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the rabbinate if they cannot respect the courage and the integrity of those who now practice our calling. Demonstrate to them, our future leaders, that the pulpit is one place where unworthy pressures do not prevail.

* * * * *

I conclude these considerations with a word of gratitude to all of you for the opportunity you have given me to be of some service, for the gracious help I have always received from Rabbi Wolfe Kelman, our director, Mrs. Carol Edelman, our administrative assistant, the staff of the Rabbinical Assembly office — and, of course, our many colleagues who were good enough to accept assignments and to carry them out. My job has taken me to many parts of the United States, and this has given me an opportunity to meet with colleagues in their own communities, and to learn how many of them are doing valiantly in behalf of the cause. I have been privileged to meet and to advise with high Israeli officials and to learn much about our brothers in Israel which I would not otherwise have been able to learn. All in all, it has been an enriching and rewarding experience. Again, thank you for the confidence you have reposed in me.

THE SPIRIT OF JEWISH PRAYER*

PROFESSOR ABRAHAM JOSHUA HESCHEL

It is with a sense of great responsibility that I undertake to discuss with you such a sacred topic, a topic which is called one of the most sublime things in the world, דברים העומדים ברומו של עולם.

I am going to discuss not only the spirit of Jewish prayer but also the state of prayer in the present day synagogue. The time has come for a חשבון הנפש ה'. נחפשה דרכינו ונחקודה ונשובה עד ה'. To find a cure we must have the courage to study the ills.

In advancing some critical remarks I do not mean חס ושלום to take a superior attitude. In all honesty, my criticism will be to a considerable degree self-criticism. I am conscious of the great work which members of this Assembly are doing, and it is with respect and affection that I address my remarks to this audience.

Moreover, numerous conversations with some of my own former students assembled here tonight give me the right to feel that I am not going to speak to you but for you. I am going to be, in a sense your שליח צבור.

הנני העני ממעש נרעש ונפחד מפחד יושב תהלות ישראל. I speak to you אף על פי שאיני כדאי והגון לכך, ארני שפתי תפתח ופי יניד תהלתך, on prayer,

I

Our services are conducted with pomp and precision. The rendition of the liturgy is smooth. Everything is present: decorum, voice, ceremony. But one thing is missing: *Life*. One knows in advance what will ensue. There will be no surprise, no adventure of the soul; there will be no sudden burst of devotion. Nothing is going to happen to the soul. Nothing unpredictable must happen to the person who prays. He will attain no

* For the sake of clarity the author has expanded certain parts dealing with the main thesis.

insight into the words he reads; he will attain no new perspective for the life he lives. Our motto is monotony. *מה שיהיה הוא שיהיה*. ואין כל חדש בבית הכנסת. The fire has gone out of our worship. It is cold, stiff, and dead. Inorganic Judaism. True, things are happening; of course, not within prayer, but within the administration of the synagogues. Do we not establish new edifices all over the country?

Yes, the edifices are growing. Yet, worship is decaying.

Has the synagogue become the graveyard where prayer is buried? Are we, the spiritual leaders of American Jewry, members of a *חברה קדישא*? There are many who labor in the vineyard of oratory; but who knows how to pray, or how to inspire others to pray? There are many who can execute and display magnificent fireworks; but who knows how to kindle a spark in the darkness of a soul?

Some of you may say, I am going too far! Of course, people still attend "services" — but what does this attendance mean to them? Outpouring of the soul, *השתפכות הנפש*? Worship? Prayer, synagogue attendance has become a benefaction to the synagogue, a service of the community rather than service of God, *עבודה הציבור* rather than *עבודה השם*. People give some of their money to UJA, and some of their time to the synagogue.

The modern synagogue suffers from a *severe cold*. Our congregants preserve a respectful distance between the *סדר* and themselves. They say the words, "Forgive us for we have sinned," but of course, they are not meant. They say, "Thou shalt love the Lord Thy God with all thy heart . . ." in lofty detachment, in complete anonymity as if giving an impartial opinion about an irrelevant question.

An air of tranquility, complacency prevails in our synagogues. What can come out of such an atmosphere? The services are prim, the voice is dry, the synagogue is clean and tidy, and the soul of prayer lies in agony. You know no one will scream, no one will cry, the words will be still-born.

People expect the rabbi to conduct a service: an efficient, expert service. But efficiency and rapidity are no remedy against devotional sterility. Orthodox rabbis worry about the *בימה* being in the right place. What about the heart being in the right place? What about prayer?

We have developed the habit of *praying by proxy*. Many congregants seem to have adopted the principle of vicarious prayer. The rabbi or the cantor does the praying for the con-

gregation. In particular, it is the organ that does the singing for the whole community. Too often the organ has become the *שליח צבור*. Indeed, when the organ begins to thunder, who can compete with its songs? Men and women are not allowed to raise their voices, unless the rabbi issues the signal. They have come to regard the rabbi as a master of ceremonies.

Is not their mood, in part, a reflection of our own uncertainties? Prayer has become an empty gesture, a figure of speech. Either because of lack of faith or because of *religious bashfulness*. We would not admit that we take prayer seriously. It would sound sanctimonious, if not hypocritical. We are too sophisticated. But if prayer is as important as study, if prayer is as precious a deed as an act of charity, we must stop being embarrassed at our saying a *ברכה* with *כונה*.

Ours is a great responsibility. We demand that people come to the synagogue instead of playing golf, or making money, or going on a picnic. Why? Don't we mislead them? People take their precious time off to attend services. Some even arrive with profound expectations. But what do they get? What do they receive? Sometimes the rabbi even sits in his chair, wondering: Why did all these people flock together? Spiritually helpless, the rabbi sits in his chair taking attendance.

There is another privation: the loss of *חן*. Our prayers have so little charm, so little grace, so little *חן*. What is *חן*? The presence of the soul. A person has *חן* when the throbbing of his heart is audible in his voice; when the longings of his soul animate his face. Now, how do our people pray? They recite the prayerbook as if it were last week's newspaper. They enshrine in anonymity — as if prayer were an impersonal exercise — as if worship were an act that came automatically. The words are there but the souls who are to feel their meaning, to absorb their significance, are absent. They utter shells of syllables, but put nothing of themselves into the shells. In our daily speech, in uttering a sentence, our words have a tonal quality. There is no communication without intonation. It is the intonation that indicates what we mean by what we say, so that we can discern whether we hear a question or an assertion.

It is the *intonation* that lends *חן* to what we say. But when we pray, the words faint on our lips. Our words have no tone, no strength, no personal dimension, as if we did not mean what we said; as if reading paragraphs in Roget's Thesaurus.

It is prayer without תה. Of course, we offer them plenty of responsive reading, but there is little responsiveness to what they read. No one knows how to shed a tear. No one is ready to invest a sigh. Is there no tear in their souls?

Is there no balm in Gilead?
Is there no physician there?
Why then is not the health
Of the daughter of my people recovered?

Assembled in the synagogue everything is there — the body, the benches, the books. But one thing is absent: נשמה. It is as if they all suffered from *spiritual absenteeism*. In good prayer, words become one with the soul. Yet in our synagogues, people who are otherwise sensitive, vibrant, arresting, sit there aloof, listless, lazy. לא המתיים יהללו יה. Those who are spiritually dull cannot praise the Lord.

That we sensed that this is a problem is evidenced by the many valiant but futile attempts to deal with it. The problem, namely, of how to increase synagogue attendance. A variety of suggestions have been made, e. g., to bring the סדר up to date by composing shorter and better prayers; to invite distinguished speakers, radio-commentators and columnists, to arrange congregational forums, panels and symposia; to celebrate annual projects such as "Jewish Culture Sabbath," "Jewish War Veterans Sabbath," "Boy Scouts Sabbath," "Interfaith Sabbath" (why not a "Sabbath Sabbath"?); to install stained glass windows; to place gold, silver or blue pledge-cards on the seats; to remind people of their birthday dates. Well-intentioned as these suggestions may be, they do not deal with the core of the issue. *Spiritual problems* cannot be solved by *administrative techniques*.

The problem is not how to fill the buildings but how to inspire the hearts. And this is a problem to which techniques of child psychology can hardly be applied. The problem is not one of *synagogue attendance* but one of *spiritual attendance*. The problem is not *how to attract bodies to enter the space of a temple* but *how to inspire souls to enter an hour of spiritual concentration* in the presence of God. The problem is time, not space.

II

Prayer is an extremely embarrassing phenomenon. Numerous attempts have been made to define and to explain it. I will briefly mention four of the prevalent doctrines.

(1) *The Doctrine of Agnosticism.*

The doctrine of Agnosticism claims that prayer is rooted in superstition. It is "one of humanity's greatest mistakes," "a desperate effort of bewildered creatures to come to terms with surrounding mystery." Thus, prayer is a fraud. To the worshipping man we must say: "Fool, why do you in vain beseech with childish prayers, things which no day ever did bring, will bring, or could bring?"¹ Since it is dangerous fraud, the synagogue must be abolished. A vast number of people have, indeed, eliminated prayer from their lives. They made an end to that illusion.

There are some people who believe that the only way to revitalize the synagogue is to minimize the importance of prayer and to convert the synagogue into a center. It is something which the Talmud characterizes as עון שקורין לארין: על הקדש ארנא ועל שקורין בית הכנסת בית עם.

Let us face the situation. This is the law of life. Just as man cannot live without a soul, Judaism cannot survive without God. Our soul withers without prayer. A synagogue in which men no longer aspire to prayer is not a compromise but a defeat; a perversion, not a concession. To pray with כונה may be difficult; to pray without it is ludicrous.

(2) *The Doctrine of Religious Behaviorism.*

There are people who seem to believe that religious deeds can be performed in a spiritual wasteland, in the absence of the soul, with a heart hermetically sealed; that external action is the essential mode of worship, pedantry the same as piety; as if all that mattered is how men behaved in physical terms; as if religion were not concerned with the inner life.

Such a conception, which we would like to call *religious behaviorism*, unwittingly reduces Judaism to a sort of sacred physics, with no sense for the imponderable, the introspective, the metaphysical.

As a personal attitude religious behaviorism usually reflects a widely held theology in which the supreme article of faith is *respect for tradition*. People are urged to observe the rituals or to attend services out of deference to what has come down to us from our ancestors. The *theology of respect* pleads for the

¹ Ovid, *Tristia*, III, 8.11.

² שבת לא, ב'.

maintenance of the inherited and transmitted customs and institutions and is characterized by a spirit of conformity, excessive moderation and disrespect of spontaneity. The outlook of religious behaviorists comes close to the view embodied in Seneca's saying, *tamquam legibus iussa non tamquam dis grata* (observe religious customs because they are commanded by law, not because they are desired by the gods).

Wise, important, essential and pedagogically useful as the principle "respect for tradition" is, it is grotesque and self-defeating to make of it the supreme article of faith.

Religious behaviorism is a doctrine that dominates many minds, and is to a large measure responsible for the crisis of prayer.

(3) *The Doctrine of Prayer as a Social Act.*

There is another definition which is being perpetuated all over the country in sermons, synagogue bulletins and books. "Prayer is the identification of the worshipper with the people of Israel," or "the occasion for immersing ourselves in the living reality" of our people. It is built on a theology which regards God as a symbol of social action, as an epitome of the ideals of the group, as "the spirit of the beloved community";³ as "the spirit of a people, and insofar as there is a world of humanity . . . the Spirit of the World";⁴ as the "Creative Good Will" which makes cooperation in our moral endeavor possible.⁵

"An act of identification with the people" is, phenomenologically speaking, the definition of a political act. But is a political phenomenon the same as worship? Moreover, is the act of identification with the Jewish people necessarily an act of serving God? Who is our model: Elijah who disassociated himself from the congregations of his people, or the prophets of the Baal who led and identified themselves with their people? The prophets of Israel were not eager to be in agreement with popular sentiments. Spiritually important, essential, and sacred as the identification with the people Israel is, we must not forget that what lends spiritual importance and sanctity

³ J. Royce, *The Problem of Christianity*, 1913, 1, pp. 172, 408 f.

⁴ E. S. Ames, *Religion*, New York, 1929, p. 132.

⁵ E. W. Lyman, *The Meaning of Truth in Religion*, p. 33.

to that identification is Israel's unique association with the will of God. It is this association that raises our attachment to the people Israel above the level of mere nationalism.

The doctrine of prayer as a social act is the product of what may be called "*the sociological fallacy*," according to which the individual has no reality except as a carrier of ideas and attitudes that are derived from group existence. Applied to Jewish faith, it is a total misunderstanding of the nature of Jewish faith to overemphasize the social or communal aspect. It is true that a Jew never worships as an isolated individual but as a part of the people Israel. Yet it is within the heart of every individual that prayer takes place. It is a personal duty, and an intimate act which cannot be delegated to either the cantor or to the whole community. We pray with all of Israel, and everyone of us by himself. Contrary to sociological theories, individual prayer came first, while collective prayer is a late phenomenon which is not even mentioned in the Bible.⁶

Such sociological perspectives forfeit the unique aspects of Judaism. Do we, in the moment of prayer, concentrate on the group? We read in the Psalms "Give ear to my words, O Lord, understand my meditation." According to the Midrash, David said, "Lord of the World, at the time when I have strength to stand before Thee in prayer and to bring forth words — give ear! At a time when I have no strength to bring forth words — understand what is in my heart, understand my faltering."⁷ Can the sociological definition of prayer as an act of identification with the group be applied to this Midrash?

(4) *The Doctrine of Religious Solipsism.*

The doctrine maintains that the individual self of the worshipper is the whole sphere of prayer-life. The assumption is that God is an idea, a process, a source, a fountain, a spring,

מומן משה רבינו ע"ה עד כנסת הגדולה . . . לא היו מתקבצים ישראל בכל מקומות מושבותם⁶ ערב ובקר וצהרים במקום מיוחד להתפלל בו תפלה צבור. אלא כל אחר היה מתפלל ביהוד במקום שירדמן לו. כי לא מצאנו בנביאים וכתובים תפלה צבור עד אחר החרבן שתקנו אנשי כנסת הגדולה י"ה ברבות ודברים שבקדושה שאינן בפתוח מעשרה', ר' משה בר' יוסף מטרנאני, ביח אלהים, וינציאה שליך.

אמרי האוינה ה' בינה הניני (תהלים ה', ב') אמר דוד לפני הקדוש ברוך הוא: רבונו של עולם, בשעה שיש בי כח לעמוד לפניך בתפלה ולהוציא אמרי - האוינה! ובשעה שאין בי כח התבונן מה בלבי, בינה הניני. מדרש תהלים ה', ו'

a power. But one cannot pray to an idea, one cannot address his prayers to a fountain of values. To whom, then, do we direct our prayers? Yes, there is an answer. As a recent writer put it: We address "prayers to the good within ourselves."^{7a}

I do not wish to minimize the fact that we all suffer from an ego-centric predicament. Our soul tends to confine itself to its own ideas, interests, and emotions. But why should we raise the ego-centric affliction to the status of a virtue? It is precisely the function of prayer to overcome that predicament, to see the world in a different setting. The self is not the hub but the spoke of the revolving wheel. It is precisely the function of prayer to shift the center of living from self-consciousness to self-surrender.^{7b}

Religious solipsism claims that we must continue to recite our prayers, for prayer is a useful activity. The ideas may be false; it is absurd to believe that God "hearkens to prayers and supplications" (שומע תפלות והתחננים), but we should say all this because it is good for one's health. It is a useful fiction, therapeutics by a lie. There is no God who hears our prayers but we pray as if

Is it really good for one's health? I think it is old-fashioned and short-sighted psychology to assume that duplicity, אהר, בלב, could be good for one's health.

We are descendants of those who taught the world what true worship is. Our fathers created the only universal language there is: the language of prayer. All men in the Western world speak to God in the language of our prayers, of our Psalms. Is it not proper to ask our fathers: What is the spirit of Jewish prayer? But are we ready to ask the question? Are we qualified to understand the answer? The difficulty of our situation lies in the fact that we have inherited physical features of our fathers but failed to acquire some of their spiritual qualities. Biologically we are Jews, theologically we are pagan to a considerable degree. Our hands are the hands of Jacob, but our voice is often the voice of Esau.

There are bitter problems which religion has to solve: agony, sin, despair. There is darkness in the world. There is horror

^{7a} A discussion of this view, which is so popular today, is found in I. Segond, *La prière, étude de psychologie religieuse*, Paris, 1911, p. 52.

^{7b} Cf. A. J. Heschel, "Prayer" in *Review of Religion*, 1945, p. 156.

in the soul. What has the community of Israel to say to the world?

Gentlemen, we worry a great deal about the problem of church and state, synagogue and state. Now what about the synagogue and God? In fact, sometimes there is a greater separation between the synagogue and God than between the synagogue and state.

Now what qualifies a person to be a rabbi? What gives him the right, the privilege to represent the word of God to the people of God? I have been in the United States of America for thirteen years. I have not discovered America but I have discovered something in America. It is possible to be a rabbi and not to believe in the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.⁸

It has become a habit with modern Jews and Jewish movements to behead, to decapitate Biblical verses. Some such decapitated פסוקים have become famous slogans. The name of the movement is an abbreviation of לבו ונלכה בילין; the essence of the verse, באור ה', was omitted. Disciples of Ahad Ha'am proclaimed כי לא בחיל ולא בכח כי אם ברוח. The Jewish National Fund has as its official motto ברומי. The end הארץ לא חמכר לצמיתות was omitted. During the last war the popular slogan among Russian Jews was ואספר מעשי יה לא אמות כי אחיה.

Prayer is the microcosm of the soul. It is the whole soul in one moment; the quintessence of all our acts; the climax of all our thoughts. It rises as high as our thoughts. Now, if Torah is nothing but national literature of Jewish people;

⁸ "It would appear that the God-concept of the preponderant majority of the rabbis is free from anthropomorphism and the notion of the first cause. Only two rabbis in the entire group of 218 define God as a first cause, and only one out of every seven, as literal creator of the universe — the two supernaturalistic responses. The remainder believe that the nature of God is best expressed as: (a) "the sum total of forces which make for greater intelligence, beauty, goodness; (b) the unitary creative impulse which expresses itself in organic evolution and human progress; (c) the symbol of all that we consider good and true." The first of these three views of God is by far the dominant one.

"With respect to the God-idea, no appreciable difference can be seen between Conservative and Reform wings. These two groups differ, however, from the Orthodox group, a majority of whom think of God primarily as a creator. In both the Conservative and the Reform wings this concept of God which best expresses the views of the rabbis is held by only about 8 percent of the respondents." — J. Zeitlin, *Disciples of the Wise*, New York, 1945, p. 76.

if the mystery of revelation is discarded as superstition, then prayer is hardly more than a soliloquy. If God does not have power to speak to us, how should we possess the power to speak to Him? Thus, prayer is a part of a greater issue. It depends upon the total spiritual situation of man and upon a mind within which God is at home. Of course, if our lives are too barren to bring forth the spirit of worship; if all our thoughts and anxieties do not contain enough spiritual substance to be distilled into prayer, an inner transformation is a matter of emergency. And such an emergency we face today. *The issue of prayer is not prayer; the issue of prayer is God.* One cannot pray unless he has faith in his own ability to accost the infinite, merciful, eternal God.

Moreover, we must not overlook one of the profound principles of Judaism. There is something which is far greater than my desire to pray, namely, God's desire that I pray. There is something which is far greater than my will to believe, namely, God's will that I believe. How insignificant is the outpouring of my soul in the midst of this great universe! Unless it is the will of God that I pray, unless God desires our prayer,⁹ how ludicrous is all my praying.

We cannot reach heaven by building a Tower of Babel. The Jewish way to God is a way of God. God's waiting for our prayer is that which lends meaning to them.

III

How should we define prayer? Since it is, first of all, a phenomenon of the human consciousness, we must ask: What is it that a person is conscious of in a moment of prayer? There is a classical statement in rabbinic literature that expresses the spiritual minimum of prayer as an act of the consciousness of man: "*Know before Whom you stand.*"¹⁰ Three ideas are contained in this definition.¹¹

⁹ See מדרש תהילים ה' ו': שטות רבה כ"א, ה'.

כשחלה ר' אליעזר נכנסו תלמידיו לבקר, אמרו לו: למדנו אורחות חיים. אמר להם . . .¹⁰ וכשאתם מתפללים דעו לפני מי אתם עומדים. ברכות כ"ח, ב': אבות דרבי נתן, נוסחא א', פ"ט. עין ארחות חיים לר' אליעזר הנדול, י"ח: בני כשתכנס לפני יוצרך חכום באימה וביראה. וכשאתה מתפלל דע לפני מי אתה עומד.

¹¹ The sentence consists of three parts: The main verb in the imperative "know." Dependent on this main verb is the clause "before whom you stand" which can be broken up into two segments, the adverbial phrase "before whom" which contains the interrogative pronoun and "you stand" which is the subject and verb of the subordinate clause.

1. *Know* (or understand). A certain understanding or awareness, a definite attitude of the mind is the condition *sine qua non* of Jewish prayer. Prayer cannot live in a theological vacuum. *It comes out of insight.*

Prayer must not be treated as if it were the result of an intellectual oversight, as if it thrived best in the climate of thoughtlessness. One needs understanding, wisdom of the spirit to know what it means to worship God. Or at least one must endeavor to become free of the folly of worshipping the specious glory of mind-made deities, free of unconditional attachment to the false dogmas that populate our minds.

To live without prayer is to live without God, to live without a soul. No one is able to think of Him unless he has learned how to pray to Him. For this is the way man learns to think of the true God — of the God of Israel. He first is aware of His presence long before he thinks of His essence. And to pray is to sense His presence.

There are people who maintain that prayer is a matter of *emotion*. In their desire to "revitalize" prayer, they would proclaim: Let there be emotion! This is, of course, based on a fallacy. Emotion is an important *component*; it is not the *source* of prayer. The power to pray does not depend on whether a person is of a choleric or phlegmatic temperament. One may be extremely emotional and be unable to generate that power. This is decisive: worship comes out of insight. It is not the result of an intellectual oversight.

What is more, prayer has the power to generate insight; it often endows us with an understanding not attainable by speculation. Some of our deepest insights, decisions and attitudes are born in moments of prayer. Often where reflection fails, prayer succeeds. What thinking is to philosophy, prayer is to religion. And prayer can go beyond speculation. The truth of holiness is not a truth of speculation — it is the truth of worship.

"Rabbi said: I am amazed that the prayer for understanding was not included in the Sabbath liturgy! For if there is no understanding, how is it possible to pray?"¹²

Know before Whom you stand. Such knowledge, such understanding is not easily won. It "is neither a gift we receive

רבי אומר: חסה אני היאך בסלו הונו הדעת בשבת. אם אין רעה — תפלה מניין? ירושלמי יג. ברכות פ"ד, ה"ד.

undeservedly nor a treasure to be found inadvertently." The art of awareness of God, the art of sensing His presence in our daily lives cannot be learned off-hand. "God's grace resounds in our lives like a staccato. Only by retaining the seemingly disconnected notes comes the ability to grasp the theme."¹³

That understanding we no longer try to acquire. In the modern seminaries for the training of rabbis and teachers the art of understanding what prayer implies was not a part of the curriculum. And so it is not the Psalmist, Rabbi Jehudah Halevi, Rabbi Isaiah Horovitz or Rabbi Nahman of Bratslav; it is Hegel, Freud, or Dewey who have become our guides in matters of Jewish prayer and God.

2. *Before Whom.* To have said before *what* would have contradicted the spirit of Jewish prayer. *What* is the most indefinite pronoun. In asking *what*, one is totally uncommitted, uninitiated, bare of any anticipation of an answer; any answer may be acceptable. But he who is totally uncommitted, who does not even have an inkling of the answer, has not learned the meaning of the ultimate question, and is not ready to engage in prayer.¹⁴ If God is a *what*, a power, the sum total of values, how could we pray to it? An "I" does not pray to an "it." Unless, therefore, God is at least as real as my own self; unless I am sure that God has at least as much life as I do, how could I pray?

3. *You stand.* The act of prayer is more than a process of the mind and a movement of the lips. It is an act that happens between man and God — in the presence of God.

Reading or studying the text of a prayer is not the same as praying. What marks the act of prayer is the decision to enter and face the presence of God. To pray means to expose oneself to Him, to His judgment.

If "prayer is the expression of the sense of being at home in the universe,"¹⁵ then the Psalmist who exclaimed, "I am a stranger on earth, hide not Thy commandments from me" (119:19), was a person who grievously misunderstood the nature of prayer. Throughout many centuries of Jewish history the true motivation for prayer was not "the sense of being at home at the universe" but the sense of *not* being at home in the

¹³ *Man Is Not Alone*, p. 88.

¹⁴ *Man Is Not Alone*, ch. 8 (The Ultimate Question).

¹⁵ E. S. Ames, *Religion*, p. 217.

universe. We could not but experience anxiety and spiritual homelessness in the sight of so much suffering and evil, in the countless examples of failure to live up to the will of God. That experience gained in intensity by the soul-stirring awareness that God Himself was not at home in a universe, where His will is defied, where His kingship is denied. *The Shekinah is in exile*, the world is corrupt, *the universe itself is not at home*

To pray, then, means to bring God back into the world, to establish His kingship, to let His glory prevail. This is why in the greatest moments of our lives, on the Days of Awe, we cry out of the depth of our disconcerted souls, a prayer for redemption:

And so, Lord our God, grant Thy awe to all Thy works, and your dread to all Thou hast created, that all Thy works may fear Thee, and all who have been created prostrate themselves before Thee, and all form one union to do Thy will with a whole heart.

Great is the power of prayer. For to worship is *to expand the presence of God* in the world. God is transcendent, but our worship makes Him immanent. This is implied in the idea that God is in need of man: His being immanent depends upon us.^{16a} When we say ברוך, Blessed be He, we extend His glory, we bestow His spirit upon this world. יתגדל ויתקדש May there be more of God in this world.

Decisive is not the mystic experience of our being close to Him; decisive is not our *feeling* but our *certainty* of His being close to us — although even His presence is veiled and beyond the scope of our emotion. Decisive is not our emotion but our *conviction*. If such conviction is lacking, if the presence of God is a myth, then prayer to God is a delusion. If God is unable to listen to us, then we are insane in talking to Him.

The true source of prayer, we said above, is not an emotion but an insight. It is the insight into the mystery of reality, *the sense of the ineffable*, that enables us to pray. As long as we refuse to take notice of what is beyond our sight, beyond our reason; as long as we are blind to the mystery of being, the way to prayer is closed to us. If the rise of the sun is but a daily routine of nature, there is no reason to say, *In mercy Thou givest light to the earth and to those who dwell on it . . . every day constantly*. If bread is nothing but flour moistened,

^{16a} *Man is Not Alone*, ch. 23.

kneaded, baked and then brought forth from the oven, it is meaningless to say, *Blessed art Thou . . . who bringest forth bread from the earth.*

The way to prayer leads through *acts of wonder and radical amazement.* The illusion of total intelligibility, the indifference to the mystery that is everywhere, the foolishness of ultimate self-reliance are serious obstacles on the way. It is in moments of our being faced with the mystery of living and dying, of knowing and not-knowing, of love and the inability to love — that we pray, that *we address ourselves to Him who is beyond the mystery.*

Praise is our first response. Aflame with inability to say what His presence means, we can only sing, we can only utter words of adoration.

This is why in Jewish liturgy *praise* rather than *petition* ranks foremost. It is the more profound form, for it involves not so much the sense of one's own dependence and privation as the sense of God's majesty and glory.¹⁶

IV

There is a specific difficulty of Jewish prayer. There are laws: how to pray, when to pray, what to pray. There are fixed times, fixed ways, fixed texts.¹⁷ On the other hand, prayer is worship of the heart, the outpouring of the soul, a matter of *כונה*. Thus, Jewish prayer is guided by two opposite principles: order and outburst, regularity and spontaneity, uniformity and individuality, law and freedom.^{17a} These principles are the two

¹⁶ Significantly, prayers written in our time are essentially petitional. Prayers of praise often sound like self-praise.

¹⁷ According to Rabbi Yose, "He who alters the form of benedictions fixed by the wise has failed to fulfil his obligations" (*Berachoth* 40b; *Yerushalmi Berachoth* VI, 2, 10b). Rabbi Meir declares it to be the duty of every one to say one hundred benedictions daily (*Menachoth* 43a, see *Numbers Rabba* XVIII).

^{17a} The contrast between order and outburst is made clear through the term *קבע* Shammai said: "Make your *חורה* (in the sense of legal decisions made by the scholar) *קבע* (a fixed thing)." Do not be lenient to yourself and severe to others, nor lenient to others and severe to yourself. See *אבות*, א. ט"ו and the explication in *תוספתא דרבי נתן*, פ. 47, ס. ב' פרק כ"ג, ו. הוצאת שעכטער. נוסחא ב' פרק כ"ג, ו. In contrast Rabbi Shimeon said: When you pray, do not make your prayer a fixed thing (*קבע*). (*אבות* ב' י"ח). Rabbi Eliezer said: He who makes his prayer a fixed thing (*קבע*), his prayer is not an act of grace (*משה ברכות*) (*ר' ד'*).

poles about which Jewish prayer revolves. Since each of the two moves in the opposite direction, equilibrium can only be maintained if both are of equal force. However, the pole of regularity usually proves to be stronger than the pole of spontaneity, and, as a result, there is a perpetual danger of prayer becoming a mere habit, a mechanical performance, an exercise in repetitiousness. The fixed pattern and regularity of our services tends to stifle the spontaneity of devotion. Our great problem, therefore, is how not to let the principle of *קבע* impair the power of *כונה*. It is a problem that concerns not only prayer but the whole sphere of Jewish observance. He who is not aware of this central difficulty is a simpleton; he who offers a simple solution is a quack.

It is a problem of universal significance. Polarity is an essential trait of all things in reality, and in Jewish faith the relationship between *הלכה* and *אגדה* is one of *polarity*. Taken abstractly they seem to be mutually exclusive, yet in actual living they involve each other. Jewish tradition maintains that there is no *הלכה* without *אגדה* and no *אגדה* without *הלכה*; that we must neither disparage the body nor sacrifice the spirit. The body is the discipline, the pattern, the law; the spirit is the inner devotion, spontaneity, freedom. The body without the spirit is a corpse; the spirit without the body is a ghost.

And yet the polarity exists and is a source of constant anxiety and occasional tension. How to maintain the reciprocity of tradition and freedom; how to retain both *קבע* and *כונה*, regularity and spontaneity, without upsetting the one or stifling the other?

At first sight, the relationship between *הלכה* and *אגדה* in prayer appears to be simple. Tradition gives us the text, we create the *כונה*. The text is given once and for all, the inner devotion comes into being every time anew. The text is the property of all ages, *כונה* is the creation of a single moment. The text belongs to all Jews, *כונה* is the private concern of every individual. And yet, the problem is far from being simple. The text comes out of a book, it is given; *כונה* must come out of the heart. But is the heart always ready — three times a day — to bring forth devotion? And if it is, is its devotion in tune with what the text proclaims?

In regard to most aspects of observance, Jewish tradition has for pedagogic reasons given primacy to the principle of *קבע*;

there are many rituals concerning which the law maintains that if a person has performed them without proper כונה, he is to be regarded *ex post facto* as having fulfilled his duty. In prayer, however, הלכה insists upon the supremacy of כונה over the external performance, at least, theoretically.¹⁸ Thus, Maimonides declares: "Prayer without כונה is no prayer at all. He who has prayed without כונה ought to pray once more. He whose thoughts are wandering or occupied with other things need not pray until he has recovered his mental composure. Hence, on returning from a journey, or if one is weary or distressed, it is forbidden to pray until his mind is composed. The sages said that upon returning from a journey, one should wait three days until he is rested and his mind is calm, then he prays."¹⁹

Significantly, Nahmanides insists that "prayer is not a duty," and he who prays does not perform a requirement of the law. It is not the law of God that commands us to pray; it is the love and "grace of the Creator, blessed be He, to hear and to answer whenever we call upon Him."²⁰

In reality, however, the element of קבע, of regularity, has often gained the upper hand over the element of כונה. Prayer has become זאנעניש, lip service, an obligation to be discharged, something to get over with. בפיו ובשפתיו כבדוני ולבו רחוק ממני ורחוקי.²¹ די אחם אחי מצוח אנשים מלמדה

Typical is the common use of the term "service" for prayer. ולעבדו means both work, service, and worship. Yet בכל לבבכם does not mean to work with your heart.²² Service is an external act; worship is inwardness.

Prayer becomes trivial when ceasing to be an act in the soul. The essence of prayer is אגדה. Yet it would be a tragic failure not to appreciate what the spirit of הלכה does for it, raising it from the level of an individual act to that of an eternal intercourse between the people Israel and God; from the level of an

¹⁸ The polarity of prayer and the decision in favor of the element of כונה is implied in the following discussion. מהו שיחלל מנחה. מהו שיחלל ערבית שחיים? . . . תפלה במקום קרבן היא, וכיון רעבר יומו בשל קרבנו, או דילמא כיון דצלותא רחמי היא, כל אימת דבעי מצלי ואויל? תא שמע דאמר רב הונא בר יהודה א"ר יצחק א"ר יוחנן: טעה ולא התפלל מנחה מחלל ערבית שחיים, ואין בזה שום עבר יומו בשל קרבנו. ברכות כ"ו א'.

¹⁹ משנה חוריה, הלכות תפלה פ"ד, ה"ו.

²⁰ ודאי כל ענין התפלה אינו חובה כלל, אבל הוא ממדת חסד הבורא יתברך עלינו ששומע ונותן בכל קראנו אליו, השנות הרמב"ן לספר המצות להרמב"ם, מצוה ה'.

²¹ Isaiah 29:13.

²² Cf. עבודה זרה, עבודת כוכבים.

occasional experience to that of a permanent covenant. It is through הלכה that we belong to God not occasionally, intermittently, but essentially, continually. Regularity of prayer is an expression of my belonging to an order, to the covenant between God and Israel, which remains valid regardless of whether I am conscious of it or not.

How grateful I am to God that there is a duty to worship, a law to remind my distraught mind that it is time to think of God, time to disregard my ego for at least a moment! It is such happiness to belong to an order of the divine will. I am not always in a mood to pray. I do not always have the vision and the strength to say a word in the presence of God. But when I am weak, it is the law that gives me strength; when my vision is dim, it is duty that gives me insight.

We must not think, that כונה is a small matter. It requires constant effort, and we may fail more often than we succeed. But the battle for כונה must go on, if we are not to die of spiritual paralysis.

The Rabbis insisted: In order to prevent the practice of repeating a prayer for superstitious or magical purposes, the Talmud ordains that a person who says the word "Hear" (*O Israel*) or the word "We thank Thee" twice, is to be silenced. Rab Pappa asked Abbai: But perhaps the person repeated his prayer because when he said the words the first time he did not have כונה. So he repeated the prayer in order to say it with כונה. Thus, there was no ground for suspecting him of indulging in superstition or magical practices. Why should we silence him? Answered Abbai: "Has anyone intimacy with heaven?" Has anyone the right to address God thoughtlessly as one talks to a familiar friend? "If he did not at first direct his mind to prayer, we smite him with a smith's hammer until he does direct his mind."²³

Prayer is not for the sake of something else. *We pray in order to pray.* It is the queen of all מצוה. No religious act is performed in which prayer is not present. No other מצוה enters our lives as frequently, as steadily as the majesty of prayer.

In הלכה—the first tractate of the משנה is ברכות. In Maimonides' שלחן ערוך, in Caro's משנה חורה, the first section

האומר . . . מודים מודים משתקין אותו . . . אמר ליה רב פפא לאביי: ודלמא מעיקרא לא ²³ כיון דעתיה ולבסוף כיון דעתיה? אמר ליה: חברותא כלפי שמיא מי איכא? אי לא כיון דעתיה מעיקרא, מתין ליה במרופתא דנפחא עד רמכוין דעתיה. ברכות ל"ג, ע"ב-ל"ד, ע"א.

deals with prayer. In אגדה — we are told that “prayer is greater than good deeds,” “more precious than . . . sacrifices.”^{23a} To Rabbenu Bahya ben Asher, the spiritual sphere that prayer can reach is higher than the sphere out of which inspiration of the prophets flows.^{23b}

The philosophy of Jewish living is essentially a philosophy of worship. For what is observance, if not a form of worshipping God?

What is a מצוה? *A prayer in the form of a deed.*

This is the way of finding out whether we serve God, or an idea of God — through prayer. It is the test of all we are doing. What is the difference between תורה and *Wissenschaft des Judentums*? If an idea we have clarified, a concept we have evolved can be turned into a prayer, it is חורה. If it proves to be an aid to praying with greater כונה, it is חורה; otherwise it is *Wissenschaft*. Prayer is of no importance unless it is of supreme importance. כרום זולת לבני אדם (תהלים י"ב. ט') אלו דברים העומדים ברומו של עולם ובני אדם מזוללים בהם.²⁴

V

My intention is not to offer blueprints, to prescribe new rules — except one: Prayer must have life. It must not be a drudgery, something done in a rut, something to get over with. It must not be fiction, it must not be flattened to a ceremony, to an act of mere respect for tradition.

If the main purpose of being a rabbi is to bring men closer to their Father in heaven, then one of his supreme tasks is to pray and to teach others how to pray. Torah, worship and charity are the three pillars upon which the world rests. To be a Jew implies the acceptance of *the preeminence of prayer*.

To be able to inspire people to pray one must love his people, understand their predicaments and be sensitive to the power of exaltation, purification and sanctification hidden in our Prayer Book. To attain such sensitivity he must commune with the great masters of the past, and learn how to pour one's own dreams and anxieties into the well of prayer.

We must learn to acquire the basic virtues of inwardness which alone qualify a rabbi to be a *mentor of prayer*.

^{23a} כרכות ל"ב, א'.

^{23b} בחיי, פרשת עקב.

²⁴ ברכות ל"ב, ב'.

One of such virtues is a sense of *spiritual delicacy*. *Vulgarity* is deadness to delicacy; the sin of incongruity; the state of being insensitive to the hierarchy of living, to the separation of private and public, of intimate and social, of sacred and profane, of farce and reverence.

In itself no act is vulgar; it is the incongruity of the circumstances, the mixing up of the spheres, the right thing in the wrong context, the out-of-placeness that generates vulgarity. The use of devices proper in merchandizing for influencing opinion about the quality of a work of music; bringing to public notice a matter that belongs to the sphere of intimate life;²⁵ having a בר מצוה at a מצוה with parents and grandparents marching with candles in their hands in a darkened auditorium and a page boy marching behind the בר מצוה, carrying a טליה, is vulgar; the חופה belongs elsewhere.

For us, it is of vital importance to beware of *intellectual vulgarity*. Many categories, conceptions or words that are properly employed in the realm of our political, economic, or even scientific activities are, when applied to issues such as God or prayer, an affront to the spirit. Let us never put the shoes in the Ark; let us try to regain a sense of הברלה, of separation, of spiritual delicacy. Let us recapture the meaning of להבריל.

The problem is not how to revitalize prayer; the problem is how to revitalize ourselves. Let us begin to cultivate those thoughts and virtues without which our worship becomes, of necessity, a prayer for the dead — for ideas which are dead to our hearts.

We must not surrender to the power of platitudes. If our rational methods are deficient and too weak to plumb the depth of faith, let us go into stillness and wait for the age in which reason will learn to appreciate the spirit rather than accept standardized notions that stifle the mind and stultify the soul. We must not take too seriously phrases or ideas which the history of human thought must have meant in jest, as for example, that prayer is “a symbol of ideas and values,” “a tendency to idealize the world,” “an act of the appreciation of the self.” There was a time when God became so distant that we were almost ready to deny Him, had psychologists or

²⁵ א"ר חנו בר רב: הכל יודעין, אלא כל המבבל פיו ומוציא דבר גבלה מפיו אפילו נחמה לו נזר כלה למה נכנסה לחופה. אלא כל המבבל פיו ומוציא דבר גבלה מפיו אפילו נחמה לו נזר. רינו של שבעים שנה לטובה נהפך עליו לרעה. כתובות ח', ב'.

sociologists not been willing to permit us to believe in Him. And how grateful some of us were when told *ex cathedra* that prayer is not totally irrelevant because it does satisfy an emotional need.

To Judaism the purpose of prayer is not to satisfy an emotional need. Prayer is not a need but *an ontological necessity*, an act that expresses the very essence of man. החפלה היא לאדם. באשר הוא אדם.²⁶ He who has never prayed is not fully human. Ontology, not psychology or sociology, explains prayer.

The dignity of man consists not in his ability to make tools, machines, guns, but primarily in his being endowed with the gift of addressing God. It is this gift which should be a part of the definition of man.²⁷

We must learn now to study the inner life of the words that fill the world of our prayerbook. Without intense study of their meaning, we feel, indeed, bewildered when we encounter the multitude of those strange, lofty beings that populate the inner cosmos of the Jewish spirit. It is not enough to know how to translate Hebrew into English; it is not enough to have met a word in the dictionary and to have experienced unpleasant adventures with it in the study of grammar. A word has a soul, and we must learn how to attain insight into its life.

This is our affliction — we do not know how to look across a word to its meaning. We forgot how to find the way to the word, how to be on intimate terms with a few passages in the prayerbook. Familiar with all words, we are intimate with none.

As a result, we say words but make no decisions, forgetting that in prayer words are commitments, not the subject matter for esthetic reflection, that prayer is meaningless unless we stand for what we utter, unless we feel what we accept. *A word of prayer is a word of honor given to God.* However, we have lost our sense for the earnestness of speech, for the dignity of utterance. Spiritual life demands the sanctification of speech.

²⁶ מהר"ל, נתיבות עולם, העבודה, פ"ב.

²⁷ כל אלמנה ויתום לא תענון. אם ענה תענה אותו כי אם צעק יצעק אלי שמע אשמע צעקתו. שמות כ"ב, כא-כ"ב. כך אמר דוד: רבונו של עולם, אפילו רשע שבישראל כשיבא לקרוא לפניך ענה אותו סידר. אמר ליה הקדוש ברוך הוא: חייך, עד שלא יקראני עניתיו, שנאמר (תהלים נ"א) וקראני ביום צרה אחלצך ותכברני, ואומר: יקראני ואענהו (תהלים צ"א, א'), ואומר: והיו סרם יקראו ואני אענה (ישעיה ס"ה, כ"ד). ואף על פי כן צריך שחרא קריאתו באסת, שנאמר קרוב ה' לכל קוראיו (תהלים קס"ה, י"ח). יכול לכלל תלמוד לומר לכל אשר יקראוהו באסת. מדרש תהלים, ר"ה.

Without an attitude of piety toward words, we will remain at a loss how to pray.

Moreover, words must not be said for the sake of stiffening the mind, of tightening the heart. They must open the mind and untie the heart. A word may be either a blessing or a misfortune. As a blessing it is the insight of a people in the form of a sound, a store of meaning accumulated throughout the ages. As a misfortune it is a substitute for insight, a pretext or a cliché. To those who remember, many of the words in the סידור are still warm with the glow of our fathers' devotion. Such Jews we must aspire to recall. While those who have no such memory we must teach how to sense the spiritual life that pulsates through the throbbing words.

In the light of such a decision about the preeminence of prayer, the role as well as the nature of the sermon will have to be reexamined. The prominence given to the sermon as if the sermon were the core and prayer the shell, is not only a drain on the intellectual resources of the rabbis but also a serious deviation from the spirit of our tradition. The sermon unlike prayer has never been considered as one of the supreme things in this world, דברים העומדים ברומו של עולם. If the vast amount of time and energy invested in the search of ideas and devices for preaching; if the fire spent on the altar of oratory were dedicated to the realm of prayer, we would not find it too difficult to convey to others what it means to utter a word in the presence of God.

Preaching is either an organic part of the act of prayer or חולין בעורה. Sermons indistinguishable in spirit from editorials in the *New York Times*, urging us to have faith in the *New Deal*, the *Big Three* or the *United Nations*, or attempting to instruct us in the latest theories of psychoanalysis, will hardly inspire us to go on to the טוסף and to pray.

Through all generations
we will declare Thy greatness;
To all eternity
we will proclaim Thy holiness;
Thy praise, our God,
shall never depart from our mouth.

Preach in order to pray. Preach in order to inspire others to pray. The test of a true sermon is that it can be converted to prayer.

To the average worshipper many texts of perennial sig-

nificance have become vapid and seem to be an assembly line of syllables. It is, therefore, a praiseworthy custom for the rabbi to bring forth the meaning of the prayers to the congregation. Unfortunately, some rabbis seem to think that their task is to teach popular *Wissenschaft*, and as a result some services are conducted as if they were *adult-education* programs. Dwelling on the historical aspects, they discuss, for example, the date of composition of the prayers, the peculiarities of their literary form or the supposedly primitive origin of some of our laws and customs.

What about the spirit of prayer? What about relating the people to the truth of its ideas? Too often, so-called explanation kills inspiration.²⁸ The suggestion that the Day of Atonement grew out of a pagan festival is, regardless of its scientific merit, hardly consonant with the spirit of the moment of *יְדִיר*.

Nor must prayer be treated as an ancestral institution. In explaining sections of the prayer book our task is not to give a discourse about quaint customs or about "the way our fathers used to think." The *סדור* is not a museum of intellectual antiquities and the synagogue is not a house of lectureship but a house of worship. The purpose of such comments is to inspire "outpouring of the heart" rather than to satisfy historical curiosity; to set forth the hidden relevance of ideas rather than hypotheses of forgotten origins.

There is a book which everyone talks about, but few people have really read. A book which has the distinction of being one of the least known books in our literature. It is the *סדור*, the prayerbook. Have we ever pondered the meaning of its words? Let us consider an example:

Sing unto the Lord, a new song;
Sing unto the Lord, all the earth.
Psalm 96:1

Praise Him, sun and moon,
Praise Him, all you shining stars.
Psalm 148:3

²⁸ I am informed that a congregation listening to comments delivered before the *הברכה* was told the following: "At the conclusion of the Sabbath, when the additional soul departs, one must be refreshed by smelling aromatic herbs, for at that moment, according to the *זוהר*, 'the soul and spirit are separated and sad until the smell comes and unites them and makes them glad.' However, this is, of course, not the true reason. The authentic origin of the ceremony is that in ancient times people ate a great deal on the Sabbath and a bad odor came out of their mouth. In order to drive out the odor, they used spices."

The Egyptian priest could not call upon the stars to praise the gods. He believed that the soul of Isis sparkled in Sirius, the soul of Horus in Orion, and the soul of Typhon in the Great Bear; it was beyond his scope to conceive that all beings stand in awe and worship God. In our liturgy we go beyond a mere hope; every seventh day we proclaim as a fact *נשמת כל חי חברך* in awe and worship God. In our liturgy we go beyond a mere hope; every seventh day we proclaim as a fact *נשמת כל חי חברך* as a fact *נשמת כל חי חברך*. The soul of everything that lives blesses Thy name.²⁹

הכל יודוך והכל ישבחוך והכל יאמרו אין קדוש כה'.
They all thank,
They all praise,
They all say,
There is none holy like the Lord.

Whose ear has ever heard how all trees sing to God? Has our reason ever thought of calling upon the sun to praise the Lord? And yet, what the ear fails to perceive, what reason fails to conceive, our prayer makes clear to our souls. It is a higher truth, to be grasped by the spirit.

יודוך ה' כל מעשיך.
All Thy works praise Thee
Psalms 145:10

The trouble with the prayerbook is: it is too great for us, it is too lofty. Since we have failed to introduce our minds to its greatness, our souls are often lost in its sublime wilderness.

The *סדור* has become a foreign language even to those of us who know Hebrew. It is not enough to know the vocabulary; what is necessary is to understand the categories, the way of thinking of the *סדור*. It is not enough to read the words; what is necessary is to answer them.

Our prayerbook is going to remain obscure unless Jewish teachers will realize that one of their foremost tasks is to discover, to explain and to interpret the words of the Prayerbook. What we need is a *sympathetic סדור-exegesis*.

Religious movements in our history have often revolved around the problem of liturgy. In the modern movements, too, liturgy was a central issue.

But there was a difference. To Kabbalah and Hasidism the primary problem was *how to pray*; to the modern movements, the primary problem was *what to say*. What has Hasidism accomplished? It has inspired worship in a vast number of

²⁹ The usual translation "shall bless" totally misses the meaning of the passage.

Jews. What have the moderns accomplished? They have inspired the publication of a vast number of prayerbooks. It is important for the Assembly to clarify its goal. Is it to make a contribution to bibliography or to endow our people with a sense of כונה? There has been for many years a *Prayerbook Commission*. Why is there no *Prayer Commission*?

Modern Jews suffer from a neurosis which I should like to call the סדרו-complex.

True, the text of the prayerbook presents difficulties to many people. But the crisis of prayer is not a problem of the text. It is a problem of the soul. The סדרו must not be used as a scapegoat. A revision of the prayerbook will not solve the crisis of prayer. What we need is a revision of the soul, a new heart rather than a new text. Did the Jews begin to pray with more כונה since the reference to sacrifices was emended? Textual emendations will not save the spirit of prayer. Nothing less than a spiritual revolution will save prayer from oblivion.

כונה is more than attentiveness, more than the state of being aware of what we are saying. If כונה were only presence of the mind, it would be easily achieved by a mere turn of the mind. Yet, according to the Mishnah, the pious men of old felt that they had to meditate an hour in order to attain the state of כונה. In the words of the Mishnah, כונה means "to direct the heart to the Father in heaven". It is not phrased, to direct the heart to the text or the content of the prayer.^{29a} כונה, then, is more than paying attention to the literal meaning of a text. It is *attentiveness to God, an act of appreciation of being able to stand in the presence of God.*

Appreciation is not the same as reflection. It is one's being drawn to the preciousness of something he is faced with. To sense the preciousness of being able to pray, to be perceptive of the supreme significance of worshipping of God is the beginning of higher כונה.

"Prayer without כונה is like a body without a soul." "A word uttered without the fear and love of God does not rise to heaven." Once Rabbi Levi Yitzhak of Berdychiv while visiting a city went to a synagogue. Arriving at the gate he refused to enter. When his disciples inquired what was wrong with the synagogue, they received the reply: "The synagogue is full of words of Torah and prayer." This seemed the highest

^{29a} Cf. רבינו יונה ריש תפלה השחר.

praise to his disciples, and even more reason to enter the synagogue. When they questioned him further, Rabbi Levi Yitzhak explained: "Words uttered without fear, uttered without love, do not rise to heaven. I sense that the synagogue is full of Torah and full of prayer."

Judaism is not a *religion of space*.³⁰ To put it sharply, it is better to have *prayer without a synagogue than a synagogue without prayer*.³¹ And yet we always speak of *synagogue attendance* rather than of prayer. It is the right word for the wrong spirit. By being in the space of a synagogue while a service is being conducted one has not fulfilled his religious duty. Many of those attending Sabbath services arrive during the reading of the weekly Torah portion and leave without having read the שמע or prayed the עמידה of שחרית — the two most important parts of the prayer.

Nor is it the primary purpose of prayer "to promote Jewish unity." As we said above, prayer is a personal duty, and an intimate act which cannot be delegated to either the cantor or the whole community. We pray with the whole community, and everyone of us by himself. We must make clear to every Jew that his duty is to pray rather than to be a part of an audience.

The rabbi's role in the sacred hour of worship goes far beyond that of maintaining order and decorum. His unique task is to be a power for התעוררות, to endow others with a sense of כונה. And as we have said, כונה is more than a touch of emotion. כונה is insight, appreciation. To acquire such insight, to deepen such appreciation, is something *we must learn* all the days of our lives. It is something *we must live* all the days of our lives. Such insight, such appreciation, we must convey to others. It may be difficult to convey to others *what we think*, but it is

³⁰ "Rabbi Hama ben Hanina and Rabbi Oshaya were strolling near the synagogue of Lud. Rabbi Hama boasted: "How much money have my ancestors invested in these buildings!" Rabbi Oshaya replied: "How many souls have they wasted here! Were there no students of Torah to support instead?"

Rabbi Abin donated a gate to the Great Synagogue. When Rabbi Mana came to him, he boasted: "Do you see what I have done?" Said Rabbi Mana: " 'When Israel forgets its Creator, they build temples.' (Hosea 8:14) Were there no students of Torah to support instead?" (שקלים ה' סוף)

³¹ אמר הקב"ה לישראל אני אסדתי לך כשאתה מתפלל התפלל בבית הכנסת שבעירך. ואם אין אהה יכול להתפלל בבית הכנסת, התפלל בתוך שדך. ואם אין אהה יכול להתפלל בתוך שדך, התפלל על משהך. ואם אין אהה יכול להתפלל על משהך, הדרה הוא דכתיב אפרו בלבבכם על משכבכם ודומו סלהי סדרש ההלים, ד' ט'

not difficult to convey to others *what we live*. Our task is to echo and to reflect the light and spirit of prayer.

It was in the interest of bringing about order and decorum that in some synagogues the rabbi and cantor decided to occupy a position facing the congregation. It is quite possible that a reexamination of the whole problem of worship would lead to the conclusion that the innovation was an error. The essence of prayer is not decorum but rather an event in the inner life of men. ³² "המתפלל צריך שיתן עיניו למטה ולבו למעלה. "He who prays must turn his eyes down and his heart up." What goes on in the heart is reflected in one's face. It is embarrassing to be exposed to the sight of the whole congregation in moments when one wishes to be alone with his God.

A cantor who faces the holiness in the Ark rather than the curiosity of man will realize that his audience is God. He will learn to realize that his task is not to entertain but to represent the people Israel. He will be carried away into moments in which he will forget the world, ignore the congregation and be overcome by the awareness of Him in Whose presence he stands. The congregation then will hear and sense that the cantor is not giving a recital but worshipping God, that to pray does not mean to listen to a singer but to identify oneself with what is being proclaimed in their name.^{32a}

כונה requires preparation. Miracles may happen, but one must not rely on miracles. The spirit of prayer is frequently decided during the hour which precedes the time of prayer. Negatively, one is not ready to engage in certain activities, or even in light talk before he prays. And positively one must learn to perform a degree of inner purification before venturing to address the King of kings. According to Maimonides, "One must free his heart from all other thoughts and regard himself as standing in the presence of the שכינה. Therefore, before engaging in prayer, the worshipper ought to go aside a little in order to bring himself into a devotional frame of mind, and then he must pray quietly and with feeling, not like one who carries a weight and throws it away and goes farther."³³

³² יבמות ק"ה, ב'. עיין ראש השנה כ"ו, ב'. בראש השנה כמה דכייף איניש דעתיה טפי מעליה, רש"י, דכייף איניש בחפלתו, פניו כבושין לארץ טפי עדיף משום והיו עיני ולבי שם' (מלכים א' ט', ב').

^{32a} ולחפלת שליח צבור כזה כל הצבור מכוונין את לבם, והקדוש ברוך הוא מקבל הפלתו, ר"י ישראל אלנקאוה, סגרת המאור, חלק ב', עמוד 84.

³³ משנה תורה, הלכות תפלה פ"ד, ה"ט.

Let us pray the way we talk. Let us not just utter consonants and vowels. Let us learn how to chant our prayers. It is one of our tragedies that we did not know how to appreciate the very soul of our ancient speech, the נוסח, and instead, have adopted a pompous monotonous manner. Let us try to recapture the last traces of our ancient נוסח. Let us learn to *express* what we say.

We are the most challenged people under the sun. Our existence is either superfluous or indispensable to the world; it is either tragic or holy to be a Jew.

It is a matter of immense responsibility that we here and Jewish teachers everywhere have undertaken to instill in our youth the will to be Jews today, tomorrow and forever and ever. Unless being a Jew is of absolute significance, how can we justify the ultimate price which our people was often forced to pay throughout its history? To assess Judaism soberly and farsightedly is to establish it as a good to be preferred, if necessary, to any alternative which we may ever face. This is often the only adequate perspective of evaluating Judaism, a perspective into which the world currents do not tire to force us, whether in the name of hellenistic culture, of Almohadic Islam, of medieval crusaders, of modern assimilation or of contemporary Fascism. The truth is, we have more faith than we are willing to admit. Yet it is stifled, suppressed and distorted by an irreligious way of thinking.

At this hour, O Lord, we open our thoughts to thee, in tears and contrition. We, teachers in Israel, stand at this present moment between all of the past and all of the future of the people of Israel. It is upon us to hand over the Torah, the holiness, the spirit of prophets, sages, and saints, to all the generations to come. If we should fail much of Judaism will be lost, gone and forgotten. O Lord! we confess our failure. Day after day we have betrayed Thee. Steeped in vanity, envy, ambition, we have often labored to magnify our own names, although we said ויחקדש שמיא רבא. Dazzled by the splendor of intellectual fads, we have accepted platitudes as dogmas, prejudices as solutions, although we repeated עולם נטע בחוכנו לחורתך.

השיבנו אבינו לחורתך