

DEVELOPING A LITURGY FOR THE JEWISH COMMUNAL PROFESSION

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Although many of us became Jewish communal professionals because of our commitment to the Jewish tradition and values, there is no specific liturgy or ritual related to Jewish communal service. This article explores the religious roots of Jewish communal service and presents a prayer that both defines the special role of the professional and acknowledges the contributions of the field to the Jewish people. It is a part of a new initiative devoted to developing rituals and prayers dedicated to the field of Jewish communal service.

In much of contemporary Jewish life, there exists a physical and psychological disconnect between the religious realm and the communal sector of our Jewish experience. Yet, for many of us, our Jewish communal practice is directly tied to our passion and commitment to the inherent values of our tradition.

Too often, colleagues, collectively or individually, are not acknowledged for their dedication and service. This is despite the fact that the tradition of Jewish social service derives from biblical concepts and that persons who carried out communal functions were accorded special recognition dating from Mishnaic times. In addition, the Amidah, the core prayer of our worship service, includes blessings related to different categories of religious and communal leadership.

Because the formalization of Jewish communal service is a fairly recent phenomenon in the course of Jewish history and perhaps because of the disconnect between the religious and communal spheres, a specific prayer or ritual related to Jewish communal prayer has not yet been developed. Yet, the creation of a liturgy specifically dedicated to the field of Jewish communal service can make an important statement to our colleagues and our lay partners that embraces the continuity of our professional and the holiness of our work.

As part of a new initiative to create that liturgy, I created a prayer, with the support-

ive input on several of my colleagues at HUC-JIR, including rabbis and others, that is presented at the end of this article. During the coming years, I am committed to crafting a ceremony focusing on the communal professional field in Jewish life.

In Jewish tradition, we mark both our history and special moments by celebrations and acts of remembrance, allowing us both to reconnect to past events and to honor individuals and groups. Just as other forms of ritual have been created throughout Jewish history, it is my intent to create a new ceremony relating to Jewish communal service to be used in communal institutions and in synagogues.

ACTS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

The tradition of Jewish social service is derived from the Biblical concept of "engaging in acts of righteousness." Deuteronomy 15: 7-11 provides the basis for understanding the idea of *tzedakah* and the responsibility we have to share God's bounty through acts of lovingkindness (*hesed*) in abiding by the *mitzvot*:

If however there is a needy person among you, one of your kinsmen in any of your settlements in the land that the Lord your God is giving you, do not harden your heart and shut your hand against your needy kinsman. Rather, you must open your hand and lend him sufficient for whatever he needs....For there will never

cease to be needy ones in your land, which is why I command you: open your hand to the poor and needy kinsman in your land.

The Jewish people are instructed (Deuteronomy 15:4–5) to share God's bounty with the poor, the stranger, the orphan, the widow, his laborers, and the Levite (the public servant of the community). At the end of each three year period, the poor, the orphan, the widow, and the stranger are entitled to the annual tithes in accordance with their needs (Deuteronomy 14:28, 29). Similar instructions are directed (Deuteronomy 24: 19–21/ Leviticus 19:9/Exodus 23:11) to the owners of the fields, who are enjoined to leave to the poor, the orphan, the widow, and the stranger the corner of the fields they harvest (Peah), the gleanings of the harvest (Leket), the forgotten sheaf (Shikhah), and the growth of the seventh year (Shemitah).

The passages below extracted from the *Book of Proverbs* elaborate further on the ideals of justice and lovingness, as introduced in *Deuteronomy*:

- "Treasures of wickedness profit nothing; but righteousness delivereth from death" (10:2).
- "Righteousness exalts a nation; but sin is a reproach to any people" (14:34).
- "Whoso closes his ears at the cry of the poor, he shall cry himself, but shall not be answered" (21:13).
- "He that followed after righteousness and mercy finds life, prosperity, and honor" (21:21).

We are reminded as well that all of our human possessions belong to God, and as a result we have an obligation to share these resources with our community: "The earth is the Lord's and fullness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein" (Psalms 24:1).

Ephraim Frisch, (Frisch, E. 1924) in his *Historical Survey of Jewish Philanthropy*, offers the following comments about biblical teachings on the notion of charity in Judaism:

On the whole, it may be said, that in the attempt to induce men to be charitable, the writings of the Prophets appealed to the highest ethical motives, the Book of Deuteronomy gave philanthropy the deepest emotional touch, the Psalms invoked aid to the distressed on the most fervent religious grounds and the Wisdom literature met the demand of the most practical utilitarianism....The biblical period did not develop a comprehensive system of philanthropy, in our modern meaning of the word, but it had in it the germ of such a system. It exercised a profound, determining influence on all future benevolent thought and endeavor.

To the biblical concept of *tzedakah*, the rabbis added their own interpretations, emphasizing the spirit of giving and receiving. The rabbis joined together the concept of *hesed* (lovingkindness) with the value of *tzedakah* to develop the notion of *gemilut ha-sadim* ("the payment of acts of loving-kindness").

If these early periods of Jewish history laid the religious and ideological construct for charitable practices, then the medieval era provided the social service framework designed to meet both particular crisis and ongoing human needs. The division of responsibilities resulted in the creation of a series of communal services. Among the separate societies one could find in European Jewish communities were these ten types of communal activities:

1. Malbish Arumim: Society to clothe the naked
2. Talmud Torah: Educational services for poor children
3. Ha-Knasat Kallah: A fund to assist poor maidens with a dowry
4. Maot Hittim: Passover assistance for poor Jewish families
5. Bet Yetomim: Care for orphans
6. Bikkur Holim: Society for visiting the sick
7. Moshav Zekenim: Services for the elderly
8. Hesed Shel Emet: Jewish burial society

9. Pidyon Shebuyim: Committee for the ransom of captives and refugees
10. Kubbah Shel Zedakah: Charity fund

The key communal functions of collecting funds (*Kuppah*) and food distribution (*Tamhui*) date to Mishnaic times. Jewish communities, beginning in Palestine, had developed a system of regulations to supervise these and other special functions. Individuals who carried out these special tasks were selected from the community and were recognized as the most honored persons. Those who collected and distributed funds, known as the "providers" (*Parnasim*), normally worked in teams of two or three and were required to account for all funds raised and distributed, as a way of demonstrating and modeling financial accountability (Chipkin, 1960).

THE IDEA OF PRAYER

The idea of liturgy in Judaism is taken from the Hebrew term "*avodah*" (service), literally the service of the Temple and more directly, the service of the priests and Levites. The concept of "*berakha*" (benediction or blessing) is taken from II Chronicles 20:26. It was initially translated as "to bend one's knee," but over time this term has come to mean "to praise and extol God." This concept of prayer as offering praise and thanksgiving has been joined with a second idea, that of "*tefillah*," which introduces the idea of petitionary prayer: "to turn to God as to a judge" (Elbogen, 1993).

The Significance of Klei Kodesh

The Book of Numbers references the term, *Klei Kodesh* (Numbers 4:15/18:3), relating it to the sacred objects of the Temple service. In more modern times, this phrase is used to identify Jewish religious objects such as a tallit, shofar, or siddur. It has also been applied to "individuals who exercise religious functions in the Jewish community" (Birnbaum, 1964). Over the years, a wide representation of leaders, who fulfill both

religious and communal tasks, have been referred to as *Klei Kodesh*, sacred vessels.

The Role of the Levites

The Levites were singled out during the wanderings in the wilderness for the service of the tabernacle—carrying the Ark, attending to the duties of the sanctuary, and assisting the priests. Their name is taken from the root "Laveh" meaning "to escort or to accompany" (*Encyclopedia Judaica*, 1972).

The census of the Levites was apparently conducted separately from the general population (Numbers 1:47–49). Described as the "ministers of God" the Levites during the period of the Judges were classified as "wanderers" without any permanent possessions. Their landless yet superior status was justified in the Book of Numbers where it explains: "the Lord is their portion" (Numbers 10:9/18:2). There is evidence that during the period of David and Solomon, the Levites were identified as servants of the state (I Chronicles, 23–27). They are described as "overseers in the work of the House of the Lord" (I Chronicles 9:14–33) serving as "officials, judges, craftsmen of the Temple service, supervisors of the chambers and the courts, overseers of the Temple treasuries, and officers in charge of the royal service" (I Chronicles 9:22, 26–27; 23:4, 28).

Placing Prayer in the Context of Jewish Peoplehood

Prayer also reflects the story of the Jewish people in history and the ongoing sense of collective responsibility for the welfare of the community. As a result of this intense group consciousness, most Jewish prayers are recited in the first person plural, reflecting the collective character and shared historical experiences of our community. This notion is based on the talmudic injunction, "All members of Israel are responsible for each other" and "all members of Israel are companions" (b.Sanhedrin 27b, Shevuoth 39a). Often, *tefillah* is organized around two competing themes, involving expressions

both of personal needs and the collective interests of the community. "The prayer book is the mirror of the spirit of the Jewish people and its development; it reflects the spiritual, economic, political, and social history of Israel from the most ancient times to the present" (Idelsohn, 1932, p. xii).

According to Elbogen and other liturgists, prayer in Jewish tradition has been subject to continual expansion, innovation, changes in taste, and outside influences. In the evolution of Jewish liturgy, beginning around the fifth century, there developed a body of literature comprised of "free poetic compositions based on religious teachings," which "brought into the liturgy a dynamic element that lent it variety" (Elbogen, 1993, p. 7). These prayers were seen as optional, and varied by country, historic period, and religious outlook.

As Jews moved through countries and continents, prayers were translated or adopted to the vernacular of the local culture. While Hebrew remained "the language of the Jewish soul," Jews often introduced prayers distinctive to the particular community or setting, especially in private worship.

The core component of Jewish prayer, the Amidah, comprises during the weekday services a series of nineteen distinctive sections or benedictions, involving spiritual, material, and social blessings. These prayers are related to particular ideas; among the variety of themes introduced in the Amidah. There is a specific reference to the notion of "rewarding the just." Within this context, Jewish tradition references particular characteristics of righteousness, as represented by three categories of persons, the righteous (*sadiqim*), the pious (*Hasidim*), and the proselytes (*gere ha-sedeq*)—literally, "the strangers who have become righteous." Therefore specific references to the righteous within the community: "Show compassion to the righteous...to the leaders of Your people." Some theologians refer to these blessings as a statement of "the victory of goodness."

The purpose of this prayer, (section 18) according to DiSante (1985, p. 101), is to "...ask God for a world in which there will be

only righteous persons, persons whose love and behavior reflect that of God himself."

Other sections of the Amidah can also be interpreted, as communal in nature according to A.Z. Idelsohn (1932) in his classic, *Jewish Liturgy and its Development*, where he offers the suggestion that there exist a series of prayers that contain national-religious aspirations. These prayers relate to the gathering of the exiles, the rebuilding of Jerusalem, and the restoration of judges and are seen as linked together with the "blessing of the righteous" described above.

The liturgy also contains several references to communal practices:

- "May those who aid the poor, care for the sick, and extend a helping hand to all who have lost their way, know that they are doing Your Will" (*Wilshire Boulevard Temple Shabbat Worship*, p. 136).
- "May He reward with the joy of goodness the charitable and the merciful—succor the poor, care for the sick, teach the ignorant, and stretch forth their helping hand to those who have lost their way in the world" (*Union Prayer Book for Jewish Worship*, pp. 98–99).
- In the traditional Siddur, we find references to those who engage in *tsarχει tsibbur* (providing for "the needs of the community"), the following: "...those who give lamps for light and wine for Kiddush and Havdalah, bread to wayfarers and charity to the poor and all those who occupy themselves in faithfulness with the wants of the congregation (community). May the Holy One, blessed be He, give them their reward; may he remove from them all sickness: may he heal their body, forgive all their iniquity, and send blessing and prosperity upon all the work of their hands, and upon all Israel their brethren; and let us say, Amen."

Origins and Uses of Special Prayers

Throughout Jewish history, special prayers were continually being created, with only a

few ever being formally added to the liturgy. For example, such prayers as "The Physician's Prayer," attributed to Moses Maimonides (1135–1204), represent a lofty, yet beautiful expression defining the sacred tasks assigned to those who practice medicine. Excerpts of this prayer appear here:

Inspire me with love for my art and for Thy creatures. Do not allow thirst for profit, ambition for renown and admiration, to interfere with my profession...Illumine my mind that it recognize what presents itself and that it may comprehend what is absent and hidden...Grant that my patients have confidence in me and my art and follow my directions and my counsel. Remove from their midst all charlatans...cruel people who arrogantly frustrate the wisest purposes of our art...Should those who are wiser than I wish to improve and instruct me, let my soul gratefully follow their guidance (Burns, 1977, pp. 169–170).

Reform Judaism made a conscious effort to introduce several key and innovative ideas regarding the role and use of prayer. At the turn of the 20th century, the leadership of this movement introduced several core theological principles and ritualistic practices that were ultimately reflected in the structure and substance of the new Reform prayer books. (Idelsohn, 1932):

1. Prayers and meditations were inserted that reflected the modern train of thought.
2. Prayers needed to be understood by the people.

In more recent times, there has been a great deal of experimentation with Jewish religious practices. Commenting on this trend, Lawrence Hoffman (1987, p. 83) stated that creative worship "provides unmistakable attempts to develop Jewish liturgies that reflect American Jewish consciousness."

Marcia Falk's *The Book of Blessings* (1996); CLAL's recent publication, *The Book of Jewish Sacred Practices* (2002); and

other such initiatives incorporate innovative ceremonies, rituals, and prayers in the area of leadership and communal life. Such practices include "building a pluralist Jewish community, examining ourselves as leaders, taking on new responsibilities, and installing a new communal leader" (Kula, 2002).

For example, the CLAL editors, drawing upon the "Priestly Blessing," developed the following prayer to be recited upon installing a new communal leader.

Y'varekh'kha Adonai v'yishm'rekha,
God bless you with success and achievement,
and keep you from being corrupted, routinized, or hardened by it.
Ya'er Adonai panav eilekha vi'chuneka,
May God show you favor, thereby giving you authority and power, and be gracious to you so that people willingly respond to you, becoming partners.

Ya'er Adonai panav eilekha v'yaseim l'kha shalom,
May God turn toward you, showering you with life and joy, and grant you peace, giving your shalom, inner peace, wholeness, completion of yourself, completion of your leadership.

The CLAL editors share with us four texts related to communal leadership:

1. Now this is the ceremony that you are to make for them, to hallow them, to serve Me as priests (Exodus 29:1).
2. You shall seek out from among the people capable people who fear God...set these over them as leaders (Exodus 18:21).
3. Who knows, perhaps you (Esther) have attained this royal position for just such a crisis (Esther 4:14),
4. El rey con la gente. The King is with the people (Ladino Proverb).

PRAYER FOR JEWISH COMMUNAL SERVICE

This prayer seeks to define the special role of the communal professional by both

referring to the origins of community service within Judaism and identifying several concepts central to Jewish tradition and practice: tzedakah, hesed, and mitzvot. This prayer introduces two additional themes, the concept of "klei kodash" (sacred vessels) and the historic linkage of this profession to the biblical role of the Levites.

*O God, grant honor to those who serve
the household of Israel,
Give strength to the klei kodash, Your
sacred vessels,
Who seek to fulfill mitzvot
And promoting tzedakah through the
world.
Their work extends Your own,
Their actions manifest Your loving kind-
ness.*

*Since the days of the Levites,
They have served our people in every age,
In every place,
Even risking their lives to insure the well
being of the tents of Jacob.*

*They inspire us through their words and
deeds, as they strive*

*To protect the sanctity and welfare of
each Jew*

*To care for those in need, for the poor
and ill amongst us, the old and young,
for those whose voices cannot be
heard.*

To rescue those in danger.

To speak and act against injustice

To inspire and lead our institutions

To build our communities

*To help fulfill the promise of building
the Jewish state.*

*Blessed are You, Eternal God, whose vi-
sion is fulfilled through the hands of Your
servants.*

Personal Reflections

In various Jewish settings over the course of our history in "prayers of the righteous" (found in the Amidah), one can find refer-

ences to different categories of religious and communal leadership. The formalization of contemporary field of Jewish communal service is in many ways a 20th century phenomenon and as such is continually developing both its identity and place in Jewish life. The development of a liturgy generally takes a significant period of time to form and to become a part of social and religious practice, in part explaining why such prayers have not appeared in the larger communal arena to date. Likewise, as referenced earlier, there existed an artificial disconnect between the communal sector and the religious realm historically defined the Jewish world; this is an effort to bridge that divide. Therefore the idea of a specific prayer or ritual was not viewed as an essential response to the evolution of the field.

For many of us, our Jewish communal "practice" has been directly tied to our passion and commitment to the inherent values of our tradition. Often however, colleagues, collectively or individually, are not acknowledged for their dedication and service. I believe the creation of such ceremonies that define both the historic contributions and contemporary roles of the communal professional can make a statement to our field and to our lay partners that embraces the continuity of our field and the holiness of our work.

Drafted in fall 2002 with supportive input of several of my colleagues on this campus, including rabbis and others, this prayer was initially introduced into the Hebrew Union College service this December; it is now a part of the liturgy of the silent Amidah on this campus. One of my students asked me to read this prayer during our Israel Seminar (conducted December, 2002, including HUC and Brandies Hornstein students), as part of our Friday evening Shabbat experience, permitting students from both programs the opportunity for the first time to respond to it.

Over the years ahead, I am committed, hopefully with the input of colleagues who bridge religious and professional positions to craft a ceremony focusing on the communal

professional field. In Jewish tradition, we mark both our history and special moments by celebration and acts of remembrance, allowing us to reconnect to past events and honor individuals and groups. Just as we have introduced other forms of ritual and special services, it would be my intent to create such a ritual that might be used in communal institutions and within the synagogue framework.

The prayer is being shared with other HUC colleagues and campuses, individual colleagues and specific lay leaders, Jewish Communal Professionals of Southern California, and alumni and friends of HUC's School of Jewish Communal Service.

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