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**THE
THEOLOGICAL
FOUNDATIONS
OF
PRAYER**

A REFORM JEWISH PERSPECTIVE

PAPERS PRESENTED AT THE UAHC 48TH BIENNIAL

EDITED WITH INTRODUCTION BY RABBI JACK BEMPORAD

COMMISSION ON WORSHIP, UNION OF AMERICAN HEBREW CONGREGATIONS

THE THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF PRAYER

A Reform Jewish Perspective

**Papers presented
at the UAHC 48th Biennial**

**Edited with Introductions
by Rabbi Jack Bemporad**



**Commission on Worship
Union of American Hebrew Congregations**



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EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

The papers contained in this book examine the theological issues implicit in Reform Jewish worship and also deal with the *Union Prayerbook*. They were originally delivered at the 48th General Assembly of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations in San Francisco, and represent the wide diversity of views representative of our movement. Each major section has an introductory foreword which attempts to focus on the issues involved.

It is our hope that those interested in Reform Jewish worship will find these essays illuminating and helpful in comprehending the nature and meaning of Reform Jewish worship.

-- Jack Bemporad

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THE DEMANDS OF PRAYER

INTRODUCTION

Prayer is the bridge between man and God.... Only in prayer does one establish a soul to soul interchange with Him.

Thus did Milton Steinberg express the essence of Jewish prayer. The Zohar -- in its poetic fervor -- gives voice to the same concept.

As the flame clothes the black sooty clod in a garment of fire, and releases the heat imprisoned therein, even so does prayer clothe a man in a garment of holiness, evoke the light and fire implanted within him by his Maker, illumine his whole being, and unite the lower and the higher worlds.

Jewish prayer demands that the religious experience of communion with God is a genuinely true experience, an experience that makes a vital difference to man and that also somehow affects God. But there is more to Jewish prayer than the religious experience of the Divine. There is all that the worshipper brings to God in his prayer, all that he receives from God. The Jew prays for peace, justice, and righteousness. He prays that the good triumph. In prayer man seeks forgiveness of sin. He searches for the meaning and significance of his life.

Prayer is not merely a form or a fact; it is a demand. A demand that the experience of the presence of God be real. A demand that man can find forgiveness in the presence of God despite his faults and failings. Prayer is a demand that life have meaning. It is an affirmation that the best is not at the mercy of the worst; and that

the God who cares for the good and the right will vindicate and make Himself real to those who worship Him in truth.

Although the above view is essential to historic Jewish prayer, the modern temper is openly hostile to it. Modern man finds it very difficult to pray to God. He may be able to understand prayer as a means of self-expression or even of self-transcendence but he finds great difficulty feeling that God is made manifest to him in prayer. He often doubts that through prayer he can find forgiveness for his sins and the meaning and significance of his existence.

Modern man has questioned whether prayer is the proper means of approaching God and of standing before Him. If Reform Judaism is to be effectively a contemporary faith, then it must seek to vindicate the demands of prayer in the face of the perplexities of our day.



THE DEMANDS OF PRAYER
by Rabbi Dudley Weinberg

The subject of this paper is not one which I happily consented to discuss in public. Our subject is "The Demands of Prayer." If the very astute members of the program committee had intended, in formulating the subject, to elicit a reasonably intelligible treatment of the demands which are made of the person who prays, I should have responded with alacrity and delight. But that is precisely what they did not intend. Over my shrieks of pain they insisted that the demands to be treated are the demands made *by* the person who prays. What is called for is an examination of the meaning and the validity of petitionary prayer. I construe this to mean that I must deal with such questions as the following: May we ask God for anything? Or more radically, does it make sense to demand something of God? When we petition God for healing, for sustenance, for justice, for peace, does He respond to our petitions? Is He in any sense *bound* to respond to them?

The elements of the traditional *Amidah* which the *Union Prayerbook* has preserved in the morning liturgy for weekdays contain such petitions as these: "Forgive our sins, O Father, pardon our

transgressions, for Thou art a merciful God"; "Look upon all the afflicted and the oppressed. Let wickedness and hatred cease, and reign Thou over us in justice and in love"; "Heal us, O Lord, and we shall be healed; save us and we shall be saved"; "Hear, O Father, the voice of our supplication"; "Grant us peace." Each of these petitions is followed by a *brachah* which praises God and describes Him in the present indicative mood as a God who does in fact perform precisely these actions.

Our problem is epitomized in the *brachah* which declares *Baruch attah Adonai shomea Tefillah* -- "Praised be Thou, O Lord, who hearest prayer."

Does He? Have we any right, all things considered, to expect, to demand that He should?

We who are the survivors of the generation of the holocaust have seen such things as we have seen. Can we still speak the ancient words, *Kee attah shomea tefillat am'cha Yisrael b'rahamim* -- "Thou dost hearken to the prayers of Thy people Israel in mercy"?

I tremble before these questions and I should gladly be relieved of the burden of dealing with them in public. My impulse is to say with the prophet Amos, *Hamaskil ba-et ha-hi yidom* -- "The prudent person will remain silent in such a time."

I had then best make clear at once what my

position is, what it is that I tremble about, and why in spite of my trembling I have decided not to be prudent.

My reply to all of these awesome questions is affirmative. Man *may* ask; man may even demand. Perhaps one ought even to go so far as to say that man ought to demand. And God replies; God *must* reply.

Why then do I tremble, seeing that I have answered the questions at least for myself.

I tremble first of all because such questions as these cannot really be answered with words alone. They can only be answered with our lives. Verbal answers to this kind of question are only signs which point to the decisions we make about the meaning, the purpose, and the goal of the lives we actually live in just this world in which we are called upon to live them. I cannot decide for you. I can hardly decide for myself without enormous pain and constant vacillation.

But words are the only means through which one can communicate his decision in this situation. If what I finally do communicate is only a neat verbal formulation of the decision and not the decision itself, then I would have done better to have clung to prudent silence. For words can be countered with other words and they in turn with still other words until all meaning is suffo-

cated by their sheer accumulation. But decisions can only be countered with other decisions. And that is quite enough to tremble about.

But there is still greater reason to tremble. If I say that man may ask and that God must respond, I run the danger of opening a Pandora's box. It may seem that what I am proposing is a kind of magic, a technique for compelling God to assume our image and to make His creation yield to our will. There is already enough blasphemy in the world. I should not want to be guilty of seeming to encourage its further proliferation. Not that any of you, trained as you are in the rational disciplines of Western culture, could be persuaded that a magical religion is valid. In our day the danger is that a straightforward affirmation of divine response to human prayer will evoke such an intensely negative reaction that it will result in a further repudiation of the living God who actually makes a difference in our lives when we worship Him.

Well, I have warned myself and you. Thus warned, I shall proceed to my task and hope for the best.

To crystallize the problem let me ask a typical question over which each of us has agonized at one time or another.

How can we ask God for justice? How can we

stand, as Abraham is reported to have stood, in the divine presence and demand that the Judge of all the earth do justly? Did none of the six million plead for justice? Did they receive a just answer to their entreaty? Have none of their heartbroken survivors prayed for justice? Have they been assured that justice was somehow done or will somehow be done? What sense does it make to ask God for justice or for anything else -- assuming that we are not willing to settle for petitionary prayer as a cathartic remedy for minor emotional disturbance or as an exercise in ethical self-stimulation?

To be sure, we can put at least an intellectual end to the question by reminding ourselves that God is utterly beyond our grasp, that His ways are not our ways, and His thoughts not our thoughts. Among the few things of which I am certain is the conviction that our minds cannot capture God in the web of human logic. But I suspect something more. If God were to make His very essence comprehensible to us, if He were indeed to justify according to His ways and His thoughts what we have seen and heard and done in our lifetime, we human beings could not stand it. There is terrible truth in the biblical words "No man can see Me and live."

How, then, taking account of the evil and the

injustice we know in our own experience, can we persist in petitionary prayer with the expectation that God -- not merely our own psyches, but God Himself -- will respond?

A task is laid upon man. That this is so cannot be demonstrated as the validity of a mathematical hypothesis is demonstrated. Nor can it be justified by any ethical theory which "proves" that a task *ought* to be laid on man. The best that ethical theory can do is to declare that the task having been given, man ought to do it.

But that the task is real, none of us can doubt. If its reality cannot be logically demonstrated, it can nevertheless be described as it becomes manifest in the variety of human experience and in the insatiable longing which is a part of that experience.

Man *must* seek truth and ally himself with it. He testifies to the claim which truth makes upon him both by his often painful devotion to it and by his frequent rebellion against it. The achievement of truth is man's task.

Man *must* search out and fashion the beautiful, surround himself with it, and nourish himself upon it. Surely something important is suggested by the use of the word "taste" in connection with

man's response to the esthetic imperative. Whether one has "good taste" or "bad taste," he requires beauty for his very sustenance -- and not some unachievable ideal beauty, but real existing beauty in real existing things. The embodiment of beauty is man's task.

Man must search out the good and do it with his whole being. He is always less than his full self because the search for goodness is never concluded. He shatters himself painfully into jagged fragments when he fails or refuses to do even the partial and tentative good he already knows. But this too -- the search for a good which is not contradicted or overcome by any other man's good -- is every man's task.

Out of the immediately meaningless, a man must make ultimate meaning. Out of the chaotic, he must make reliable order. Within the various, the separate, the many, he must find abiding unity.

Why must he? Who knows why, except Him who laid the task upon us? But to have this task is precisely what it is to be human, to have been created in just this way, and in just this world. Can anyone seriously doubt that the achievement of unity, the reconciliation of contradiction, and the overcoming of chaotic conflict constitute the work man is called upon to do? More than that, they constitute man himself. Not to have such

work to do is to be something other than human. To refuse the work is to be inhuman.

What has been said here about man the individual and about man in general is uniquely and specially true of the people Israel. I am not asserting that it may not also be true of other peoples. But I know from the remembered and recorded collective experience of Israel that this people -- the whole people in all its generations -- is extraordinarily summoned to the human task. However incredible it may seem, the call to Abraham and the happening at Sinai have imposed upon the people Israel the task of establishing the unity of God and of man in the world; and by and large the people has accepted the task. This is what the Torah and the rabbinic tradition mean when they declare that Israel is bound to its task by a covenant. The covenant is of God's making. He chose Israel. Sometimes Israel responded willingly to the covenant, and sometimes Israel rebelled against it; but accepting or rejecting, the task always remained and still remains.

The task which is laid upon every single man is what constitutes his humanity. The task which is laid upon Israel is what constitutes Israel's peoplehood. Surely that is what our tradition means when it speaks of the universal covenant with Noah and the particular covenant with Israel.

Integration has become the great slogan of liberals and liberators in the contemporary struggle within the civil and social order. It ought not be surprising that Jews are prominent in this integrating endeavor.

If one looks for a one-word definition of the perpetual Jewish task in the world, that single word might well be "integration." But Israel's integrating task is not limited to a reshaping of the civil and social order. Perhaps Israel's work at the political, economic, and social levels is not even properly comprehensible apart from a larger view of the work of unification. The struggle to achieve unity begins at the level of the single person, advances to the social order, and even, if one may dare to say so, reaches out into the cosmos itself.

In Judaism the individual is indeed an individual, unique and irreplaceable. But we pray in the morning blessing which precedes the *Shema*: *Yachid l'avvenu* -- "Unify our heart." Overcome the internal division and conflict which inflict spiritual and emotional schizophrenia upon us. A generation schooled in psychoanalytic theory will not need to be told of the struggle within the single individual to achieve an authentically integrated personality.

We insist that humanity is one humanity. That

is how the tradition teaches us to understand the biblical account of the creation of man (Adam). But we pray, *V'yeesu kulam agudah achat la'asut r'tson'cha belevav shalem* -- "May all men become a single brotherhood to do Thy will with a whole heart."

We declare as our utmost and unalterable faith that *Adonai elohenu Adonai ehad* -- "The Lord our God, the Lord is one." But we also proclaim with equal fervor that when integrated persons have achieved an integrated society, then *Bayom ha-hu yihyeh, Adonai ehad u-sh'mo ehad* -- "On that day the Lord shall be one and His name shall be one."

The Kabbalists and the mystics in our tradition may have gone too far when they declared that the mitzvot are performed *L'shem y'ehud kudsha b'rich Hu ushechinteh* -- "In order to unify the Holy One, blessed be He and His *Shechinah*" (indwelling Presence), but in their way of thinking it was quite clear that the unity of God as an effective practical truth in this world is not altogether independent of what men do. (Perhaps we need to be reminded that our faith in the unity of God is not merely a mathematical statement. It is a proclamation of the absolute Lordship of God. That is why we say *Baruch Shem K'vod malchuto l'olam vo-ed* immediately after the *Shema*. The

tradition teaches that professing the divine unity requires us also to accept the *ol malchut shamayim* -- "the yoke of the Kingdom of God." Is there a suggestion here that the Creator God who commands by virtue of His oneness perfects His unity in the created world when His creatures respond to the commandments? The question is worthy of at least some careful speculation.)

Human experience in general and the experience of Israel in particular make it clear that we are human and Jewish precisely by virtue of the tasks which are laid upon us. We are so made that integration, unification is our goal and our meaning. We yearn for it. We can scarcely live without it. When we fail to move significantly toward it, we literally disintegrate.

But the person who is at one with himself and with his experienced world, the society in which men are at one with each other, and the world in which God is at one with His creation are not, at least for us, ideals for which we merely yearn passively. They are our commanded tasks. We are required to work for them. The passive yearning and the active working are inseparable. Each is meaningless without the other. And lacking them, we could not be what we are; we could not be hu-

man and we could not be of the household of Israel.

That is why we can make demands of the Commander. The task is our task, but it is He who lays it upon us. It is inconceivable that man should have created his own humanity, or that Israel alone among all the peoples of the earth should have created its own sacred peoplehood. And just this is the evidence in our living experience of His love for us and the ground of our love for Him. We have no prior right to our humanizing task. It is simply given to us. And so, in fact, are we taught by our liturgy. *Ahavat olam bet Yisrael am'cha ahavta* -- "With eternal love dost Thou love Israel Thy people." What is the proof? *Torah u'mitsvot chukkim u'mishpatim otanu limmadta* -- "Thou hast taught us Torah and commandments, statutes and ordinances." *V'hem chayyenu u'oraah yomenu* -- "And they are our life and the length of our days."

God loves us. He creates us and He gives us a task. We could not have asked for either. Nor could we have been created human without having been given human work to do.

In the end therefore our task is His task. For reasons that dissolve in mystery before our inadequate comprehension, God shares with us the task of establishing the unity of His creation.

This partnership, which is both our glory and our tragedy, was suggested long ago by talmudic statements which speak of man as *shutaf laKadosh baruch Hu* -- "the partner of the Holy One, blessed be He."

Because our task is His, we may ask both that the task itself be a valid and genuine one and that we be given the means with which to pursue it and to persist in it. And He must respond to our prayerful demands. Otherwise He would be His own opponent. He would contradict Himself.

To be able to persist in the task which is laid upon us -- that we may demand and that must be granted. To see the final fulfillment of the task, the reconciliation of each man with himself, of each man with all other men, of all with God in justice, love, truth, and beauty -- for that we may hope and in the coming of that ultimate time of wholeness (*shalom*) and integration (*yichud*) we must trust. Meanwhile in this fragmented and unredeemed world we have our work to do -- and His.

And in the end, we ask only what has already been given. We could not even ask for the humanizing virtues if they had not already been granted to us. How would we know of them? Do the beasts of the jungle demand justice? Do the fish of the sea require love or beauty? Does a stone ask for the truth that overcomes separation and conflict?

When we demand of God that He sustain us in our human task, we acknowledge Him as our sovereign. What we are really saying in our petitions is "Let God be God." We utter our humble, joyous, awestricken recognition that He is indeed the Lord of the universe, and that we are not.

And that is how God responds. He responds as the living Lord. Perhaps we may learn something from the situation of the little child who cries out in the night. The child's mother responds "I am here," and the child is comforted and strengthened.



THE NEED TO PRAY
by Rabbi David Polish

If God is, we must reach out to Him as a child to a parent.

How does the Jew respond? With the *mitzvah*, with the ethical act, with study of sacred literature, with prayer. Prayer is the most difficult of all for modern man to accept. First, many find the content of the prayer book unacceptable. Second, they find the idea of a God who responds weird and unrealistic. Man responds to God, yes. God responding to man? Absurd.

It does not take a profound knowledge of Jewish prayer to know why many are alienated by it. Again and again, it conveys beliefs which many find unacceptable and even repellent. If we are meant to seek converse with God, must it be in an idiom like this? ... "As we thank Thee for the joys of life, so we praise Thee for its sorrows... with a father's love dost Thou discipline us that we may learn to understand life's holy purpose"; "We know that not without wise purpose dost Thou afflict Thy children"; "We see Thy hand in all that comes over us and reverently submit to Thy decrees."

I cite these passages to illustrate the capacity of prayer sometimes to be absurd. Is a

deity who afflicts us "for a purpose" a god or a demon? How can anyone say this in the presence of cancer or the violent death of a child? It will soften our rebellion if we learn that we are not the first to resist mawkishness in worship. A common misconception about prayer and especially the theology which it expressed is that the ancients were thoroughly satisfied with it. Some of them were as resistant as we are. Many centuries ago, a rabbi suffering bodily anguish was being comforted by his disciples. They held out the promise of eternal reward and maintained that God was chastising him out of divine love. He answered, "Let me have neither the chastisement nor the reward." It is not remarkable that the ancients accepted. After all, this was an intimate part of their life-view. What is remarkable is that they rebelled. Job challenged God. (Job 13:22.) Jeremiah challenged God. (Jer. 12:1.) It is also remarkable that so many of the moderns accept more meekly than ancient men of towering faith. I find myself, at Sabbath and holiday services, at funerals and at worship, at the homes of mourners, revising the text as I read.

But this is only a small part of our problem which is not *this* prayer book or *that*. It is the greater question of prayer, and when we address ourselves to this alone, we will discover

that there is more gold than dross in Jewish liturgy. The more we examine it, and even more to the point, the more we immerse ourselves in it, the greater depths of meaning and feeling are reached. Prayer is not investigation -- it is experience. Therefore I must address myself to this question personally, against the background of my own response.

For one who is unacquainted with it, it comes as a surprise that Jewish prayer does not indulge primarily in grovelling petitions for personal favors. It does not present a series of requests to God. It is not a shopping list which I present to the supermarket of the universe. After rising, the Jew washes his hands and thanks God for bidding him to do so. He fulfills his bodily functions and expresses thanks that God "created openings and channels.... If any one were to be opened up or stopped up, it would be impossible to stand before Thee." Here the physical, what some consider the gross, is hallowed. Here there is recognition of the thread by which life hangs and the reverence one must pay to life. The worshipper then passes, without any indication of a cleavage in the human experience, from the physical to the spiritual. He praises God for requiring him to study Torah. "Make pleasant ... the words of the Torah in our mouths and in the mouth

of Thy people ... so that we with our offspring ... may all know Thy name and learn Thy Torah. Praised be Thou ... who teachest the Torah to Thy people Israel." The worshipper then moves on to yet another dimension: the spirit -- the ethical. In a technical sense, what he reads is not prayer, because he does not address God. In a sense, he reminds himself what God and the Torah require of him. He transfers from a worshipping to a studying posture, and this too is prayer. "These are the commandments which have no limit ... the practice of charity and the study of Torah...." These are the things of which a man enjoys the fruit in this world, while the stock remains for him for the world-to-come: honoring father and mother, deeds of loving-kindness, timely attendance in the house of study ... hospitality to wayfarers, visiting the sick, dowering the bride, attending the dead to the grave, devotion in prayer, and making peace between man and his fellow; but the study of Torah leads to them all.

The ethical impulse carries over into a subsequent prayer. It is a petition. But what does the petitioner ask? "Lead us not into sin ... temptation, or disgrace; let not the evil intention have dominion over us.... Keep us far from a bad man and a bad companion." At the outset of

his devotions the Jew pours out his gratitude for the gift of existence. He is overwhelmed by the wonder of life and the Torah which have a common source. He is reminded of what man is expected to live by as a moral being. He does not begin his day by surrendering to his fears, anxieties, and grievances. He begins by attempting so to organize his life that he might conquer his fears, and make his life worth living.

I recognize that this is only one of many forms of prayer. There are, to be sure, requests of God in the Jewish prayer book. In the main, they fall into two categories. The first intercedes for the whole community, not for the individual. The second is an expression of the supreme need -- for God. A Chasid prayed, "I don't want Your world-to-come. I don't want Your Garden of Eden. I want You, You only." Above all, there is the need to know that God is; and where God is, there man is spared a living death -- an aimless existence. This may not diminish his pain. But it can give him the will and the strength to bear the pain.

Thus, at the core of prayer is its richest content -- the awareness that there is a God to whom man responds. But out of this comes the frightening question -- does God respond to man? What sense does the statement make, "Praised be

"Hear, O God, who hearest prayer"? If by response we mean a reply, a "Yes, I will" or "No, I won't," then there is no response. God does not answer our requests.

I stood in a hospital room where a young woman was feeding her mother, a victim of a heart attack. Suddenly the mother began to gasp for breath. Nurses were summoned. Within seconds, doctors rushed into the room to attempt to save the patient. The daughter was taken to an adjoining room where she pleaded with me, "Rabbi, how do I pray?" Then she moaned again and again, "God, help my mother to live." But the mother died. Had God deny the prayer? It would be cruel to say this. Yet, even if we know in advance that such a prayer cannot help the patient, it must nevertheless be spoken because the grief-stricken person must express his desperate need for help. Sometimes, as in this instance, prayer is altogether nonrational. The one who prays does not ask in his anguish, "Is this reasonable?" He only knows his grief and he must release it. How wisely the rabbis said, "The heart knows its own bitterness." Anguish demands expression, and however unreasonable it may be, it must not be denied.

But if God does not reply, what kind of response can we expect? The response which God gave to the suffering and questioning Job, "I am God." Whatever

exists responds to us. The flower responds to my touch. The violin responds to the bow. The tide responds to the tug of the moon. At Gloucester in Massachusetts, I climbed down the ancient boulders, witnesses of the Ice Age, and sat alone as the tide began to pound against the rocks, slowly engulfing them. That tide came in at the exact moment which had been ordained for it at that place. It was responding. And God responds to man. How? By disclosing Himself to us. God hears prayer, not by fulfilling our requirements, not by satisfying our needs, but by making Himself known to us as a living reality in our lives. When we pray we become aware, like Moses who sought to know who God was, that God "is what He is." But even more important than I should hear is that I should address myself to God. Not that He needs it, but that I need it. I need to feed and nurture my soul. I need to feel awe. I need to be aware of my finiteness and the wonder of my existence. I need to be reminded of this daily. Most important, I need to affirm, to say "Yes," to say "I do." I cannot exist if I assume the destructive attitude of one of Sartre's characters: "I have decided that all along death has been the secret of my life, that I have lived for the purpose of dying. I die in order to demonstrate the impossibility of living; my eyes will

put an extinguisher upon the earth and shut it down forever."

When I call, it can be that God will make Himself manifest. Not always. Even a psalmist in an age of faith cried out, "Do not hide your presence from me." But another psalmist wrote, "I called and God responded." Men in the Bible have responded to God's call, "Hineni, here I am." God, too, says "Hineni." For some, this is not enough. For others, it is. Like the text of the Passover Haggadah, they can say "Dayenu, it is sufficient."

So, we do not pray "Help me to win," but "Help me to live." The knowledge that He is gives courage. This makes the anguish of existence bearable. It is told that about nineteen hundred years ago four rabbis ventured into the "Pardes," the dangerous realm of mystical speculation. One died. One became mad. One betrayed his faith. Only Rabbi Akiba "entered in peace and came out in peace." Modern man faces his dreadful world in a similar posture. For some, the "death of God" means also the death of man. In the subway near Columbia University someone scrawled "God is dead. Nietzsche." Beneath it someone else wrote "Nietzsche is dead. God." The hollow men, the "dead souls," the zombies of the human race, going about the business of living in the midst of their

inner death, are products of a world where God -- on any terms -- has been banished.

Some men go mad when God is destroyed. There is the madness of an aimless existence. It is symbolized in a Kafka story where a clerk awakes one morning to discover that he is a cockroach. There is the madness of human bestiality. We ask in our time, "How did God allow the massacre of six million Jews?" This is an improper question. Instead we should ask, "What else can be expected when a movement of race and blood arises, glorifying the beast in man, gloating that there is no place for God in the jungle?" When the restraints of a deity who calls "Thou shalt not" are overthrown, the beast must prowl, whether he be a Nazi or a Crusader.

Some, like the apostate rabbi, abandon all belief. They reject all existence as absurd. Like the victim (not the hero) in Kafka's *Trial*, they are accused, tried, and executed out of sheer madness. The apostasy is to God. It is also to man.

Some cling to their faith. Unlike the rabbi, they do not "enter in peace and leave in peace." No one escapes the anguish of existence, but for some, this anguish can be borne because of their belief.

In *The Human Season*, by Edward Lewis Wallant, a Jew who has lost his dearly beloved wife turns

against God with blasphemy and rejection. He isolates himself from his family and from his world. Then one day, in the midst of his rage against God, he touches a live wire in his home.

Suddenly ferocious life snaked up his arm and reached for his heart. He gave a loud cry as the electricity shot through him. He felt himself thrown, as though by a gigantic hand, down to the floor. Stunned, he lay there. He didn't know if he could move, refused to try.

In the emptiness he began to cry, a simple, childlike weeping. Then because there was nothing else, because his thoughts and his grievances were amputated for the moment, and he was left only with some of the old reflexes of the spirit, he began to moan:

*Baruch atah Adonai ... God in Heaven ...
Mary, Mary, my wife ... forgive me
V'yiskadash ... Gott im Himmel ... forgive
me....*

He wished with all his heart not to die there on the living room floor, so senselessly, with no chance to make a little peace with himself.

In a mingling of the languages he had spoken in his life, English, Russian, Yiddish, he prayed without realizing he prayed, begged with no memory of pride, to come out of that living death he had made for himself, to be touched by life again.

THE GOD WE WORSHIP

INTRODUCTION

Many of us who believe in God nevertheless find it difficult to pray. If God is what traditional Judaism affirms, the "Hearer of prayer," He who creates and redeems man, then why is it that so many prayers go unanswered? If God in fact is the source and guarantor of the values of the righteous man, why is it that the righteous man so often goes down in defeat, very often with the *Shema* on his lips? The omnipotent, omniscient and all-good God of traditional Judaism seems somehow inscrutably to allow this to happen. There are other questions which could disturb the traditional Jew who believes in the traditional God. If God knows all, then He also knows our prayers, so what is the point of expressing them? Or as the medieval Jewish philosopher Joseph Albo stated in his *Book of Principles*, "Either God has determined that a given person shall receive a benefit, or He has not so determined. If He has determined, there is no need of prayer, and if He has not so determined, how can prayer avail to change God's will that He should now determine to benefit the person when He had not so determined before?" How can man affect God in prayer if he believes that God knows at the beginning of time both what any individual being will ask and whether his prayer will be answered?

The religious existentialist, naturalist, and organicist have sought to remedy these perplexities. The religious existentialist stresses the limitations of human reason and maintains that it is impossible for man to know how a good God could

let a righteous man perish. The existentialist believes that God is only grasped through religious experience. He is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and not the God of the philosophers.

The religious naturalist maintains that God is the prime cosmic force making for good in the universe. God is the creative principle within the cosmos continually giving rise to greater value and harmony. Some have questioned how it is possible for man to pray to such a force and how this force responds to his hopes and yearnings.

The organicist, as the naturalist, rejects the doctrine of an omnipotent and omniscient God. The former differs from the latter, however, in not necessarily rejecting a personal or transcendent God. The organicist, similarly to the naturalist, nevertheless stresses the immanence of God in nature, a view radically rejected by the religious existentialists, who view God as totally transcendent.

In order for prayer to be meaningful, it is necessary to clarify how differing concepts of God affect the meaning of prayer. How is prayer determined by different concepts of God? Must God be personal for prayer to be meaningful? What kind of God does prayer need and in what kind of universe? We must also determine what views of God are compatible with what doctrines of prayer.

These are the questions contemporary man has raised. These -- or similar questions -- contemporary faith must confront.

A TRADITIONAL VIEW
by Rabbi Jakob J. Petuchowski

To speak within the span of ten minutes about "the God we worship" would have been impossible enough even without the additional difficulties contained in the invitation. For one thing, I am supposed to represent the "traditional view." Which traditional view? Surely, we Jews, traditional or otherwise, pride ourselves on the fact that our tradition is broad enough to include all kinds of views about God. Nobody today would care to assert that Rabbi Akiba, in the second century, and Maimonides, in the twelfth, held identical views about the Deity. Yet both of them were "traditional" Jews. Moreover, Maimonides would declare him a heretic who invests God with human attributes. But Maimonides' contemporary, Abraham ben David of Posquières, insisted that greater and better men than Maimonides had done just that. And "traditional" Judaism prints the comment of Abraham ben David alongside the text of Maimonides' definition. Which, then, is the "traditional" view?

It has also been suggested to me that I deal with the question: "What kind of God does prayer need?" Another great difficulty! It is like putting the cart before the horse. You might as

well ask: "What kind of morality does my sex instinct need?" I am not so sure that were I to ask my sex instinct about it I would come up with the kind of morality and monogamous marriage which our society demands of me. What, then, if prayer needs one kind of God, and God Himself happens to be something quite different?

Still, this question "What kind of God does prayer need?" may really contain the clue to what I am supposed to say here -- from the "traditional" point of view. For the very question does draw the line between the tradition, in all of its manifold varieties, and the modern temper. The question, after all, is possible only within a nontraditional frame of reference for which faith is a commodity like any other. Tradition would never ask, "What kind of God does prayer need?" Rather would tradition reverse the question: "God being what He is, what kind of prayer would be appropriate?" Prayer may be a basic human urge, but God, tradition would say, is not dependent for His nature or existence upon man's basic urges. A god constructed to meet people's urges and needs is the kind of god that the Bible calls "idol."

And yet, it is appropriate to link God and prayer. However much individual representatives of the tradition may have appealed to reason, to

philosophy, and to history by way of constructing their theories about God, none of them would have bothered to do so if God had not first and foremost been a fact of experience to them. And prayer is one of the meeting-grounds between God and man -- the most readily available meeting-ground. Perhaps it should be the final test of any theological system to ask of it: "Can I pray to the God taught by this system?"

Let me illustrate: Suppose I took a dime from my pocket and dropped it on the floor, and then made inquiries why the dime dropped. Suppose, furthermore, that someone undertook to enlighten me about the law of gravity. I would then be in possession of a very important principle, which helps me enormously in accounting for many a phenomenon in this universe of ours. But never in my right mind would I get down on my knees and say: "O Thou Law of Gravity, have pity upon me. Pardon my sins, and lead me on the path of righteousness!"

Similarly, if someone were to suggest, or even to prove, that this world of ours must have been given the first push, as it were, by some Prime Mover, or that Evolution (with a capital "E") makes the wheels go round, or that life would be impossible without some Life Force [of which we may capitalize the "L" and the "F"], I would be

very grateful for the information. I would find it to be very helpful and useful. But I could not pray to it, any more than I could pray to the law of gravity. I can only pray to something I can address because it addresses me. And, since something is not very likely to address me, we had better come out in the open and admit that we are referring to someone.

That is why the tradition speaks of God as a Person. Of course, the tradition does not mean to imply that God has flesh and bones, arms, hands, and a nose. But tradition does speak of God's will, and of God's love, and of God's concern. And to have a will, love, and concern means that one is so constituted as to have them; and, in our human language, that kind of constitution is called "personality." When the psalmist asks (94:9): "He that planted the ear, shall He not hear? He that formed the eye, shall He not see?" he could go on to say: "He that endowed man with personality, shall He be less?" Tradition answers: He is infinitely more; but He cannot be less!

But how do we know that He exists in the first place? The experience vouchsafed to us in moments of prayer may, after all, be an illusion or a hallucination. That is why the tradition recognizes that God can also be approached through

channels other than prayer -- the philosopher may find Him at the end of his chain of reasoning, and the scientist may put down his test tube in a moment of radical wonder and amazement; the mystic may bathe in His light during moments of illumination, and the prophet may hear His voice urging him on to the improvement of society.

Above all, the people of Israel have encountered Him again and again in their millennial history. Four thousand years of Jewish life would be the cruelest joke ever perpetrated (and by whom?) if Jews had risked and sacrificed their security, their worldly goods, their very lives and the lives of their children out of loyalty and devotion to a God who did not exist, who did not redeem them from Egypt, who did not meet them at Sinai, who did not share with them the vicissitudes of exile, and who did not hold out to them the promise of ultimate redemption. If we have really been deluded all that time, then we shall indeed not only have disproved the existence of God, we shall also have proved the existence of the -- Devil.

Still, we do not speak of the God of Israel, *and* of the God of the philosopher, *and* of the God of the scientist, *and* of the God of the mystic, *and* of the God of the prophet. We recognize that man is limited in his understanding and that God

is unlimited. It is the same One God who reveals Himself to them all, though each one of them is capable of only a partial understanding.

To unify all the partial approaches, to confess the limitations of our individual understanding, and to proclaim that God transcends Israel, mankind, and the universe itself -- that is the affirmation of the *Shema*: "Hear O Israel, Adonai our God, Adonai is One!" Tradition, fully aware of the different aspects by which God is known to man, calls the proclamation of the *Shema* "the unification of the Name of God." Though not, properly speaking, a prayer, it sets the tone for prayer. It is the "traditional" statement which points to "the God we worship."

AN EXISTENTIALIST VIEW
by Rabbi Bernard Martin

The participants in this forum were invited to concern themselves with three questions: (1) Must God be personal for prayer to be meaningful? (2) What kind of a God does prayer demand and in what kind of a universe? (3) How can we conceive of and believe in such a God?

I shall not try to answer these questions because I do not think they are the right questions or, at least, the truly important ones. Instead I should like to deal with three related questions which, I believe, do go to the heart of the matter.

First, the significant issue, it seems to me, is not "Must God be personal for prayer to be meaningful?" but "Must God be personal *to be God?*"

God -- from the human side, from the point of view of man's faith -- is the name we give to the object of our ultimate concern, that which we take to be worthy of our highest loyalty and deepest love.

For biblical faith -- and this has been the classic faith of the Jewish people throughout the centuries -- God is that ultimate reality who cre-

ated and continues to sustain the universe, who bestows on man the gift of life and confronts him with moral imperatives, who reveals Himself in the affairs of individuals and societies, who has called Israel (through a covenant given in love) to His service, and who will ultimately fulfill history and redeem men and nations from the tragedies and ambiguities of their personal and collective existence. This God is not a *person*. Indeed, it is blasphemy -- according to the Bible -- to make *any* image or picture of Him. But He is *personal*, or better, *superpersonal*, in the sense that He lives, acts, is conscious, and enters into personal relationship with man, addressing him and demanding his personal response.

This is the only God who, according to our biblical ancestors, could be man's ultimate concern and be worthy of his worship. This is the only God who could be truly God.

In our time, some thinkers, supposedly in the interests of reconciling Judaism with science and logic, have substituted for the living God of the Bible a "force" behind the evolutionary process or a "power" making for man's salvation. Does this give us a more exalted and worthy object of worship? And is it really a manifestation of reasonableness and intellectual sophistication to portray the highest, the ultimate reality in imper-

sonal and subhuman forms? Does this not rather reflect the depreciation, the devaluation of human personality that is the besetting sin of our time?

Furthermore, can the God who is merely an unconscious process or a field of force answer our religious needs? The man who cries, as did the psalmist, "out of the depths," who is crushed by disease, suffering, and the shattering blows inflicted by an indifferent physical universe, who is poignantly aware of his own and every man's finitude and mortality, who experiences the pangs of guilt and self-condemnation -- such a person knows that he cannot find any real help in or truly worship an impervious, unconscious, unmoved and unmovable process or force.

Since, in point of fact, empirical science and logical reason are powerless to prove or disprove the reality *either* of the living God of the Bible or of a force directing the evolutionary process toward humanly desirable goals, or power within nature that makes for man's salvation -- since *all* these are arrived at not by science or knowledge but by faith -- why choose or give one's ultimate loyalty to the less satisfying object of faith?

God, I suggest to you, is not exalted but degraded when he is reduced to the level of the im-

personal or subpersonal. Nor is the intellectual integrity associated with a refusal to go beyond the evidence or the rigour of scientific method really preserved in positing such a God. What happens is merely that we are given a philosophic, metaphysical God who does not greatly matter and who in no way answers man's deepest needs. The God who is not personal, or rather superpersonal, is not a living, effective *reality* but a religiously valueless *idea*. And, of course, prayer in any sense but philosophic meditation is impossible if this is what God is.

"What kind of a God does prayer demand and in what kind of a universe?" These again are the wrong questions, implying as they do that what is ultimate is our human prayer and that this prayer can determine what God is and what the universe is.

God and the universe are real. They are what they are, actualities independent of what we believe they should be in order to make our prayer meaningful.

The important question is not what kind of a God does our prayer demand, *but what kind of prayer does God demand from us*. And to this, the answer is: God, the living God of biblical faith,

does not "demand" any kind of prayer. He does not need our words of praise or adoration or petition. But *we do*. And that we can reach out to Him, address Him, and, in certain moments, find Him -- this is our glory and our greatness as human beings.

Prayer is the unique, incomprehensible, and ungrounded privilege of man. The capacity to pray is one of those essentially mysterious qualities that distinguish the human species from the rest of the animal creation. That man can transcend the order of nature of which he is a part; that he can, at moments, escape the inexorable flow of time; that he can reach out of his mortal and finite being to the One who is infinite and immortal; that he can, in Martin Buber's words, address "the eternal Thou" -- this is a gift of grace. It is God Himself acting.

It is something like this that the late Paul Tillich, from whom I have learned much, meant when he said that when we pray "we do something humanly impossible. We talk to somebody who is not somebody else but who is nearer to us than we ourselves are. We address somebody who can never become an object of our address because He is always subject, always acting, always creating. We tell something to Him who knows not only what we tell Him but also all the unconscious tendencies

out of which our conscious words grow. This is the reason why prayer is humanly impossible.... It is God Himself who prays through us, when we pray to Him -- God Himself in us: that is what Spirit means. Spirit is another word for 'God present,' with shaking, inspiring, transforming power. Something in us, which is not we ourselves, intercedes before God for us. We cannot bridge the gap between God and ourselves even through the most intensive and frequent prayers. The gap between God and ourselves can be bridged only by God." (*The New Being*, p. 137.)

And what kind of a universe does prayer demand? No special kind, certainly none that we ourselves are entitled to construct. It requires only that we recognize the *real* world we live in, a world in which there have arisen out of the most unpromising and unlikely materials mysterious and marvelous beings like ourselves with a capacity to create, to feel, to love, to think, to aspire to ideal ends.

What is required is a recognition of the true character of the world, the real world, which, a modern interpreter of Job has said that ancient biblical figure discovered, is the world in which "all wordly hopes vanish in time," in which "the values men cherish, the little gods they worship -- family, home, nation, race, sex, wealth, fame --

all fade away"; the world in which "there is nothing else that abides" but in which "confidence in This One (i.e., God) is the only value not subject to time." (Marvin H. Pope, *The Anchor Job.*)

When we have discovered that this is the world we live in, and when we have been enabled to move from regarding the Ultimate Reality behind this world as God the Enemy to seeing Him as God the Friend, to trust and to love Him, then we are ready for prayer, whether this be in words or -- often and more authentically -- in wordless longing.

How can we conceive of and believe in such a God? Again the wrong questions.

We cannot *conceive* the God of biblical faith; we cannot define Him conceptually in a neat, dogmatic formula or in an elaborate theological system. To say of Him that He is omniscient, omnipotent, and all-good -- and apply to Him literally our human understanding of the categories of knowledge, power, and goodness -- is to falsify Him. We cannot say this is what He is precisely in His own essence and nature. Once we do this, it is no longer the living God of whom we speak but an idea or -- if you will -- an idol of our own making.

A God who is truly God, as Buber so wisely said, cannot be expressed but only addressed. And if we open ourselves to Him totally and unreservedly, if we penetrate beneath the surface into the depths, we shall hear Him calling to us in the most ordinary and mundane aspects of our life. We shall hear Him and, through our prayer, respond to His divine address.



A NATURALIST VIEW

by Rabbi Roland B. Gittelsohn

My two predecessors at this platform this morning began by disclaiming the official listing of their categories. Allow me to commence by acknowledging both of my categories as announced on the program, both the incorrect and the correct one.¹ I am a religious nationalist (though that's not the framework within which I speak this morning) because I believe that within Judaism religion and nationalism have ever been inexplicably intertwined. And I am a religious naturalist -- my correct identification today -- because I believe that religious naturalism has at the very least been adumbrated within traditional Judaism.

I'm delighted to share this platform with my colleagues and friends, not merely for the personal pleasure it gives me, but also, and more importantly, because it demonstrates that Judaism, historic Judaism if you please, is broad and comprehensive enough to encompass the wider spectrum of theological alternatives we are presenting from

¹The program described Rabbi Gittelsohn's position as that of a Jewish nationalist, instead of naturalist, the latter being the correct designation. -- Ed.

this platform this morning. If we accomplish little else in the course of this symposium, let it at least become immediately apparent to every person present that there is indeed room enough within our Jewish tradition for a comfortable variety of theological views, so that no member of the CCAR or UAHC need ever feel that he has been cramped or forced to comply with a very narrow kind of theological view which is uncongenial to himself.

Having said that, let me proceed at once to establish, if I possibly can within my own personal limitations and the limitations of time, just what it is that the religious naturalist within Judaism believes (a) about God and (b) about prayer. And wherein the theological emphases of the religious naturalist may differ from the other legitimate religious postures represented on this platform, the religious naturalist asserts essentially that God is to be found within nature, not acting upon nature from outside itself. Now this involves, to be sure, a much deeper, broader understanding of nature than was formerly held. Men once thought of nature as being only physical; on that premise it then became necessary for religionists to assume the existence of a spiritual entity outside nature to account for that which in human experience is manifestly transphysical or extraphysical.

From the position of the religious naturalist it is possible to think of nature itself as encompassing both the physical and the spiritual. Science has helped us achieve this newer understanding by its propensity to see existence as unified and whole. One of the deepest insights of modern science is that the old boundary lines have been breached. My good friend, Dr. George Russell Harrison, dean of the School of Science at MIT, has expressed it this way: "The more closely one examines the border line between living and un-living matter, the more is one forced to conclude that there is no boundary that is definite, no place where a breath of life comes sharply to inform matter."

To which I would add: As it is with the organic and the inorganic -- namely, that they partake one of the other with no sharp line of division -- so is it with matter and energy, so is it with the unconscious and the conscious, so is it with the physical and the spiritual. They are aspects of each other; where one happened to precede the other in time, the ultimate eventuality was potentially present from the inception. What glorious overtones modern science has thus added to the ancient watchword of our Jewish faith! As God is one, so the universe is one, life is one, man is one! That which is spiritual

in man -- his soul -- has evolved out of his protozoan beginnings no less than his spine, his hands, or his brain. And such evolutionary development was possible precisely because there was soul within the universe from its beginning. God, to the naturalist, is the Soul of the universe. God is the creative, spiritual Seed of the universe -- the Energy, the Power, the Force, the Direction, the Trust -- out of which the universe has expanded, by which the universe is sustained, in which the universe and mind find their meaning.

I must insist, with all the emphasis of which I am physically and intellectually capable -- the religious naturalist neither denies God nor diminishes Him. He simply enlarges his concept of nature enough to include God. It is not belittling God to talk of Him as a Life Force or as the creative, indefinable Soul of the universe. It is not subjecting God to subhuman form. To the contrary, it is precisely the person who insists on talking about God within a human vocabulary and in terms of human analogy who is belittling God.

Do I believe in a personal God? I must answer in a characteristically Jewish manner with a counterquestion. What do you mean by a personal God? If you mean by these words a God who can possibly be conceived in terms analogous to human person-

ality, no, I do not believe in a personal God. But if you mean a God who is the most intense personal reality of my life, functioning personally in everything I think and feel and do, then God is indeed personal for me. I say that God cannot be encompassed within the terms of personality, not because He is *less* than personality but because He is ineffably and incomprehensively *more* than personality. I refuse to imprison God, as it were, within my lexicon of human psychology and human understanding.

I can understand why my ancestors had to do that, with their less sophisticated understanding of the abstract processes of reality. Our ancestors needed a transcendent view of God because they had so limited an estimate of the universe. A cozy, self-contained little universe -- consisting of earth, sun, moon and a sprinkling of stars -- that's too small a thing to encompass the Divine. But are we not ready to recognize that ours is an incomparably different kind of universe? Where our fathers knew only of one sun, we are aware of millions. Where they believed the light which emanated from the sun reached them almost instantaneously, we know that it takes eight billion years for light to travel from one end of the universe to the other -- assuming, indeed, that the universe has ends. We know that if our earth

were reduced in scale to the size of the period punctuating this sentence -- which means to say, to a dimension of one-fiftieth of an inch -- the sun would be, on that scale, nineteen-and-a-half feet away, the next nearest star would be removed from us by one thousand and five miles, the galaxy farthest known at this moment would be eighty-one billion, eight hundred thirty million miles away. All on a scale in which the earth is represented in diameter by one-fiftieth of an inch!

Is it really an affront to God to suggest that perhaps today heaven and the heaven of heavens can contain Him? God is transcendent to humanity, yes. He is transcendent to our galaxy, yes. But I am not so sure that it is any longer necessary to think of Him as being transcendent to the entire universe of nature. Here, then, in essential summary, is the first part of what I have to say. Here is what the Jewish religious naturalist believes about God.

How does prayer fit into such a concept? Well, let me give you four alternative statements, four ways of saying pretty much the same thing in attempting to express my understanding of prayer. Prayer is my constant effort to reinforce my relationship with the Soul of the universe, thereby to emphasize and realize my spiritual potential. Prayer is a reminder of who I am, of what I can

become, and of my proper relationship to the rest of the universe, both physical and spiritual. Prayer is an inventory of the spiritual resources which nature has invested in me and a survey of how I can exploit those resources to their fullest. Prayer is a recapitulation of the spiritual laws of the universe and an encouragement to conform to those laws in my conduct.

The difference between prayer and ordinary meditation or introspection is that prayer must include a constant recognition of my relationship to something both outside and within myself, namely, to the Spiritual Core of Reality. The spiritual reserves within me are an aspect of a great spiritual reservoir outside me, even as the oxygen within my lungs at any moment is a part of the great reservoir of oxygen which constitutes the earth's atmosphere.

What, then, is the special emphasis of prayer to the Jewish religious naturalist? First, a negative emphasis. The religious naturalist vigorously, emphatically rejects the following statement made by another of our colleagues: "A religion based on prayer must picture God as a person." The religious naturalist denies that you must picture God as a person in order to pray. The religious naturalist insists, moreover, that prayer is not supposed to change God or His universe; it's rather supposed to change the person

who is praying. It's supposed to help him conform to the nature of the universe, not beg the universe or its Creator to conform to his will. Prayer is supposed to help me do God's will, not cajole God into performing my will.

This is really not so radical an idea in Judaism as some may at first suspect. God said to Moses at the shore of the Sea of Reeds when Moses turned to Him in desperation: "Why do you cry out to me? Tell the Israelites to go forward!" The Midrash, moreover, expands the terse comment reported in the Torah. It pictures God as saying: "Moses, there is a time for a long prayer and a time for a short prayer; the Egyptians are coming close -- this is the time for a short prayer." The Midrash also asserts that the Sea didn't part until after the Israelites had entered it up to their noses. God would not respond to their prayers until after they had responded themselves! In Mishnah Berachot the rabbis tell us that a man standing on a hill, watching smoke rise from his town, should not pray "May the fire not be in my house." The fire is burning already; such a prayer can have no possible effect. The same passage insists that if a man's wife is pregnant, he must not pray that the child be either a boy or a girl, because the sex of the child has already been determined.

Does prayer accomplish anything for the religious naturalist? If it is a valid prayer, of course it does! But its effect is on me, not on God. What does *ozen sho-ma-at* -- a listening ear -- mean to the religious naturalist? I can answer best in terms of an analogy: As I sat before my typewriter, preparing my notes, I became aware of the fact that I was surrounded by shelves of books. All around me was intellectual power, the accumulated wisdom of many centuries. But the books on my shelves did not offer to intercede on my behalf. They did not jump off the shelf and open themselves to the right place and help me, whether I used them or ignored them. They were there as a spiritual resource for me to activate and energize if I so chose. Similarly, God is a Spiritual Power in the universe and in myself. He operates the same way, whether I pray or not. In the life of a tree it makes no difference whether the tree is aware of God's existence; in my life it makes an immense difference, for prayer is my way to activate and utilize a Power which otherwise remains dormant.

I will conclude with the words of Dr. N. J. Berrill, a distinguished Canadian zoologist who, though not a Jew and not speaking within the lexicon of religion, has nevertheless eloquently summarized the position of religious naturalism: "We

need no faith in supernatural forces. We need only to recognize that our knowledge of the universe ... shows that it is orderly, moral and beautiful, that it is akin to intelligence, that love and hope belong in it as fully as light itself, and that the power and will of the human mind is but a symptom of reality; that we, when we are most human, most rational, most aware of love and beauty, reflect and represent the spirit of the universe." (*Man's Emerging Mind*, p. 28E, Dodd, Mead and Company.) (See also Roland B. Gittelson's *Man's Best Hope*, Random House.)



AN ORGANICIST VIEW
By Rabbi Levi A. Olan

It is good to begin by drawing a distinction between worship and prayer. Worship is the experience of God. It is Moses at the burning bush; it is Isaiah and his vision in the Temple. In both instances the experience of God sends them into life with a purpose which did not exist before. Essentially, worship is to "know before Whom thou art standing." It is neither rational nor irrational in its nature. It is unrelated to either proving logically that God exists or demonstrating empirically that He is real. The psalmist did say that "the heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament showeth His handiwork." What this ancient singer of faith was expressing was nearer to the experience of art than of reason or science.

Worship is the art of religion. It is akin to the experience a person has when listening to a Mozart symphony, viewing a painting by Rembrandt, or reading a sonnet by Shakespeare. Worship is an experience that changes a man's life. It is the art of all the arts in one. Those of us who are responsible for the worship in the synagogue are called upon to summon the best talent. When a man leaves the sanctuary after a service of worship, he needs to feel somewhat like Moses and Isaiah.

His reentrance into life should have a new meaning and purpose.

Prayer is an address to the God whom we have experienced. He must be real to us, a God who hears us and answers. It was well described as man's desperate effort to cross the bridge to God, the soul of man reaching toward the soul of God. Prayer is essentially psychological and began probably before man knew God. It began because man, as a creature in a universe which always confounds, needs help. In its earliest forms it was animistic or totemistic. But what primitive man was doing in essence is no different than what modern man does. He sought an answer to his fears and needs and an explanation of the mystery which surrounded him. We search for some help in our loneliness, in our desperation, and in our unrelieved uncertainty. There is a vast difference between the animistic prayer of early man and the declaration of the psalmist, "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want." A long and eventful cultural development occurred in the time that separated them. But whatever the form, prayer is always an attempt by man to cross the bridge between himself and the ultimate source of his being, God.

There have been three stages in human history which describe man's understanding of the God he

is seeking. In the first era, which lasted until the beginning of the modern world, man conceived of God as one who could give him whatever he needed. Rain for his crops, safety on a dangerous journey, a cure for his diseases -- these and similar needs were properly expressed to a deity who had the power to grant them. It was a view quite in keeping with man's understanding of the universe. When Isaac Newton introduced the concept of natural law, such prayers became meaningless. To ask God to set aside, in whimsical fashion, the regular operation of the laws of nature made little sense to the modern mind. The decline in the practice of prayer began with this radical change in man's understanding of the universe. It is no longer possible to ask God to grant us something which men of an earlier day found natural. We are now at the beginning of the third stage in man's relationship to God. Modern man needs a power to sustain him, to give meaning to his existence, to encourage his hopes, to respond to his ideals, his aspirations, his highest desire.

Religion, then, is above all else worship and prayer. Morality is a part of religion but it exists as well outside of it. Men may, and many do, practice the highest ethical code without experiencing or addressing God. Religion alone is the experience of a God who transforms a man's way

of life and who hears and answers man's prayers. It is an event which enables a man to do what he thought he could never do. Consider the matter of charity -- a person may say, "I've given all I can, it is all that I can afford." He may convince his friends and neighbors. He may even convince himself. But a man who has a genuine experience of God is hard pressed to say "It is all I can afford." In this terrible hour of human history when millions are hungry, hurt, exploited, and oppressed, there are very few of us who can in honesty stand before God and say "I have done all I can." This is what the experience of God does to a man. It is the difference between the secular and the religious view of life.

The God we worship, above all else, must be real. Man has known Him through a variety of ways, but in each instance He is as real as the universe itself. Being a rational creature, distinguished from other animals by his capacity to think, man cannot suddenly deny his mind when he thinks about God -- certainly not as a Jew. God must make sense. The significant fact of our era is that modern science has revealed a universe which demands a God if we are to explain it intelligently. It appears that the universe possesses three basic ingredients. It is an organism, not a machine. It is closer to the flower than to Paley's watch.

It grows. It is unfinished, incomplete. That is to say that it is characterized by life. Secondly, it is a cosmos and not a chaos. A scientist may depend upon its orderly nature. Eddington suggested that it is more like a thought. It is, if you will, mind. Finally, in its development it reveals purpose moving from lower to higher forms of existence. It is the development from the protozoan to Einstein. Scientists themselves speak of teleology, the evolution toward some goal. It is valid to suggest that the word which best suits the unification of these three characteristics of the universe -- life, mind, and purpose -- is God. In this sense, God is as real as the universe itself.

To posit God as a reality is far more satisfying to the intellect than to deny His existence. Rational man cannot escape metaphysics. The mind insists upon some explanation of reality. It is a practice as old as man himself. We may devise in error and our answers may be wrong, but man by his nature must ask questions and seek answers. This is as true of the untutored farmer as of the trained philosopher. Thus it is that modern man may proclaim the reality of God as the more satisfying answer to his search for the meaning of the universe and his life in it. The God we experience in worship does not insult the mind. God is, and He is real.

Having said this, we face the matter of the nature of the real God. Here men differ today as they always have in the past. Moses was told, "My face thou canst not see." The psalmist cried, "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me." The poet says "I have not seen Thee, yet will I tell Thy praise." The Bible speaks of God walking in the garden in the cool of the day. We being human, language limits us and we eventually resort to anthropomorphisms. Maimonides cautioned us that when we describe God, and we must try, we must be aware that we are wrong. Yet try we must.

There is one traditional understanding of God which requires a reexamination. Men have generally described Him as being omnipotent and omniscient. There is much in our experience which justifies a doubt about these characteristics of God. It appears that instead of the absolute view of deity, we are nearer to the truth if we view Him as nonabsolute. In the first place, the evolutionary nature of the universe and of life suggests that the world is imperfect, incomplete. It is true that the Bible records that on the sixth day God finished making the world. But the world is not finished at all, it is terribly incomplete. Furthermore, it reveals in its long evolutionary process many blunders, cruelties, and much waste. A perfect, all-powerful God ought to do better than that!

In fact, there is no need for God to be absolute in power to be God. God is better understood as a becoming even as is the universe and man. God struggles against evil and learns to overcome it. Man can help God and God can help man. They are co-workers in the building of the kingdom. Man needs God and God needs man. The tradition does hint at some limitations in God's power. "Everything is in the power of heaven," said the rabbis, "except the fear of heaven."

The crux of the theological problem is the meaning of evil. If God is all-powerful and all-loving at one and the same time, why is there such senseless cruelty, useless and meaningless suffering? If God has the power to prevent it, why does He permit it? It will not do to answer that faith is a mystery which man cannot understand. The God faith for modern man must be more rational than that! If God could have helped Anne Frank and six million helpless Jews, but for some mysterious reason which I cannot understand did not choose to do so, it is not enough to answer "Have faith." An omnipotent God who loves without reserve must do better than that.

Our problem, again, is language and symbols. Men once conceived of God as a king because in their experience the king had power over life and death and was the source of their blessings or

curses. He could do anything and everything. So God became the King of Kings. But this image is irrelevant in our day. The image of God as king is far from appealing. Perhaps we would be better served by the old Jewish idea of God as father. A father is both inside the child and outside him. He is, if you will, imminent and transcendent at one and the same time. In our childhood father was all-knowing, all-powerful; he could do everything. As we mature the image changes; father no longer knows everything and can do everything. Yet, he is probably closer and nearer to us, more meaningful and more necessary than when we were children. Analogies are always difficult, and even dangerous. A father is a human figure and God is not human. It is impossible to use language without falling into error when we try to picture God. Yet, if pictorialize we must, the figure of a father who loves us and cannot always do what he would love to do for us comes closer to our experience of God than that of an absolute monarch. A father needs his children and they need him. Modern men can more readily worship God viewed as father than as king.

WHAT MAKES PRAYER JEWISH?

INTRODUCTION

Is there anything that makes prayer and worship in Judaism unique, an entity in itself? Has Judaism a form of worship and prayer or some special content that makes it different from Christianity? Unquestionably the liturgies and prayer of the Western world originated with the prayers and worship of Israel. The Book of Psalms offered all men a pattern for prayer and devotion. Jeremiah, with his soul searching and seeking raised prayer to one of the noblest, if not the most noble of man's expressions. The scribes and rabbis originated the synagogue as a house of prayer and worship which in turn became the prototype for the church.

But is this uniqueness limited only to historical precedence? Christianity has in many respects radically transformed the worship of the synagogue. At its center is the figure of Jesus, and his "sacramental presence" inspires the whole of Christian worship. Evelyn Underhill, in her classic work *Worship*, has incisively stated the crucial role of Jesus in Christian prayer. She states, "All the historical events and conditions of Christ's life ... mediate God, disclosing some divine truth or aspect of divine love to us. Here lies the importance of the Christian year with its recurrent memorials of the birth, the manhood, the death, the triumph of Jesus as the framework of the church's ordered devotion."

Jewish prayer has generally rejected any mediation between man and God, and the worship of the Jews reflects the religious experience of the Jewish people.

But what exactly does make prayer Jewish? What is it, if anything, that makes it unique?

THE JEWISH ELEMENTS OF PRAYER
by Rabbi Bernard J. Bamberger

More years ago than I care to count, I was asked by a Christian lady -- a kindly person speaking in all innocence -- "Do you Jews have the Psalms too?" The incident came back to mind when I received the invitation to speak on the subject "What Makes Prayer Jewish?" My first reaction is to ask, "Is there any other kind of prayer but Jewish prayer, especially in our Western world?"

Certainly Christian prayer was derived chiefly from Jewish sources and models, from biblical prayers, especially the Psalms, and from the service of the synagogue. Several Christian scholars have written books on the Jewish background of Christian liturgy, and last spring I listened to a fascinating talk by a learned Benedictine priest on the relation of the Catholic Mass to our Passover Seder.

It seems to me that Christian prayer is distinguished from Jewish prayer chiefly by the presence of distinctive Christian ideas: the divinity and incarnation of Jesus, the trinity, the power of the clergy to give absolution, the concept of sacraments, and so on. But as regards general intent and purpose, as well as form and style, I have found no sharp distinction between

Jewish and Christian prayer. Both include elements of adoration and praise, of aspiration and striving for divine nearness, of confession of sin and petition for material and spiritual benefits. In brief, it appears to me that the rather fully developed system of prayer which Judaism already possessed was adopted by the Christian churches and modified fundamentally only insofar as they added to their liturgies concepts and beliefs that are alien to Judaism.

This is admittedly an impression based on limited knowledge. It could be established firmly -- or corrected -- only through very elaborate research. Such an undertaking would require a reexamination of the entire area of Jewish prayer, including no less than the following divisions:

1. Biblical prayer. Here it would be necessary to compare the surviving prayers, hymns, and rituals of other ancient peoples, especially the former neighbors of Israel, and to note resemblances and differences.

2. The basic non-biblical prayers of the synagogue liturgy. The composition of these prayers began some centuries before the Christian era, and additions and changes continued for a considerable period. The oldest Palestinian prayers were revised extensively after the destruction of the Temple in the year 70 and were

still further rewritten in Babylonia. Our *Union Prayerbook* version, that is to say, a large part of what appears in Hebrew in our prayer book, is derived from the Babylonian tradition.

3. *Piyyutim* -- that is, poems and hymns in rhymed Hebrew, often in strict meter as well, dating from the early Middle Ages and onward. An example is *Adon Olom*.

4. Insertions and additions from cabalistic, mystical sources, dating from about the fourteenth to the seventeenth centuries. A large part of these accretions have been dropped from modern Orthodox prayer books; the one instance we have kept -- and it's hardly typical -- is the song *Lecho Dodi*.

5. Prayers composed for private devotion. A number of such personal prayers -- in Hebrew -- are given in the Talmud. More voluminous are the so-called *techinnos* (supplications) in Yiddish-Deutsch intended chiefly for the use of women. According to the late Professor Mann, similar prayers in Arabic, Persian, Byzantine, and Greek exist in manuscript; and no doubt they may be found in other languages as well.

6. Modern compositions for public and private worship, chiefly but not exclusively the products of our Reform movement.

This vast body of material would have to be ex-

amined and analyzed, and then compared with extensive samples of the Christian liturgies -- Roman, Orthodox, Anglican, and Protestant -- and with the rich devotional literature of Christianity. It would also have to be compared with the prayers of Islam and of the non-biblical religions of the Far East. Only after such prolonged and intensive research could we arrive at authoritative conclusions as to whether there is anything distinctive about Jewish prayer, and in what the distinctiveness consists. Such a definitive study would require years of effort by many competent scholars.

Our purposes are, however, more modest and perhaps more practical. We would like to make our own worship more meaningful and rewarding. As we consider various means to this, we may profitably inquire whether the things we have been doing in the last century or two, and the proposals now made for further change are in line with the traditions of Jewish worship or not. For this purpose I shall attempt a brief description, not of Jewish prayer but of Jewish public worship in its pre-modern form or forms. We must proceed in this fashion because it is precisely our modernizations that may be called into question as not authentically Jewish. On the other hand, such a description does not impose on us a rule from

which we dare not depart. Innovations and borrowings made by our predecessors or by us may be desirable or necessary, even though there is no warrant for them in earlier Jewish traditions, but we should understand clearly what we are doing.

1. The fact that we are concentrating on public prayer is, first of all, fully justified by the great emphasis laid in our sources on congregational worship. Though (with a few omissions) the standard prayers could be recited privately, the preferable choice is to pray with a *minyan*. The "acceptable time for prayer," according to the Talmud, is when the congregation is assembled; and one who habitually absents himself from public worship is characterized as "a bad neighbor."

Moreover, with few exceptions, the prayers are in the first person plural. We address "our God and God of our fathers." The same forms are used whether the prayers are recited in the congregation or privately; and it is my impression that this is not merely a matter of routine. Each individual identifies himself with, and prays in the name of, the Congregation of Israel, which is not only a sociological reality, but also a religious concept. In congregational prayer, of course, Christians likewise use the "we" form; but in most cases, it appears, "we" simply means the total

of the persons present. In Christianity, the theological equivalent to the Congregation of Israel is the Church, which is generally referred to in the third person, as "she" rather than "we."

2. Public worship took place not only on Sabbath and festivals, but every day -- morning, afternoon, and evening. It should be noted that when these daily prayers were first instituted, the order of prayer was quite brief, and could be recited without rushing in a few minutes. On Sabbath and festivals the service was more elaborate, but then the congregation was not in a hurry.

3. The service was emphatically one of "audience participation." The average congregant came not to listen, but to "davven" or "ohr." As I understand it, the Yemenite Jews dispense with a regular leader of prayer and chant the entire service in unison. Elsewhere, any layman could act as *sheliach zibbur* (spokesman of the congregation); the rabbi was not debarred from this function, but did not assume it regularly. The office of *hazzan* in the sense of musical soloist and official prayer-leader emerged gradually during the Middle Ages; and there were many complaints against those cantors who prolonged the service with vocal displays.

Two remarks in this connection. The clear distinction between the parts of the service that are

spoken and those that are sung did not exist in the pre-modern synagogue, since it would have been hard to draw precise lines between fully developed melody, modal chant, and a singsong close to that of ordinary speech.

Second, the call for "more pageantry" sometimes heard among us today is out of harmony with Jewish tradition. The term pageant, according to the dictionary, refers to a presentation made by one group before a larger group of onlookers. The processions on Simchat Torah are not pageantry, because everyone took part (except, of course, women). In the pageantry of the Catholic Church, gorgeously-robed priests played a central role, and the others observed.

4. From the start, instruction was an important element in synagogue worship. The custom of reading scriptural passages and expounding them in a discourse was borrowed from the Synagogue by the Church. In addition, the traditional prayer book included some biblical and talmudic selections, so that daily worship would provide at least a minimum of study.

In practice, the very success of Jewish education tended to make these provisions less effective. To people well drilled in knowledge of Scripture the ceremonial reading of the Torah became a rather dull interlude, enlivened only by the competition for *alices* and the pledges made by the participants. Moreover, as the service grew

in length and on the other hand opportunities for intensive study were provided, regular preaching disappeared from many communities and was restored only in recent years.

It is worth noting that the instructional element was generally prominent in the Jewish sermon. Jewish preachers did not omit the moralistic and inspirational element, just as many Christian preachers provided their hearers with intellectual substance. But the educational stress was generally more marked in Jewish preaching. In some medieval collections of sermons, headings distinguished between the *d'rashah*, a discourse that was primarily an exposition of biblical and rabbinic texts, and *tokachat musar*, an exhortation to repentance and to righteousness.

Such, then, as I see them, are the most striking features of classic Jewish worship: the emphasis on the congregation as the praying unity, the fact that it was a several-times-a-day practice, the active participation of the worshippers, and the connection with study of the Torah.

But in fairness, I must add one more point before concluding. I have repeatedly noted that Christian worship borrowed much from Jewish worship; but we have also borrowed from the Church. I refer not only to what the Reform movement adopted in recent times from Christian practice:

the organ, choral music, confirmation and so on. In pre-modern times, customs whose Christian origins are plain were introduced into the traditional Jewish patterns of worship -- in particular, the various rites and prayers of intercession for the souls of the dead, such as *Yizkor* and *El Male Rachamim*. All this is peculiarly relevant to our main theme, the question of the qualities that make prayer Jewish. For a fairly good case could be made for the view that these intercessory practices are not in accord with the doctrines and the spirit of Judaism -- and yet these same practices have taken a deep hold upon the Orthodox community! It is true that a few scattered antecedents for this sort of thing can be found in earlier sources, and yet there is abundant evidence that the intercessory prayers, as well as the custom of *Yahrzeit*, were modeled on Catholic procedures. The question placed before me is a complicated one; I regret that I have been unable to give you a plainer and simpler answer.

A RESPONSE

by Rabbi Joseph Klein

Since coming to this convention, at least half a dozen colleagues, taking note of the title of this discussion, have come up to me to offer their sage counsel and advice. "What makes prayer Jewish? The answer is quite obvious," they say, "a praying Jew."

The title, "What Makes Prayer Jewish?" is an intriguing one. Whatever prompted or motivated it, the immediate reaction is to assume that the framer of this title also had in back of his mind the opposite question -- What is there about Jewish prayer or worship that is not necessarily Jewish?

First, we ought to understand that prayer is a universal human phenomenon and a natural form of human expression. Prayer is man's attempt to speak to God and to relate himself with the source of his existence or the power that controls his destiny. In its most primitive and elementary form it is an outcry of pain or a call for help. Even the cry of a hungry infant seeking the attention of the parent may be regarded as prayer.

Some prayers are motivated by fear, others by sickness and pain, others by feelings of guilt, and still others by gratitude. Often,

without being fully aware of what we are saying, we will give voice to such exclamations as "Thank God!" or "God forbid!" or "God help me!" Utterances of this kind are just as valid as expressions of prayer as are the more formalized types found in a prayer book. When, as we are told in Scripture, Miriam, the sister of Moses, was stricken with leprosy, Moses, in an attempt to intercede for her, uttered nothing more than the terse phrase: *El na, r'fa na la --* "O God, heal her!" The rabbis in the Talmud were quick to point out that there were times when prayers could be long and other times when, as in this instance, they represented the height of brevity, but were no less legitimate because they were so brief.

There are people who say they have no need for prayer, that they can get along well enough without it. Such people are either liars or fools. No one has ever gone through life without being afraid, without giving expression to wants and needs beyond his own human power to achieve. Every wishful thought is a prayer, as is every verbalization of human emotion. When people say they have no need for prayer they may have in mind the formalized type of worship found in a synagogue or a church. It is this which they reject, more often out of arrogance rather than

conviction. But in truth, prayer is as much a part of their life as the air they breathe. They are just too insensitive to the realities of life to be aware of this. Let the air be shut off from them for just a few moments, or let them be denied food or drink for a short space of time, it will not be long before they find themselves in the posture of legitimate petitional prayer.

There is a universal kind of prayer that is more mature than the petitional variety and this is gratitude or thanksgiving. The air we breathe, the water we drink, the food we eat are not of our own making. Without them we could not live. Whether we believe these fundamental necessities for human existence are the creations of God or of some other power in nature that causes them to exist, no one who is conscious of his dependence on these gifts can be so callous as not to want to give thanks for the things that sustain life and for life itself. Only a boor in the extreme degree would resist expressing gratitude for the blessings that come to him daily.

If prayer is so natural and universal a human phenomenon, what is there about the prayer of Jews to make it Jewish? How is Jewish prayer to be distinguished from that of Christians or Moslems, of Hindus or Shintoists? In some respects there is no distinction at all. A Christian and a Jew

may read the identical psalm. A rabbi offering an invocation or benediction at a public gathering may use words and ideas that could be used just as validly by a Christian clergyman under similar circumstances.

One may argue from this that all prayer is the same and motivated by the same human impulses and that if there are distinctions between so-called Jewish prayer and prayer in general they are artificially contrived and have little importance.

And yet, there definitely is Jewish prayer and it is different from other forms of worship. Rabbi Bamberger stated in his paper: "It seems to me that Christian prayer is distinguished from Jewish prayer chiefly by the presence of distinctive Christian ideas: the divinity and incarnation of Jesus, the trinity, the power of the clergy to give absolution, the concept of sacraments, and so on. But as regards general intent and purpose, as well as form and style, I have found no sharp distinction between Jewish and Christian prayer."

I cannot disagree with Rabbi Bamberger's assertion that theological differences distinguish between Jewish and Christian forms of worship. This is self-evident. But I cannot go along with his statement that no sharp distinction exists with regard to general intent and purpose as well

as form and style. By its own admission Christianity has borrowed much of its liturgical materials from ancient Judaism. But in their development over the past 18 or 19 centuries the two religions have moved in different directions. Broad similarities still remain just as similarities continue to exist in the general nature of the two religions, but the specifics are decidedly different. For example, Christians do not pray in Hebrew, Jews do.

Of course, it is conceivable that in present-day Israel a Christian group may undertake to conduct its services in Hebrew. Perhaps this has already happened. But this would represent the unusual and extraordinary and could happen nowhere else in the Christian world. But with Jews, no matter where they lived or what vernacular they spoke, prayer was always prayer in the Hebrew tongue, notwithstanding the fact that the Talmud makes it permissible for one to recite even the *Shema* in the language he best understands. There have been some instances in which Aramean prayers found their way into the Jewish liturgy. The *Kaddish*, *Kol Nidre* and *Y'kum Purkon* are notable examples. But then, Aramaic was always looked upon as a tongue with a quality of holiness almost akin to that of Hebrew, possibly because two of the books of the Bible are written in Aramaic as

is much of the talmudic literature. Essentially, however, the Jewish prayer book has always been a Hebrew prayer book, despite the occasional presence of an Aramean passage. In my own mind I am convinced that the Hebrew language would have disappeared centuries ago, and with it the Jewish people and Judaism, were it not for the fact that throughout the ages it was the normal and almost universal practice among Jews to engage in Hebrew prayer three times daily. Because the Hebrew word was in the mouth of the Jew constantly, he had the capacity to engage fully in that other fundamental of Judaism -- the study of Torah.

In the Reform movement we have not given the same emphasis to prayer in Hebrew that our forebears did. We have made a radical departure from tradition by putting a larger stress upon prayer in the vernacular, mainly on the ground that our people no longer know Hebrew. I am not opposed to prayer in the vernacular. I feel that a notable contribution has been made to Jewish liturgical expression through many of the beautifully worded English prayers found in our *Union Prayer-book*. Nor do I object to the translation of classic Hebrew prayers into English or any other tongue. This too is right and even a necessity in our times. But I think it is wrong for people in our movement to take the attitude, as many do,

that Hebrew prayer can be dispensed with. I feel strongly that this generation of Jews has as much obligation to keep the tongue of the prophets alive as did our ancestors.

It is not true that prayers in Hebrew have no meaning. They have meaning when they are familiar to people. How many of us would want to dispense with the reading of the *Kaddish* in Hebrew -- or rather, Aramaic -- substituting for it the English version. There is too much sentiment and emotion tied in with the manner in which we now read the *Kaddish* or the *Shema*, or other prayers and responses with which we are familiar, to want to give this up.

For Hebrew prayers to have meaning to worshippers they must be used in synagogue worship. If not employed constantly they will never be learned. I think the manner in which our *Union Prayerbook* is constructed militates against more frequent use of Hebrew prayer. I have never been able to understand why some of the most beautiful examples of Hebrew liturgy have been left out of the prayer book, though fine translations of the Hebrew text are retained. For example, there is not a single service held during the year in which we do not include the Adoration. But why print only the English translation? Why not also the original Hebrew version, the *Aleynu*, which is no

less magnificent than its English counterpart and is probably even more so. But as things now stand, we must wait from one Yom Kippur to the next before we encounter the *Aleynu*.

What makes prayer Jewish? There is a structure and order in the Jewish prayer book that makes it different from any other system of liturgy. We call the prayer book a *siddur*, which means arrangement or order. That structure and order is at least 2,000 years old and possibly older. Jewish prayers are not haphazardly strung together. Every service of worship is organized along definite lines. There is the Shema and the benedictions surrounding it; there is the *Amidah*; there are introductory prayers and concluding prayers, and each item, small or large, has its proper place in the structure of worship. The *Union Prayerbook* attempts for the most part to retain the traditional order of the service, but here and there one finds outright carelessness. This is especially true of the five Sabbath Eve services which resemble a hodge-podge. I do not mean to be critical of the method now employed of offering alternative Friday night services. There is obviously some justification for variety in worship. But at least one of those services should have been complete in the sense of including all the traditional prayers which the Reform

movement has made officially a part of its liturgy. It would not have lengthened the service in any way and would have satisfied those who value tradition.

Rabbi Bamberger has already alluded to the theological content of Jewish prayer and to the strong emphasis every service of worship puts on the study of Torah. There is no need for me to repeat what he has so well said except, perhaps, to point out that Jewish prayer not only stresses study of Torah, but the performance of *mitzvot* also. The prayer book was a constant daily reminder of the Jew's obligation to fulfill the commandments of Scripture. *Torah, mitzvot, chukim u-mishpatim otanu limad'ta. Al ken Adonai eloheynu, b'shochveynu uv'kumeynu nasiach b'chukecha v'niemach b'divrey toratecha* -- 'Thou hast taught us Torah, commandments, statutes and ordinances. Therefore, O Lord, our God, at our lying down and our rising up we will meditate on Thy statutes and rejoice in the words of Thy Torah.'

It was through the daily recitation of prayer -- morning, afternoon and evening, at mealtime, at bedtime, or in connection with any special experience one encountered -- that the Jew was kept constantly aware of the presence of God in every action he performed, in every thought he ex-

pressed. A Jew didn't have to believe in God. He knew God. It is only those who stop praying or who have never really experienced prayer who must struggle with their conscience and answer for themselves as to whether or not there is a God in whom to believe or to whom one should pray. It is here that Reform Judaism has its greatest weakness, the fact that it has done so little to make of prayer a daily habit, if not in the synagogue, then at least privately. It has not even offered adequate materials to enable a Jew who might want to *daven* in the privacy of his home to so engage himself.

It is clear that I have attempted to answer the question, "What makes prayer Jewish?" by putting a special emphasis on tradition. I suppose I am a traditionalist by nature. My approach to Reform is in terms of how best to preserve the values that have come down to us from the ancient past. The prayers of our people are for the most part ancient prayers; the commandments are ancient commandments. I recognize that modern and up-to-date techniques must often be employed to make the ancient values meaningful to people, whether this applies to a synagogue service or any other area of Jewish religious experience. But I am not willing to sacrifice or discard the ancient values just for the sake of modernism. To me,

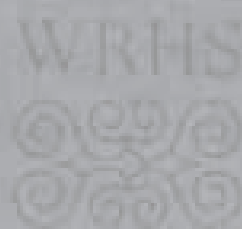
Judaism is important, not Reform. If reforms in external matters help to preserve tradition and make it more meaningful to our people, then reforms and modifications are valuable. But if they destroy the heart of Jewish tradition, then it were better that they had never been introduced.

What makes prayer Jewish? It is prayer itself which makes prayer Jewish. We are a people of prayer. The very essence of our being is the worship of God. *Hakol kol yaakov* -- "The voice is the voice of Jacob." (Gen. 27:22.) The only real strength the descendants of Jacob have ever had is the power of a voice raised in prayer. With that voice in constant use we have outlived all other peoples and have preserved our ancient traditions and ideals and have brought into the world the great prophetic teachings that they might be shared by the rest of mankind. But when the voice of Jacob is silenced -- the voice of prayer -- then all we have lived for and all we have achieved disintegrates into nothingness.

In the story of the battle of the Israelites with the Amalekites we are told: "And it came to pass, when Moses lifted up his hand, that Israel prevailed; and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed." (Exod. 17:11.) Commenting on this verse, the Talmud asks: "And were the hands of Moses engaged in battle?" (Obviously, they were

raised in a posture of prayer.) "This is to tell you," the Talmud continues, "that every time Israel looked upward and turned their hearts in prayer to their Father in Heaven, they became strong; and when they did not, they fell." (Rosh Hashanah 29a.)

I doubt if anyone can dispute the truth of this talmudic observation. The very strength of the Jewish people, and its capacity to survive all the vicissitudes of time and fortune and political upheaval, lies in the power of prayer. And when prayer is no longer a fundamental of Jewish life, inevitably both our people and faith will surely fall and eventually disappear.



A RESPONSE
by Rabbi Leonard S. Kravitz

To answer the question "What makes prayer Jewish?" we should know what we mean by prayer and what we mean by Jewish. Prayer, seen in the most neutral terms, expresses some kind of relation between man and God, some kind of outpouring from man to God, and some kind of response from God. Prayer presumes some kind of conceptual system which will contain ideas about God, about man, and about their relation. There are many kinds of prayer, for the word "prayer" also refers to a species of literature which emanates from different religious traditions. Coming from differing traditions, systems of prayer texts will differ. Yet there will be certain common elements -- each prayer text (or collection of texts) will reflect the history and outlook of the religious tradition of which it is part, each prayer text will justify itself and the existence of those using it. Thus the Mass will reflect differing aspects of the Catholic tradition. Moreover, the worshipper at the Mass, reciting the Creed, justifies the institution of the Church and, therefore, the form of prayer which he is using.

If we ask what do we mean by Jewish prayer, then the first and simplest answer we can give is

that Jewish prayer is the form of prayer which the Jewish people use, which they recognize as specific to themselves and which others recognize as specific to them. If we ask what is the nature of that specificity, then knowing that as every prayer text must reflect its past and justify its present, so Jewish prayer will reflect the history of the Jewish people who have used it and justify its own understanding of the nature of prayer, i.e., the linkage between God and man. Jewish prayer will reflect a particular set of ideas concerning God and man and their relation. If we now turn to the collections of Jewish prayer, we may note a particular formulation which is found in all prayer books, past and present. That particular formulation is the *Shema*. When we say *Shema Yisrael Adonai Elohenu Adonai Echaā*, we at one stroke affirm the existence of the Jewish people, for Israel must exist to hear, and express a particular concept of the quality of this people -- they are the people who feel the Lord is "our God," and assert the nature of that God, "The Lord is One."

(Jewish tradition saw in the assertion "The Lord is One" something implicit about the nature of mankind; in the Messianic future, the God we Jews affirm as "our God" would be affirmed as the One God of Mankind.)

The fact that we proclaim the *Shema* in Hebrew suggests that we need a language linked to the Jewish people to express a uniquely held Jewish value.

If we look at the benedictions associated with the *Shema*, which are the earliest non-biblical elements of the prayer book, which were found with some modifications in all prayer books, and which are found with other modifications in all present prayer books, we find an expansion of the views of God and man and their relation which the *Shema* affirmed. God is One who not only controls nature by "forming light and creating darkness" and who "brings on the evening twilight, in wisdom opens the gates, and in understanding changes the time and shifts the season," but He also speaks to man, and to be specific, to a particular group of men, the Jewish people. Thus the benediction which precedes the *Shema* states that God "with infinite love ... hast given us Torah, commandments, statutes, and ordinances...." The world is governed by natural law; the Jew is directed by Torah. To the One God who manifests Himself in law, the Jew responds in love. Therefore, the words which follow the *Shema* are -- "And thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with all thy heart, with all thy soul and with all thy might...."

The benediction which completes the rubric

known as "The *Shema* and its benedictions" adds yet another dimension to the concepts of God and man. If the Jew, if man will love God, if he will live by God's law that he becomes as law abiding as the stars in their course, then God in turn will respond to him. God will provide redemption like the redemption He worked as of old and, therefore, we recite *Baruch atah Adonai ga-al Yisrael* -- "Praised art Thou who hast redeemed Israel." Though the grammatical form is the past, the intent is the future. Hence, the *Union Prayerbook* translates the Hebrew phrase as "Redeemer of Israel."

The *Shema* and its accompanying benedictions present a Jewish theology which makes Jewish prayer possible. The One God, Creator of the world, is concerned about the acts of men, and specifically certain acts of certain men, Jews. Specific concepts of law, love, and hope are here intertwined to create a specific structure of belief which serves as the background against which the Jew will pray.

Any prayer which contains ideas congruent with this structure will be Jewish prayer. If such a prayer be attractive enough, it will be accepted by enough Jews to enter the prayer book to join those prayers which the Jewish people and their leaders have already adopted.

Any prayer which contains ideas opposed to the ideas of the *Shema* will not be considered Jewish prayer. Hence, we read in the *Mishnah* that were one to be reciting the *Tefillah*, the prayer *par excellence*, and repeat the word *Modim* (in English, the phrase "We gratefully acknowledge") he is to be stopped, for such a repetition was considered to be the affirmation of dualism. Dualism, however, denied the ideological basis of the Jewish people as the people in covenant, through the Torah, to the One God; therefore, prayer which contained dualistic elements could not be allowed as Jewish prayer. Similarly, to pray for the destruction of the Jewish people, or to pray for the disappearance of the Torah, or to pray to or for any person or thing which symbolized either or both would not be Jewish prayer.

Moreover, we find the opinion that any prayer which seeks to change that which has already taken place is not proper prayer. It is useless prayer since it would entail a break in the natural order suggested by the first benediction of the *Shema*. Thus the *Mishnah* states that a man may not pray that his unborn child be a boy rather than a girl for the sex of the fetus is already determined, nor may he, upon hearing the cry of fire, pray that the fire not be in his house, for it already is where it is.

Just as the content of Jewish prayer is distinctive, so too is the language of Jewish prayer. The expressions and the imagery reflect the history of the Jewish people; so too does the very language of the prayer. Up to the present day, no matter where Jews lived, no matter what language Jews spoke, they prayed in Hebrew. Hebrew was for them *lashon haKodesh*, the Holy Language, the language related to sanctity. Though in theory even the main elements of the liturgy, the *Shema* and the *Tefillah*, might be recited in any language, in practice they were recited in Hebrew. This is not to say that prayers were not composed in the vernacular. However, such prayers entered the liturgy as introductions or as additions to the service. Even when Reform Judaism came upon the scene, and discussion developed as to the amount of the vernacular to add to the service, the first rabbinical conference to deal with the issue (Frankfort on the Main, July 15-28, 1845) ruled that while in theory Hebrew was not necessary, still in practice, the *Shema* and the *Tefillah* (with the modifications which Reform Judaism brought to them) were still to be recited in Hebrew.

A glance through the Sabbath morning service in the *Union Prayerbook* will indicate to us that it is laid out to allow for conformity with the dictate of the Frankfort Conference.

One of the participants to that conference, Ludwig Phillipson, explained the differing use of the vernacular and Hebrew as related to the difference between private and communal prayer. Private prayer, which he described as the out-pouring of the heart, should be, he felt, in the vernacular. Communal prayer, which he described as a stimulus, a method of instruction, and a means of expression of faith, should be in Hebrew.

Again, looking at the *Union Prayerbook* we may note that those prayers which are in English are either modern meditations (and thus are private prayers) or derive from traditional sources that were originally not part of the synagogue service, but were to be recited at home (and thus were prayers recited privately).

I would carry what we have learned about communal and private prayer still further. I would say that wherever prayer is or is meant to be the expression of the Jewish people, as when it is published in a Jewish prayer book, as far as is possible it should be in Hebrew. That possibility should be linked to the level of Hebrew knowledge which should be increased to meet that goal. The individual Jew in his specific situation cannot be expected to pour out the needs of his heart in Hebrew; he should develop his here-and-now prayer in the vernacular. However, when the in-

individual Jew prays with other Jews, when he prays with the congregation, he should pray in Hebrew.

What makes prayer Jewish? Let us hear what the *Shema* tells us: "The history of a unique people, a particular vision of God, and a specific language make Jewish prayer Jewish."

WRHS



THE LANGUAGE OF PRAYER

INTRODUCTION

The *Union Prayerbook* is the liturgy of Reform Judaism. It has served as a unifying force for Liberal Judaism in America throughout its history. It has expressed the feelings, longings, and hopes which have guided Reform Jews in their search for religious understanding. It has given us the language through which we can express our desire for peace and justice and our yearning for God.

Today, however, murmurings are heard and voices have risen on all sides seeking change -- not merely changes in the prayer book, but in the very modes of worship. Some seek to fulfill these aspirations through dramatics and art, others through poetry and contemporary music, still others through services of study and education. But the question they all ask is what should be the language of prayer in our contemporary world?

A MORE TRADITIONAL AND RADICAL PRAYER BOOK
by Rabbi Arnold Jacob Wolf

I hope to follow Rabbi Silver since his paper is considerably more precise and important than mine and because it represents a position which responds to the needs of a quite different congregation -- a large, established congregation in a central city, a congregation with traditions, stature, and dignity. I am involved in a quite opposite situation, with a new congregation, in the suburbs, with no traditions, and with only the style of experiment -- perhaps experiment without reservation in the field of liturgy as in every other field of congregational enterprise.

Just to tell you a little bit about this situation, last week two members of my congregation -- two of the most able and informed members -- came to me and suggested that our recent experiments in liturgy were heretical and that they were written from a point of view which was decidedly illegitimate in the Jewish tradition of prayer. They were surprised to learn that I agreed; it seemed to me that some of our recent work skirted very close to the borders of heresy if it did not actually cross those borders. And the reason I was able to say this was that I did not prepare this service as I have not prepared any of our

religious services. In that, I think, consists largely the innovation. It seems to me that the problem of liturgy, the problem of the language of prayer is not one in which rabbis alone have a stake. Whatever is decided will be decided ultimately by congregations in which rabbis participate, perhaps even in a leading way -- though I suspect not always in a leading way -- and in which all of the people become well enough informed to produce a new kind of liturgy for the Reform movement. Now this will lead to excesses, and I have no illusions that we have not ourselves produced some of these excesses. A British rabbi asked for our material; when we sent it, he wrote me back a long letter in which he said he thought our religious experiments were "bizarre," to quote his word. And they certainly are, but I think they come out of a great need, a great disappointment, and a great longing. It is about this need, this disappointment, and this longing that I want to speak.

The classical Reformers, whose last generation produced the present volume of the *Union Prayer-book*, made some serious mistakes. One of their mistakes was that their criterion for worship was esthetic and not religious. They wanted, and they said they wanted, a beautiful service -- and a beautiful service is exactly what we now have: a

service in which nothing wrong ever happens, in which nothing un-beautiful is ever permitted, in which no spontaneity, that is to say bizarre excess, is ever welcome, a service in which decorum rules and overrules every possibility of creativity and even of devotion. The esthetic criterion is incompatible with the religious criterion. You cannot have it both ways. And a "beautiful" service, *so ipso*, is not a service at all, or so it seems to me.

Their second mistake was that they adopted Christian criteria, largely Protestant. They wanted a service in which things happened in a certain way that were appropriate to the Christian church, and are inappropriate to the synagogue; and Jewish authenticity, in many crucial cases, thereby went by the boards because of their Christianizing tendencies. What this means in practice is a professionalization of the service: the rabbi, or now the cantor and the rabbi produce the service for the people. They *do* the service, and they do it because things must not go wrong; and if you leave it to laymen, somebody is going to say the wrong word or drop the wrong note or the singing will be off key or perhaps the service itself will be a little too frightening. And so it is highly professionalized -- rabbis with specially trained voices to train out of them any hint

of spontaneity or sincerity; laymen excluded from the act of worship or told to respond in some mechanical way; music which is built systematically for the production of beauty and not for the production of sincerity; sermonics instead of prayer because the sermon is really the center of the Reform Jewish worship -- prayer becomes something you have to do before you get to the sermon and you do it as rapidly and as cleanly as you can. Now all of these sins, and I think they are sins, are sins of tactics, but there is also to be found in the *Union Prayerbook* an extraordinary theological naiveté. The generation that produced the *Union Prayerbook* accepted a vision of God and of Messianic future which strikes us as remote. For example, they believed in a personal God but they could not believe in the immortality of the body or the resurrection of the body, and they could not believe in the Messiah as anything more than progress.

For us the problem is no longer theologically what it was for them. They believed in God, but they couldn't imagine God would work miracles. For us miracles are easier to believe in than God. For us it is easier to believe in the resurrection of the body than it is in a personal God. The God issue comes to us at a much different level of

existential significance. And so their notion of the mission of Israel is for us neither right nor wrong; it is simply old-fashioned, and the chosenness of Israel must come to us mediated in a quite different way. Therefore, theologically, and also practically, the prayer book of the future must be both very much more traditional and very much more radical than the *Union Prayerbook*. The *Union Prayerbook* is a noble failure and perhaps all that we shall ever produce are noble failures, but it is a noble failure which speaks to another generation than ours, and beyond which we must go -- not by despising or denigrating it, but by going back to a tradition that was not available to that generation and by going forward to a future which is also only available to our time and to the times that follow us. Now we've begun to do this in the wrong way. We've begun to talk about meaningful services, meaningful services being our version of esthetics. A service is judged by what it does to you, by how much energy, how much *grisson* it produces in you; that's why the camp services are always better than the synagogue services, because God is somewhere out in the woods where He is not available in the synagogue. But this is equally a trap. To judge the service by how people feel is as wrong as to judge by how people see. The service must be judged by

quite other standards transcending both the former. And so we have now the dichotomies between, let us say, the cold and the warm service. The cold service is the cathedral service in which many people come and sit quietly and watch a majestically cool performance. The warm service is a small or *hemish* service in which they talk animatedly to each other briefly before pastry. But the real service is neither cold nor warm, that is to say, it is neither stuffy nor sentimental, it is authentic in a way which this dichotomy does not explain. Gimmickry, now widely prevalent throughout our movement, cannot save the service no matter how many special Sabbaths or special people or special music or special anything we have. The fact that the service must be special to mean something means that the service itself is the wrong service. Creativity, and I speak from a congregation which boasts of its creativity, is not enough. While I think it is important to have the creative expression of many people, creativity itself, unless it is serving an ideal higher than itself, does not suffice. Now have we rabbis answered the problem, assuming for ourselves through the Central Conference and through the individual congregations a monopoly on religious experiment and religious production. We have not produced a great prayer book and we will not

produce a great prayer book, and while we have tried to keep out excesses perhaps successfully, we have also kept out the life which is necessary for worship to be meaningful, meaningful in a way different from the way I used the word a few moments ago. The child-oriented service, the typical nationalist service, either American nationalist ("Grant us peace " becomes the great prayer of the Reform movement) or Israeli nationalist, are evasions of the real issue; the *Union Prayer-book*, once an achievement, is now an achievement which must be superseded by the work not of the movement-in-the-large alone, but by radically decentralized experimental committees in many communities and in many congregations among many kinds of Jews.

For this future I have only general suggestions. In the first place all of tradition is ours; unlike our Reform Jewish forebears, there is no reason for us in principle to leave out any part of Jewish tradition. Nothing Jewish can be ruled out before experiment. Not the resurrection of the dead and not the personal Messiah and not the great special prayers of the Holy Days -- none of this can be ruled out in advance. All of it must be tried and all of it must be searched and all of it must be used and worked with and worked against, because *all* of tradition is ours. It is not simply the dead hand of the past which

will write the prayer books of the future, not the mechanical reproduction or simplification of the past, but the re-creation, the re-formulation of all of tradition through the eyes of a modern man and therefore leading toward a quite different, unpredictable, and "bizarre" future.

What this means in practice is the recovery of biblical, rabbinic categories -- the recovery of traditions and doctrines which have seemed to us for fifty years or a hundred years unavailable but which will be available again. It means the centrality of lay creativity, a creativity which is not merely the creativity of format, though this is extremely important. One of the great faults of the *Union Prayerbook* is that it is "square," and I do not mean this only as an esthetic criticism. Lay creativity in format, in piety, in learning, lay creativity in experiment and especially experiment with the past is the only possible way to produce the liturgy of the future, the language of future prayer.

We have emphasized either spontaneity or the fixed. We have emphasized either the needs of modern man or the traditions of the past. But the truth is that they must be in constant tension, one building against the other: as with a group of laymen who are willing, as a group of ours was, to study thirty-five Haggadahs including the Union

Haggadah, and then to produce its own Haggadah which will not be entirely different from any of those and yet will be different from all of those. In the tension between *keva* and *kavannah*, between the fixed, obligatory, transcending responsibilities, and the personal expression of each man's faith, we will find the possibility of a new language of prayer. This will not come quickly; it may not come in our generation; but it is something toward which we must work if we have any hope of recovering not just the past, but of re-recovering the future.



PRAYER AND WORSHIP
by Rabbi Daniel Jeremy Silver

For most of us the language of prayer is the language of the *Union Prayerbook*. The many rows of empty pews each Sabbath, and our own reservations about the *Union Prayerbook's* structure and style, have lead many to conclude that the *Union Prayerbook* is inadequate and the empty pews attributable to it. The Central Conference of American Rabbis authorizes and edits the prayer book and there is constant agitation for its revision within the Conference. Parenthetically, the major roadblock to such a revision is a lack of consensus as to the direction such a version should take. Some favor radical surgery, that is, the scrapping of all ancient formulae. Others favor the inclusion of much more traditional material. Some object to the underlying theology which assumes a God-man dialogue and insist that prayer is a soliloquy between man and his "better self." Others object that the book contains too much preaching and too little praying. Needed revision is stalled by a lack of agreement on fundamentals. That freedom and lack of doctrine, in which Reform has taken such pride, frustrate every effort towards revision.

Let this be clear. The *Union Prayerbook*, Volume I, newly revised, is not inviolate. No prayer book is. In every one of the twelve centuries since Amram first published an order of service, the *Siddur* has been expanded, edited, updated, revised and changed. The *Shema* is deuteronomic -- seventh century B.C.E. The *Alenu* (Adoration) is talmudic -- fourth century C.E. The *Lecha Dodi* is cabbalistic -- sixteenth century. The beautiful paragraph "O Lord though we are prone to seek favors for ourselves alone...." was written by a rabbi who fortunately is still active among us.

The traditional *Siddur* is an open book but not a structureless book. In early rabbinic times certain elements were set forth as constant formulae -- first the *Shema* and the *Amidah*, then other themes, so that wherever one worshipped (in Ashkenazic or Sephardic synagogues, in cabbalistic or Mithnagid minyans) there was a familiar substructure and familiar highlights in the service. Each *Siddur* reflected the spirit of its age and the inherited wisdom of the ages before.

When the first *Union Prayerbook* was proposed there was much debate between those whose Reform was so persuasive that they wanted to begin from scratch and those whose Judaism was so persuasive that they insisted that the basic structure and

the visible continuity of the *Siddur* must be maintained. To anyone who is committed to the concept of *K'lal Yisrael*, the victory of the moderates must be welcomed. Certainly it prevented Reform from becoming a separate sect set apart. But the first *Union Prayerbook* and its several revisions neither handled the old with full respect nor inserted the new with adequate discrimination. For these reasons and for many others it requires revision.

But let us not delude ourselves that an updated, stylistically-modern, and theologically-deepened prayer book will fill the pews or silence our doubts about why we come to synagogue. The finest liturgy recited by the tongue, and not by the heart, is no more than an exercise in choral reading. If there is no love of God, there can be no love of prayer. The fundamental issue before our movement is not what's wrong with our prayer book, but what happened to our awareness of God? Despite its limitations, those who affirm God can make their peace with the *Union Prayerbook*. Unhappily, I have come to the conclusion that much criticism of our prayer book is self-serving and apologetic -- an excuse for non-attendance. Faith and faith's concerns, God and Torah and Israel, are tangential and superficial elements in the average life of the average Reform Jew. We

touch here the critical, and, we can only hope, not the fatal weakness of Reform. By intent or indirection we have reduced Judaism from a consecrated way of life to a few lines of moral exhortation, and these platitudes are as applicable to the life of the non-believer as to the life of the pious. We nod when we are told "I am a good Jew even if I do not come around." "Being a good Jew is simply to obey the Ten Commandments, isn't it?" Yet, unless I misread my Bible, the Ten Commandments depend upon and derive from the first "I am the Lord thy God." To the average Reform Jew, Judaism is rather more an ethical culture than a divine commitment, and this, despite the dogma we repeat in our every service, "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One." For a century, pulpit and publication have emphasized the purely ethical, the prophetic attack on the sacrificial cult, the pharisaic attack on the priesthood, the early Reform attack on ritual formalism. For a century we have handled worship cavalierly. There is dignity in our temples but little devotion. Our services are den meetings, pretexts for academic seminars, hootenannies and sing-alongs. The sense of the holy is lacking.

To be sure, a saving remnant within our congregations take Judaism seriously. They merit a new prayer book and the effort it will require. But

before we undertake to revise the *Union Prayer-book*, we must know at the very least what we are after, the purpose for which we assemble each week. It is this question that I should like to examine with you.

The Talmud publishes a significant second-century debate which centers on the meaning of a liturgy. The mystic, Simeon bar Yohai, is quoted to this effect: "It is more important to read the Torah at a service than to study the Torah in a classroom." His view is contrasted to a biographical note told of Judah Ha Nasi, who would not interrupt his biblical studies in order to worship. Rabbis have used Judah's example to emphasize adult education and some few to transform the Sabbath service from an act of worship into a community forum or a theater-in-the-round. Such inference is unwarranted. Judaism emphasizes as religious duties both *Torah* and *Avodah* -- study and worship. Both duties immerse the Jew in moments and ideas of divine concern. In both he accepts the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven, the obligation of sanctifying his life.

In the second century when Judah would not interrupt his studies, his choice was between two spiritual duties. Judaism's sacred books were his classroom texts. Men prayed thrice daily and the omission of one devotion was not of serious

moment. Today, the congregant who does not attend is out bowling or at the office. The choice is between sacred and profane, between leading a life with some faith discipline and leading a life in which these disciplines are absent. Put bluntly, the man who does not worship has no ongoing relationship with God or the tradition.

Many confuse the issue by insisting "after all it is the deed that counts." No one denies this. But the Jewish ethic rests on the observation that an occasional decency is not morality. The average man's standard of conduct is average, well-intentioned, and unenlightened. In worship we deliberately immerse ourselves in a noble and consecrated wisdom. To borrow a term from the sociologists, worship is an hour of spiritual conditioning in which the terms of our covenant -- our most sacred responsibilities -- are rehearsed, reviewed, studied, and sealed. Lacking a worship hour, Judaism remains for most of us a set of vapid platitudes. Through the ages it has been the *Siddur*, the one book every Jew owned and read, which taught him his Judaism -- the basic insights of his tradition. Through his *Siddur* and his worship, a child who was by accident of birth Jewish became a Jew.

To speak of spiritual conditioning distorts even as it explains. Simeon insisted on the virtue of ritual. The service is not only a didactic

exercise, but a sacred duty. A service provides the necessary emotional electricity to weld teaching to life. The mind delights to play with ideas but holiness is not a game. The Torah read in the academy is a textbook. The Torah read in the synagogue is a sacred covenant. It is made so by a man's willingness to attend. "We will abide, now let us listen."

It may not suit your preference, but in Judaism worship is essential, indeed quintessential. Without the discipline of the service we lead spiritually arid lives. Oh yes, the humanist and the atheist can be good citizens but good is not the religious category. Judaism insists on holiness. Judaism has the temerity to insist that religious instruction is better than any instruction in moral philosophy. "A day in Thy court is better than a thousand elsewhere." How so! It is our experience that secular moralities translate into rather ordinary, timid, and humdrum deeds. The phrases are noble but the standards are prosaic. Humanism translated into Americanism has meant the Cold War and an impersonal and acquisitive society. A daily and weekly renewal of the covenant helps to make us more sensitive and more selective in our commitments.

This too must be said. Much of our misunderstanding and awkwardness with our services is at-

tributable to the title we give this hour -- an hour of prayer. The title of our *Siddur*, the *Union Prayerbook*, and the title of this seminar, "The Language of Prayer," repeat and compound this confusion. The Sabbath hour is not an hour of prayer but an hour of worship. I would to God we would find a proper title for our liturgy.

Let me explain myself. Webster defines prayer in terms of petition and entreaty. Prayer, to the modern, means a pleading. Most moderns equate prayer with that sudden surge of emotion which rushes out when we are pushed beyond our resources or are unable to contain our joys. In this sense I prayed as I touched hands with my wife at the marriage altar, when the doctor told me we had a healthy child, and outside my father's sick room. It is against such remembered prayers that a congregant judges the service. It is this frame of reference which leads him to ask: "What has a book to do with prayer?" "How do you expect to schedule prayer between 8:30 and 9:30 on Friday night?" "You invite me to pray, yet when I attend, I am read to, lectured, and sung at -- why?" Let me pursue this a step further. When I pray, I pray to God. I believe, and that is the way it comes out. Yet I hold it as a matter of routine observation that there is much prayer which is not properly addressed and toned. Men pray to God,

to gods, to mother, to the devil, to the winds. Prayer is instinctive. No rabbi need justify it. It is a lightening discharge of emotional electricity. What is there that is explosive and crackling about the carefully written formulae and artfully devised chants of our services? Yet because the book given out at the synagogue door is called a prayer book, we encourage false expectation, create disappointment and sow confusion. We impale ourselves on the logical thickets which surround these questions: Why a formal liturgy? Does God want us to be parrots? Why didn't God answer my prayer?

Traditional Judaism accepted petition and placed it within the *Siddur*. We are human. To live is to be bruised. There are times when we need to pour out our fears and our tensions. There is petition in the *Siddur* and there are fastidious folk who find this petition offensive. We are told that God is not a cosmic complaint clerk. Agreed. We are told that it is naive to believe that the temple is the only proper post office for our letters to the Creator. Agreed. Yet prayer is elemental. Prayer is man's instinctive response to the extreme passions and bitter anxieties of life. Why drive a natural emotion out of the synagogue? Indeed, who are we to say that prayer displeases God. Our fathers had the temer-

ity to suggest that God himself prays, as if there is a divine secret but the rabbis saw a virtue in bringing prayer into the house of God. In the holy place petty peevishness is revealed in shoddy and shocking perspective. We are less likely to utter them. Then too, the language of traditional prayer ties our private needs to the common need. "Grant us peace, Thy most precious gift, O Thou eternal Source of peace." We are made to sense our interdependent destiny.

Having defended the petitionary elements of prayer and the presence of prayer in our liturgy, I hasten again to add that our service is not a prayer meeting. One look at the *Union Prayerbook's* or the *Siddur's* structures makes this clear. Open the *Union Prayerbook* and you find praise, dogma, doctrine, paragraphs from the literature, a whole volume *The Sayings of the Fathers*, memorial. At our services, Scripture is read and a sermon preached; candles are lit and the *Kiddush* is recited. All in all the prayer element is small. The rabbis did not set out to create a prayer hour. Those who say "I do not need to come to the synagogue to pray" or "I do not need a prayer book to pray" are absolutely right. Prayer is a spontaneous release of tense or exalted feelings. President Lincoln put it this way: "I often find myself down on my knees when I have no place else to go." Prayer is ag-

nostic; worship is monotheistic. Prayer is elemental; worship is organized. Prayer is spontaneous; worship has a set calendar. Prayer is a release; worship is a commitment.

The rabbis created worship. A sanctuary, a *Siddur*, music, the congregation, the reading of Scripture, ritual are all requirements of worship, not of prayer. Prayer and worship are not antithetical but for our purpose we must keep them separate. Much of the current disparagement of our services exists because you come expecting intensity-prayer, and find a low-keyed and meditative service-worship. You want to ask and you find yourself encouraged not to ask. You expect silence and find reading. Indeed our sermons and Sunday School texts often encourage this confusion. From its beginning Reform has been tempted by the antinomian element in Christian thought. Paul mistrusted public worship. Paul emphasized seizure and ecstasy. We do not emphasize ecstasy, of course, but many among us routinely disparage the printed word. There is even a little cult of the silent meditation among us. Current popular philosophies also emphasize the breaking of forms and rules. The key word today is to be genuine. Reform youth especially have been caught up by, and, to a certain degree, encouraged in a suspicion of forms, of readings, and of rituals.

The Jewish world view begins in community,

not in aloneness. Man is free to accept responsibility. Family, school, community permit civilization, and man finds his freedom in furthering the common cause. Judaism will not admit that compromises freedom or individuality when he accepts the ties of family, love, and the city -- "If I am for myself alone what am I?" Consequently, our fathers understood worship as submission rather than as exaltation. In worship we take upon ourselves the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven. The pious have always claimed this yoke to be the highest freedom, but no one can deny its deep and persuasive obligation.

Worship is artificial in the sense that all civilization is artificial; it is a creation of human design. We must outgrow the naiveté that no one can properly use another man's words. Creative worship is any worship in which we are engaged heart and soul. No one would say that Stern and Heifetz are not genuine musicians because they play notes written by Chopin or Beethoven. The pianist creates his music even as he re-creates another's music. If this were not so, Rubinstein would be replaced by a roller piano. The genuine worshipper participates fully and genuinely in the words of the psalmist or the poet. The words are read; the thoughts reviewed. We work our own lives into and around the lines. We relate our

faith to their faith. The words are the same, yet unique -- new. The Twenty-third Psalm belongs to me as much as to King David.

Now, of course, worship can be a perfunctory and hapless routine. If we come to honor a friend or a friend's son rather than to honor God, our worship is meaningless, if not blasphemous. Our literature is heavy with reminders that one who recites without intent plays a fool's role.

Simple literary analysis or theological judgment distorts and misrepresents, albeit unwittingly, the act of worship. It describes the dead word, the formal act, the surface meaning. A Buddhist priest once lectured on his forms of service. The phrases had meaning for him but I confess I understood without understanding. His words lacked context or reference. I went to a Buddhist service and though I did not understand a word I sensed the mood -- the piety. Cadence and chant, the disciplined setting, the physical self-control, the trust of his faith spoke to me. We share a single form of worship and we can speak critically together about it. Much more of this is needed. The *Kol Nidre* is a Perry Como hit tune unless each generation associates with it a history of sturdy loyalty and persistent faith. In far too many congregations worship is performed but liturgy never studied. Yet, historical associa-

tion and theological analysis alone will not revive worship. We need to find in worship the living presence of God. Judaism is the achievement of a people who have approached God and sought to understand His will. God is beyond understanding, yet over the centuries we have sensed and expressed His creative wisdom and we have sensed and expressed His will. This wisdom, this poetry, this teaching is available to us in the substance of our worship. In prayer man speaks to God. In worship God speaks to man. The *Shema* is not a philosophic definition, but a revelation -- the end and the beginning of faith. The Torah is not an ancient teaching, but the presence of God's wisdom among us. The *Kaddish* is not a prayer for the dead, but the revelation that death is part of God's wisdom and the resurrection of earlier generations who struggled and suffered and served. The *Kaddish* has no meaning unless we understand this struggle, this sacrifice, and this service. The Torah is an idol in our ark unless we read it, reflect on it, and renew ourselves in God's wisdom. The *Shema* is a password unless we understand it as a statement of faith, the substance of faith, and the search for the meaning of faith.

When our fathers first left Egypt they fashioned for themselves an ark in which they put their holy objects. They carried the ark with

them and set it up wherever they camped. The ark was the visible symbol of the presence of God in the midst of the people. Today the sanctuary serves that purpose. Today we know that physical objects misrepresent and distort the image of God. We have substituted worship for clay tablets and golden vessels. In the act of worship the Jew becomes Jewish. In the act of worship faith comes alive. In the act of worship the teaching becomes relevant. In the act of worship God finds man.

Let us put the obvious on the cover of our *Siddur*. This is not our prayer book, but our liturgy. The Sabbath is not our prayer day, but the sanctified time for worship. Worship is far more inclusive and far more civilized than prayer, and unlike prayer, unequivocally monotheistic. The worship that I love is something finer and wiser than prayer. Prayer begins in need; worship begins in reverence. Prayer is a measure of man's anxiety; worship is a measure of man's commitment. Prayer springs from the convulsed heart; worship begins in the reflective soul. Prayer is half-formed, a thing of the moment; worship is sculpture, a thing of beauty. Prayer is an urgency; worship is a consecration. We pray when life is too much for us; we worship the better to live.

C O N C L U S I O N

THE THREE DIMENSIONS OF A SPIRITUAL LIFE Rabbi Samuel E. Karff

Jewish spirituality is rooted in faithfulness to an experience and a memory -- the memory of a people who stood at Sinai and experienced the living presence of God. At Sinai the people Israel entered into a covenant with God. At Sinai Israel first heard the command: "Ye shall be holy." Let every sphere of your life bear witness to the reality of your covenant with God!

Spirituality is covenant-mindedness. It is a man acknowledging, in all his ways, a faith in the reality of his covenant with God. What are some of the dimensions of this covenant faith?

The covenant faith is, first of all, an attitude toward our own value as persons. It enables man to affirm: I am worth more than the chemicals in my body, more than my services or talents can command in the marketplace, more than the sum of my good deeds, more than the number of people who like me, more than the place or no place accorded me in man's social register. My worth measured by these standards is exceedingly ephemeral. Whenever any man, however ingenious his talents or weighty his relative accomplishments, contemplates his labors against the infinite backdrop of the universe on which he struts, these fruits of his hand and mind pale into paltry nothingness.

No wonder that even some of the greatest artists and statesmen have recorded in their diaries crises of self-evaluation, doubts concerning the significance of their acts and their labors. And when man, with all his flaunted and ever-increasing dominion over nature, ponders his prowess amid

the span of the galaxies, what indeed is he? In the perspective of astronomy, Harlow Shapley reminds us, the destruction of our planet would be but "a local disturbance. Such an episode would leave the stars untouched and unconcerned."

Nor does man fare better when he is defined biochemically. In pre-Nazi Germany the following definition of man was popular: "The human being contains a sufficient amount of fat to make 7 cakes of soap, enough iron to make a medium-sized nail, a sufficient amount of phosphorous to equip 2000 match-ends, enough sulphur to rid oneself of fleas."

We all know that a man's true sense of dignity is not always derivable from the posture with which he confronts the world. Some of modern man's most extravagant escapades in self-indulgence -- whether in the conspicuous consumption of material goods, social status, sex, or alcohol -- betray a pitiful compulsion to obscure or escape from a sense of worthlessness.

For the believing Jew self-respect is rooted in the covenant. There is a prayer in the daily liturgy which is also recited on the afternoon of Yom Kippur. It begins with the confession:

"What are we, what is our life, what our righteousness, what our justice, what our virtue, what our power, what our heroism." Then the words, "from the beginning Thou hast distinguished man and hast recognized him so that he may stand before Thee." Hermann Cohen reminds us that this prayer is part of the *Amidah*, the standing prayer, and he concludes homiletically, "man has been appointed to stand before God."

Man is distinguished from other forms of creation, not uniquely by virtue of his intelligence but by virtue of his capacity to enter into a covenant with the Source of his being. Man feels at home in the universe only if his life bears witness to his kinship with his Creator.

We talk much of the brazenness (*chutpah*) which the classic Jew displayed in relation to God:

Abraham acknowledges that he is but dust and ashes, yet argues with his Creator on behalf of the people of Sodom. Jeremiah calls God a "deceiver" and Sholom Aleichem's Tevya prays in his hovel, "Blessed are they that dwell in Thy house" and then adds irreverently, "I take it, O Lord, Thy house is somewhat more spacious than mine."

The argument is significant. We argue with one whom we care for and have reason to believe cares or is capable of caring for us. The Jew's "lover's quarrel" with God was based on a faith in Him -- a faith in God's covenant. The Jew's boldness in God's presence is Judaism's most fruitful symbol of man's dignity, a dignity rooted in the covenant faith that God is real and that God cares for me. The classic Jew's argument with God was far more spiritual than our polite invocation of Him.

This covenant-rooted sense of dignity has been the Jewish people's most formidable defense against the perils of history. One finds a secular hero of this faith in Saul Bellow's *Herzog*. The hero, hemmed in by dire circumstance, never completely surrenders his own sense of worth nor does he yield to the miasma of despair.

What is the source of this dignity? Of his family, Herzog says: "All the branches of the family have the cast madness of *yichus*. No life so barren and subordinate that it didn't have imaginary dignities, honors to come, freedom to advance." Herzog, the Jew, was rooted in a family (shall we say a people) that did not permit its sense of self-respect to be governed by the objective conditions of the moment. Even when the surrounding world disdainfully confined him to the ghetto, he dwelt there biding his time until the world would be ready to accept his previous treasures.

Herzog uses the word *yichus*. The Yiddish meaning is "good stock." It comes from the Hebrew word for *relatedness*. What was the source of the historic Jew's indestructible dignity? It was his

sense of "divine *yichus*" -- his sense of living in relationship to God. There is no adequate substitute for a self-image rooted in the faith that, as a rabbi put it, "I am a son of the King of the universe."

Is this sense of election an inexcusable arrogance? Only if one fails to add that so are all men. The sanctity of every human personality is rooted in a divine *yichus*. It stems from the faith that every man "has been appointed to stand before God."

A second dimension of Jewish spirituality defines an attitude toward time. Time is an awareness of our own mortality. Time is the sense of our "vanishing reality," or, as Dr. Langdon Gilkey put it, "The feeling that our existence is slipping ever more rapidly away from us into nothingness and we can do nothing about it."

Man's anxieties inspire the major themes for his laughter. So it is that we tire not of Jack Benny's classic jest. We laugh about our effort at age concealment because we regard the inexorable march of time as no laughing matter. The specter of time is especially ominous in our American culture. We place an ever-increasing premium on youth in our business executives, our presidents, and even our rabbis. But the sting of time is not peculiar to our day or age. Even in a society which respected its elders far more than we, the psalmist did still lament, "The days of our years are threescore years and ten, and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their span labor and sorrow for it is soon cut off and we fly away."

Covenant faith does not enable us to elude the angel of death. It does offer a way to invest our fleeting days with abiding significance. We live our lives on different stages. The conditions which frame our existence are not the same for any of us. We may enjoy varying degrees of health and material wealth. We may be single or married or widowed. The events which intrude upon us are not the same nor are they often of our choosing. But

though we cannot transcend time, we are able to answer for the time that is ours.

Martin Buber once wrote: "Each concrete hour (of time) allotted to the person is speech for the man who is attentive but the sounds of which the speech consists are the events of our personal, everyday lives. The words of our response are spoken in the speech of our doing and letting."

To whom do we answer? Ultimately to the God who created us. In all that we do with the time allotted to us we are answering for or against Him. Here then is the key to the significance of our lives. We cannot conquer time but we may sanctify it.

The classic introduction to Jewish prayer declares: *Baruch Atah Adonai Eloheinu Melech Ha Olam Asher Kidshanu* -- "Praised be Thou, O Lord our God, Ruling Spirit of the Universe, who hast sanctified us," who has rendered our lives significant *Bemitzvotav* -- "by giving us commandments wherein we may respond to Thy will."

The reality of our covenant with our Creator, the reality of our power to serve Him or betray Him by our deeds, endows our mortal lives with their only significance. The most comprehensive term for a life which responds affirmatively to God's summons is *Kiddush Hashem* -- the sanctification of God's name. It is the duty of a son and daughter of the covenant to sanctify God's name, to be loyal to Him in every sphere of life. This is our divine vocation.

At times this summons has required (as Akiba knew so well) the surrender of one's very life with the words of the *Shema* lingering on one's lips. But neither is death nor self-denial the only way of answering "yes" to the God of the covenant. As the rabbi says to the king in Judah Ha-Levi's classic: "Your contrition on fast days does not bring you nearer to God than your joy on the Sabbath and holidays if it be the outcome of a devout heart."

The range of responses by which a man-born Jew may be called upon to sanctify God's name is poignantly suggested in three words -- words which sound alike and which stem from the same root: *Kadosh* (holy -- sacred). I speak of the *Kaddish*, the *Kiddush*, and *Kiddushin*. A Jew reciting the *Kaddish* sanctifies God. He affirms trust in God's wisdom even in the presence of death. He affirms life's meaning in the presence of life's mysteries. He says "yes" to God even in his hour of grievous loss.

A Jew observing the Sabbath recites the *Kiddush*. He, too, sanctifies God. He bears witness that God is the Creator of the world and the Redeemer of the oppressed who desires that man pause to enjoy the fruit of his labors.

In the hour of their troth a bride and groom hear the rabbi proclaim: "Praised be Thou, O Lord, who sanctifiest Thy people, Israel, through *Kiddushin* (the covenant of marriage). In their faithfulness to each other, bride and groom sanctify Him -- say "yes" to Him by whose grace man and woman may become "beloved friends."

Of all the means by which a Jew is called upon to sanctify God, none is more crucial than his conduct toward his fellowman. Commenting on the verse "Thou shalt love the Lord, thy God," the rabbis explained, "May God's name be beloved because of you." As God's witnesses you have the power through acts of justice and love to reflect honor upon His Name among those who do not acknowledge Him. By acts of injustice, you have the power to profane His Name. In our age of little faith this mandate is all the more compelling and significant.

Covenant faith is an attitude toward the time of our life. Either life degenerates into a futile race against time or our life pulsates with the saving truth: "Praised be Thou, O Lord, who hast made our fleeting life significant by enabling us to do something for Thee." Life's

significance, said Leo Baeck, derives from "the consciousness of being able to give an answer every day, a personal answer to God."

The covenant faith not only affirms an attitude toward self and time, it affirms a vision of the world--the space--in which we spend or expend the time of our lives. The strident dissonance and radical disarray of our world has driven many a mortal to echo the sentiments of Dostoevski's Ivan: "I don't accept this world of God's although I know it exists. I don't accept it at all. It's not that I don't accept God, you must understand, it's the world created by Him I don't and cannot accept."

Yet it is of this world of ours, this world racked by racial and political conflict, this world imperilled by over-population and nuclear annihilation, this world in which innocent children are plagued by disease, and innocent men struck down by disaster -- it is of this world that the Bible affirms, "And God saw the world that He had created and behold it was good." This declaration embodies the third dimension of Jewish spirituality.

What can this faith mean? In the biblical story God creates every beast of the field and every bird of the air, but it is man's task to name them, and "whatever man called every living creature that was its name." Harvey Cox of Harvard Divinity School reminds us that "the Hebrew naming did not mean simply attaching an arbitrary label. It meant conferring on something its meaning and significance." We are thrust into an unfinished world. We are summoned to answer God's call for covenant, for partnership. We are called upon truly to share in fulfilling the promise of creation.

But under what conditions do we labor? Are we like Sisyphus condemned to push a large boulder to the top of the hill only to have it roll

down, so that in an eternal cycle we may begin again and again?

No, the world is not a tormenting trick. The cards are not stacked against man as in a Greek tragedy. The aces are in the deck. God is forever creating opportunities for man to share in forming order out of chaos, good out of evil, light out of darkness. Covenant faith proclaims: Man is able to answer the challenge of life and God's world is responsive to man's answer.

Even our folk humor betrays this world view. There is the story of a Catholic, a Protestant, and a Jew who have been apprised of an impending tidal wave. The Catholic and Protestant pray for God's miraculous intervention. The Jew concludes soberly, "We'll just have to learn to breathe under water."

This bit of humor reveals not so much a skepticism of God's redemptive power as a bold confidence in the essential congruity between man's basic needs and the world's possibilities. Genesis promises man dominion over nature. If we use our God-given powers in a world created by Him, "we shall overcome."

For this reason, too, the believing Jew, contrary to the prevailing mood of our time, does not call the world "absurd." An echo of this spirit is again found in Saul Bellow's *Herzog*. At one point Herzog, who himself cangles perilously over the abyss of breakdown, chides a boyhood friend. The friend is a Jewish intellectual who in print and at cocktail parties persistently bemoans the dismal prospects of mankind. Herzog writes his friend a letter, saying, "I can't accept this foolish dreariness. We are talking about the whole life of mankind. The subject is too great, too deep for such weakness, cowardice. Too deep, Shapiro, you were too intelligent for this. You inherited rich blood. Your fathers peddled apples."

Herzog's fathers were nourished on the talmudic midrash which compares man to a king's son who has strayed from home and is lost in an eerie forest. The king sends a messenger to remind the lad of a path leading out of the forest, to assure him that if he will but turn toward that path his father will meet him.

God has not set us in a world whose paths are all lurid labyrinths, say the rabbis. There is a path of promise. Man, who has been endowed with the power to unleash the atom, has been endowed with the power to control it. The God who grants man safe walks in outer space does not deny him the power to build cities where men of different colors may live together in justice and peace.

New challenges will ever beset us. We shall ever be called to move from where we are to where we ought to be. This is the meaning of the *mitzvah*, of the divine summons to man which is heard until the end of history. The world in which we live remains unredeemed but brimming with promise. By God's grace our challenges do not exceed our powers. The world is not absurd. If we move toward the path which God has set, we shall be met.

The Jewish view of the spiritual life is rooted in this covenant faith. It is a threefold faith. (1) I am sacred because I have been "appointed to stand before God." This is the sanctification of self. (2) My fleeting days are significant by virtue of my power to do something for or against God. This is the sanctification of time. (3) God's world is brimming with promise if man will fulfill the conditions of his covenant with his Creator. This is the sanctification of space.

The reality of the covenant is a faith to live by, not a hypothesis which may be empirically validated. When the ancient Israelites threatened to worship Baal, the prophet Elijah asked for an unmistakable demonstration of Baal's impotence and

God's supreme power. "Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, give proof this day that Thou art the Lord God ... and art calling their hearts back to Thee."

According to the biblical historian, Elijah's pleas were answered. The bulls brought to the altar by the prophet of Baal remained untouched, but a divine fire consumed Elijah's offering, and we are told: "The whole people fell face to earth and raised a cry, 'It is the Lord who is God, it is the Lord who is God.'"

Have the tests of God's being and the covenant's reality ever been so compelling? Hardly. Else most men would, out of prudence if not virtue, be faithful witnesses to God's majesty. Alas, we are fond of quoting a more subtle and ambiguous incident of divine self-revelation. It was of the selfsame Elijah that we read:

"... and a great and strong wind rent the mountains and broke in pieces the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire, a voice of gentle silence "

The vindication of our faith is more like a voice of gentle silence than a dramatic spectacle of fire. The covenant has hidden clauses. The life of sanctification is to be embraced or rejected in freedom. Each generation must struggle to hear the call: "Where art thou?" Each must choose to answer: "Here am I, send me."