tapestry of one’s life and all the weavings of individual threads form one to another that creates something.”

Text #2: Babylonian Talmud Tractate Berakhot 26b

איתמר, רבי יוסי ברבי חנינא אמר: תפלות אבות תקנום; רבי יהושע בן לוי אמר: תפלות כנגד תמידין תקנום.

The dispute between the Rabbis and Rabbi Yehuda with regard to the times beyond which the different prayers may not be recited is rooted in a pro-found disagreement, also manifest in a later amoraic dispute. **It was stated: Rabbi Yosei, son of Rabbi Hanina, said:** The practice of praying three times daily is ancient, albeit not in its present form; **prayers were instituted by the Patriarchs.** However, **Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said that the prayers were instituted based on the daily offerings^{HB}** sacrificed in the Holy Temple, and the prayers parallel the offerings, in terms of both time and characteristics.

► Questions to consider:

1. According to this source—who created the daily prayers?
2. Why would I want to claim that the Patriarchs created prayer? What does this teach me about prayer?

Text #3: Babylonian Talmud Tractate Berakhot 33a

אמר ליה רב שמן בר אבא לרבי יוחנן: מכדי אנשי כנסת הגדולה תקנו להם לישאל, ברכות ותפלות קדושות והבדלות, נחזי היכן תקון.

Regarding this, Rav Shemen, Shimon, bar Abba said to Rabbi Yoḥanan: **Now, since the eighteen blessings of the Amida prayer and the other prayer formulas for prayer were instituted for Israel by the members of the Great Assembly just like all the other blessings and prayers, sanctifications and havdalot; let us see where in the Amida prayer the members of the Great Assembly instituted^N to recite havdala.**

► Questions to consider:

1. According to this source—who created the prayers?
2. Do you think this source supports or contradicts the debate we saw earlier about the forefathers vs. the sacrifices?

Text #4: Babylonian Talmud Tractate Berakhot 28b

תנו רבנן: שמעון הפקולי הסדיר
 שמונה עשרה ברכות לפני רבן
 גמליאל על הסדר ביבנה. אמר להם
 רבן גמליאל לחכמים: בלום יש אדם
 שיודע לתקן ברכת המינים? עמד
 שמואל הקטן ותקנה.

In light of the previous mention of the blessing of the heretics, the Gemara explains how this blessing was instituted: **The Sages taught: Shimon HaPakuli¹ arranged the eighteen blessings**, already extant during the period of the Great Assembly, **before Rabban Gamliel**, the *Nasi* of the Sanhedrin, **in order^N in Yavne**. Due to prevailing circumstances, there was a need to institute a new blessing directed against the heretics. **Rabban Gamliel said to the Sages: Is there any person who knows to institute the blessing of the heretics, a blessing directed against the Sadducees? Shmuel HaKatan**, who was one of the most pious men of that generation, **stood and instituted it**.

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Creating the Amidah: How our Defining Prayer Came into Being

Text #6: Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz—A Guide to Jewish Prayer—Pages 22–23

Moreover, private prayer by its very nature is based upon the “I”. True, this “I” is confronting the divine “Thou,” yet even so it still retains a considerable amount of egotism. “I need something,” “I want,” “I request,” and sometimes even “I thank,” are all different expressions of the “I” as the center of all else. Communal prayer blurs this egotistic attitude by making the communal collectivity the subject offering up prayer, in which the individual is merely one component.

Moreover, the very fact that communal prayer includes such a large variety of requests and supplications, which by their nature do not express the immediate needs of the worshipper himself, in itself makes him more conscious of the problems of others. One who is not ill is reminded of others suffering from illness, while one who is unconcerned with rain becomes conscious of those for whom rainfall is a vital necessity. This very sharing of concerns with others adds another dimension to prayer—the link with and relationship to other people.

The fixed prayer text admittedly restricts self-expression. But for most people the problem lies not in the limitations imposed by the prayer text but, on the contrary, in the difficulty of finding a channel for expressing their innermost thoughts. A person surely does not need flowery phrases or a grand style to address God; “God wants the heart” rather than polished rhetoric. The main issue, therefore, is not the formulation of words, but the definition and clarification of concepts. What prevents man from expressing himself properly in prayer is not the lack of beautiful words and well-turned phrases but the lack of words altogether. The fixed prayer text thus serves as a means of expressing thoughts that man cannot think clearly for himself or of feelings that are so blurred and confused that they do not even assume to form of thought.

Text #7: Moshav Band—Wake Up

Wake up your own soul
And wake up your friend's
Shoo off the devil
And stay out of harm's way

There's a pain that's been aching and it keeps getting stronger
There's a hungry young child with a tear in his eye

When it all gets revealed, there may be nothing left here
You see most of my heroes, they've faded away.
It's clear from their last note that tells us goodbye
And I'm sure there's a way to undo the thread of sorrow
And cut the lines that let us this far.

Wake up your own soul
And wake up your friend's
Shoo off the devil
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There's a secret that's written all over your soul
If you wanna detect it, that shouldn't be hard
There's a mystical song and it hums in your mind
And a flag to declare that you stand on your feet.



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