

Amidah, second meeting – First Blessings

The World of *Atzilut* (“Emanation”)

* Excerpts below from the (soon to be published) commentary on the Siddur by Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz:

The *Amidah* is at the center, the focal point of prayer. According to kabbalistic teachings, this unit of the prayer service corresponds to the World of *Atzilut* – the world of the absolute presence of God, in which there is no sense of any reality apart from the existence of God alone. All sections of the prayer service that come before the *Amida* serve as preparation for it, as we gradually draw closer, from one world to the next, until we enter the realm of the King. This entry is also the reason for the custom to take three steps forward before beginning the *Amida*, as these steps represent our entrance to the King’s sanctuary through various chambers, one within the other. Similarly, the three steps backward at the conclusion of the prayer represent our exit from His sanctuary. In addition, the *Amida* starts and ends with an act of bowing, which also symbolizes our entrance and departure from the King’s domain – we bow when we come in and when we depart from our encounter with the King. It is called *Amida*, literally the “Standing Prayer,” and it must be recited while standing, because it is entirely based on the awareness that one is standing before God and speaking directly to Him. This is also why it consistently refers to God in the second-person – “You.” For this reason the prayer is recited quietly, since in the *Amida* each and every member of the congregation stands separately before God. One who prays is like someone who enters for a hearing before a king – even if he is surrounded by people he addresses his words to the king, and the king likewise responds to him personally. The same is true of the *Amida* prayer – although everyone says exactly the same words, each person has their own unique and personal conversation with God.

The *Amidah* is comprised of three parts: the first three blessings are essentially words of praise, in which we give thanks and acknowledge the One before whom we stand. They are followed by three blessings of requests, which start with personal, private needs before moving on to prayers and entreaties for the nation as a whole,

including the redemption of the nation and the world. The *Amida* concludes with three final blessings, which mark our departure from the inner sanctum.

“O Lord, open my lips”

אֲדֹנָי שְׁפֹתַי תִּפְתָּח וּפִי יִגִּיד תְּהִלָּתְךָ.

“O Lord, open my lips, so that my mouth may declare Your praise”

* Excerpts below from the (soon to be published) commentary on the Siddur by Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz:

This verse from the book of Psalms [51:17] opens the *Amida* prayer with a request for assistance in our very ability to pray, that God will help us formulate and express the feeling of hearts in prayer. The verse also incorporates an even greater request, that the prayer should not take great efforts of thought and concentration on our part, but rather our mouths and lips should recite the prayer fluently, of their own accord.

The Blessing of the Patriarchs

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ, אֱלֹהֵי אַבְרָהָם, אֱלֹהֵי יִצְחָק וְאֱלֹהֵי יַעֲקֹב. הָאֵל הַגָּדוֹל,
הַגִּבּוֹר וְהַנּוֹרָא, אֵל עֶלְיוֹן, גּוֹמֵל חַסְדִּים טוֹבִים, קוֹנֵה הַכֹּל, וְזוֹכֵר חַסְדֵי אֲבוֹת, וּמַבְיֵא גּוֹאֵל לְבָנָי
בְּנֵיהֶם לְמַעַן שְׁמוֹ, בְּאַהֲבָה. מֶלֶךְ עוֹזֵר וּמוֹשִׁיעַ וּמַגֵּן. בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' מֶגֶן אַבְרָהָם.

“Blessed are You, Lord our God and God of our fathers, God of Abraham, God of Isaac and God of Jacob; the great, mighty and awesome God, God Most High, who bestows acts of loving-kindness and creates all, who remembers the loving-kindness of the fathers and will bring a redeemer to their children’s children for the sake of His name, in love. King, Helper, Savior, Shield. Blessed are You, Lord, Shield of Abraham.”

* Excerpts below from the (soon to be published) commentary on the Siddur by Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz:

The blessing of the Patriarchs serves as a kind of introduction to the whole *Amida*. First of all, it articulates the individual acknowledgment of God that each of us has constructed within himself. It is through this recognition that we can say “our God,”

as one can start to pray only after having established a relationship with God. Next we present ourselves, by stating who we are: We are the children of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, who achieved true closeness to God, and it is through their merit that we knock on the door of the Holy One, blessed be He, and ask Him to respond to us. The expressions of praise in the passage also allude to the attributes of the Patriarchs: The term “great” represents *Hessed* [Kindness], which was the attribute of Abraham; “mighty” represents Isaac’s attribute of *Gevura* [Might]; while “awesome,” which is a mixture of closeness and distance, represents *Tiferet* [Splendor] (which is a synthesis) – the attribute of Jacob. The blessing concludes with Abraham’s name – “Shield of Abraham” – because he had the merit of being the first, as our bond with the Holy One, blessed be He, began with him.

The Blessing of Might

אתה, גבור לעולם, אֲדֹנֵי. מַחֲיֵה מֵתִים אַתָּה, רַב לְהוֹשִׁיעַ.
בְּקִיץ: מוֹרִיד הַטֶּל. בַּחֹרֶף: מְשִׁיב הָרוּחַ וּמוֹרִיד הַגֶּשֶׁם.
מְכַלְכֵּל חַיִּים בְּחֶסֶד, מַחֲיֵה מֵתִים בְּרַחֲמִים רַבִּים, סוֹמֵךְ נוֹפְלִים, וְרוֹפֵא חוֹלִים, וּמַתִּיר אֲסוּרִים,
וּמַקְיֵם אֲמוּנָתוֹ לִישׁוּנֵי עֶפְרָי. מִי כְמוֹךָ בְּעַל גְּבוּרָה, וּמִי דוֹמֶה לָּךְ, מֶלֶךְ מַמְיֵת וּמַחֲיֵה וּמַצְמִיחַ
יְשׁוּעָה. וְנֶאֱמַן אַתָּה לְהַחְיֹת מֵתִים. בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה', מַחֲיֵה הַמֵּתִים.

“You are eternally mighty, Lord. You give life to the dead and have great power to save.

He makes the wind blow and the rain fall / He causes the dew to fall.

He sustains the living with loving-kindness, and with great compassion revives the dead. He supports the fallen, heals the sick, sets captives free, and keeps His faith with those who sleep in the dust. Who is like You, Master of mighty deeds, and to whom can You be compared, O King who brings death and gives life, and makes salvation grow? Faithful are You to revive the dead. Blessed are You, Lord, who revives the dead.”

* Excerpts below from the (soon to be published) commentary on the Siddur by Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz:

The blessing of Might is a continuation to the introduction of the prayer. After having identified ourselves in the first blessing, in this blessing we declare to God “who He is.” We praise the Divine might, which is the strength and power through which God controls the world. This might is revealed both in acts which seem to break the laws of nature and in matters that might seem commonplace and routine. The resurrection of the dead, which is mentioned several times in the blessing, and even in its concluding line, is the clearest expression of His lofty might, of God acting against the laws of the universe – for it is the natural way of things for every living creature to die, and yet God counteracts this tendency by reviving the dead. The attribute of might is also displayed through many features of the “ordinary” course of nature: Rainfall; the giving of food to all living beings; and help and salvation for those in need. This serves to emphasize that even regular functions depend on God’s constant intervention, as otherwise the world would cease to exist.

“Causes the dew to fall” / “makes the wind blow and the rain fall”

In the winter, from Shemini Atzeret until the first day of Passover, we say “He makes the wind blow and the rain fall”; in the summer, from the Intermediate festival days of Passover until Shemini Atzeret, we say “causes the dew to fall.”

The mention of rain in this context is due to the might and power of rainfall. Its mention also serves as a living, daily parallel to the resurrection of the dead: The falling of rain to the ground is the beginning of growth – the parched soil, in which everything appeared dead, is revived and returns to life. Just as the sowing and sprouting of seeds is part of the cycle of nature, so too the future resurrection that will follow death is a guaranteed stage in the cycle of life. Like rain, dew is also a source of life for vegetation, and the Sages use it as an analogy for the resurrection of the dead as well: “the dew with which the Holy one, blessed be He, will in the future revive the dead” [see e.g., *Shabbat* 88b].

Kedusha

בחזרת הש"ץ אומרים קדושה:
בְּקִדְשֵׁךָ וְנִצְרִיָּצֶךָ, בְּנֹעַם שִׁיחַ סוּד שְׂרָפֵי קִדְשׁ הַמְשִׁלְשִׁים לְךָ קִדְשָׁהּ, בְּפָתוּב עַל יָד נְבִיאָךְ וְקָרָא זֶה אֵל זֶה
וְאָמַר: קָדוֹשׁ קָדוֹשׁ קָדוֹשׁ ה' צְבָאוֹת מְלֵא כָּל הָאָרֶץ כְּבוֹדוֹ. לְעַמְתָּם מְשִׁבְתִּים וְאוֹמְרִים: בְּרוּךְ כְּבוֹד ה'
מִמְּקוֹמוֹ. וּבִדְבָרֵי קִדְשֶׁךָ פְּתוּב לְאֹמֵר: יְמִלֶּךְ ה' לְעוֹלָם אֱלֹהֵינוּ צִיּוֹן לְדֹר וָדֹר הַלְלוּיָהּ:

“We will sanctify You and revere You, like the pleasant conversation of the assembly of the holy seraphim that recite holiness thrice over before You. As it is written by Your prophet, “and one calls to the other and says: Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of hosts; the entire world is filled with His glory. Those facing them, give praise and say: Blessed is the honor of the Lord from His place. And in Your holy words it is written, stating: The Lord will reign forever, your God, Zion, for every generation, Halleluyah.”

* Excerpts below from the (soon to be published) commentary on the Siddur by Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz:

This *kedusha*, holiness, is a public declaration on the part of the assembly of Israel, announcing to all that God is lofty and exalted above and beyond all reality, to an infinite degree. This declaration is shared by all created beings, both those of the upper world and the lower world. We stand alongside the hosts of angels, on the same level of distance and wonder, and pronounce: “Holy.” This section ends with a prayer and hope that the kingdom of God will be revealed in the world, that all will recognize and accept His rule, and especially that His reign will be seen in “Zion,” the place that God chose. For although the holiness of God is in all places and everywhere, as long as the world fails to acknowledge this, the holiness is not perfect.

The Blessing of Holiness

אַתָּה קָדוֹשׁ וְשִׁמְךָ קָדוֹשׁ, וְקַדוּשִׁים בְּכָל יוֹם יְהִלְלוּךָ סֵלָה. כִּי אֵל מֶלֶךְ גָּדוֹל וְקַדוֹשׁ אַתָּה. בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה', הָאֵל הַקָּדוֹשׁ.

“You are holy and Your name is holy, and holy ones will praise You daily, Selah. Blessed are You, Lord, the holy God.”

* Excerpts below from the (soon to be published) commentary on the Siddur by Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz:

The Blessing of Holiness concludes the introductory section of the *Amida*. After mentioning the kindness of God through the memory of the Patriarchs and God’s might in His world in the present and the future, the prayer rises up to the essence – holiness. Whereas kindness and might are external revelations, holiness refers to

God Himself, that is, He is lofty and exalted high above any definition, description or attribute. Although the word “holy” can in truth refer only to the actual Holy One, the term “holy ones” is also used here in reference to the angels and Israel, as it proceeds to state: “And holy ones will praise You daily.” The reason is that although they are limited creatures, whenever they connect to the Holy One, blessed be He, they are fundamentally touching upon the holy, and in virtue of this they merit to be called “holy ones.”