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Guidelines for abbreviating Jewish prayer experiences

Approved on April 1, 2025 by a vote of 21-0-0. Voting in favor: Rabbis Aaron Alexander, Adam Baldachin, Pamela Barmash, Emily Barton, Chaya Bender, Suzanne Brody, Nate Crane, Aviva Fellman, David Fine, Joshua Heller, Barry Leff, Amy Levin, Daniel Nevins, Matthew Nover, Avram Reisner, Rachel Safman, Robert Scheinberg, Miriam T. Spitzer, Meir Szames, Stewart Vogel, and Raysh Weiss. Voting Against: None. Abstaining: None.

שאלה (Question):

(1) In a congregational context, what are guidelines for shortening tefillot (daily, shabbat, holidays) on a regular basis? What ways to shorten tefillot are minimally acceptable on an occasional basis?
(2) what are guidelines for abbreviating one's private davening, regularly or occasionally, to still have fulfilled all relevant halakhic obligations for prayer?

תשובה (Response):[1]

(a) INTRODUCTION:[2]

אַחַת שָׁאַלְתִּי מֵאֵת־ה' אוֹתָהּ אֲבַקֵּשׁ שִׁבְתִּי בְּבֵית־ה' כָּל־יְמֵי חַיַּי לַחֲזוֹת בְּנֹעַם־ה' וּלְבַקֵּר בְּהֵיכָלוֹ׃

One thing I ask of the LORD,
only that do I seek:
to live in the house of the LORD
all the days of my life,
to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD,
to frequent God's temple.

Psalm 27 offers a utopian vision for those who long for God's presence. Sitting in God's sanctuary, untroubled by the unpredictability of life, the psalmist imagines an unfettered opportunity to meditate on God's beauty, sheltered by God's protection, a

[1] *The Committee on Jewish Law and Standards of the Rabbinical Assembly provides guidance in matters of halakhah for the Conservative movement. The individual rabbi, however, is the authority for the interpretation and application of all matters of halakhah.*

[2] The authors are grateful to Rabbis Edward Feld and Jeffrey Hoffman for their assistance and suggestions, as well as to members of the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards including Rabbis Mordecai Schwartz, Joel Pitkowsky, Aaron Alexander, Pamela Barmash, Joshua Heller, Karen Reiss Medwed, Daniel Nevins, Avram Reisner, and Miriam Spitzer for their helpful feedback.

respite from a world in conflict. The psalmist's requests, "*shivti…kol yemei hayai*" to dwell…all of my days" and "*levaker beheikhalo*" "to visit in God's temple" center on time. The psalmist is aware of the contradiction that exists between a desire to remain in God's constant presence and to visit that experience temporarily.

The quantity of Jewish prayer texts has greatly expanded since the inception of rabbinic liturgy nearly 2000 years ago. This expansion has brought both benefits and challenges. New liturgical compositions in each generation have expanded the emotional palette of the liturgy. Individuals and communities adopted these new creations because they found them to be a valuable and meaningful way to enhance the individual and communal connection to God and to one another. To include those prayers in our prayers honors past contributions and helps build our experience of prayer. It is important for each generation to add to the prayers of the present to reflect our own reality and perspective. Adding to the siddur builds on its creativity and relevance. And at the same time, as the liturgy has increased in length, so has the length of our services, sometimes leaving highly engaged community members confused and/or unsatisfied. In a world in which our attention is ever-decreasing, maintaining or further increasing the length of our services becomes more challenging.

This conflict is a common issue for the clergy and lay leaders who craft and lead our services and deserves to be addressed. Prayer has the ability to help us transcend the mundane and experience wonder. It offers us a hiatus from the tumult of our lives and gives us an opportunity to re-awaken our sense of awe at the splendor of the universe. Liturgy is a tool to connect those praying to one another across space and time. Through this individual and communal process we explore the connections we share with other humans as we contemplate our lives through the poetry of our ancestors and the words of our hearts. Therefore, it is important to strike the right balance between maintaining our inherited text for use in our tefillah experiences as well as creating experiences for our congregations that are desirable and sustainable.

While there are many CJLS teshuvot about the parameters for making liturgical changes, additions and deletions for ideological reasons,[3] the scope of this teshuvah is to address specifically non-ideologically motivated liturgical abbreviation in public prayer on a regular basis or on an occasional basis, as well as in private prayer.

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[3] CJLS Teshuvot about ideologically motivated liturgical change include: Joel Rembaum, "Regarding the Inclusion of the Names of the Matriarchs in the First Blessing of the Amidah," OH 112.1990, and "Matriarchy Confronts Patriarchy: An Addendum to the March 3, 1990 CJLS Paper on Including the Names of the Matriarchs in the First Blessing of the Amidah and a new Pesak Halakhah, OH 112.2023a). Also see Daniel Sperber, *On Changes in Jewish Liturgy: Options and Limitations* (Urim, 2010), for a discussion of relevant rabbinic sources on ideologically motivated liturgical change from a liberal Orthodox perspective. Also see David Golinkin, "Siddur Sim Shalom - A Halakhic Analysis", *Conservative Judaism*, Vol.41(1) Fall 1988 p.38-55, for discussion of liturgical change in principle and various examples of different perspectives on its legitimacy. (See below, n28, for a listing of earlier CJLS Teshuvot about liturgical abbreviation.)

Anecdotal and statistical evidence suggest that even as many Jews who attend synagogue services do so because they find them to be spiritually meaningful, larger numbers of Jews regard Jewish prayer as irrelevant to their lives or as daunting and intimidating. For example, a study by Pew Research Center in 2020 indicated: [4]

> Jews who say they attend services at a synagogue, temple, minyan or havurah at least once a month – 20% of Jewish adults – were asked what draws them to religious services. Those who attend services a few times a year or less were asked what keeps them away; this group makes up nearly eight-in-ten U.S. Jews (79%).
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> Of nine possible reasons for attending Jewish services offered in the survey, the most commonly chosen is "Because I find it spiritually meaningful." Nine-in-ten regular attenders say this is a reason they go to services (92%), followed closely by "Because I feel a sense of belonging" (87%) and "To feel connected to my ancestry or history" (83%). About two-thirds (65%) say they feel a religious obligation, and Orthodox Jews are especially likely to give this reason (87%). Fewer Jewish congregants say they go to religious services to please a spouse or family member (42%) or because they would feel guilty if they did not participate (22%).
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> Of 11 possible reasons for *not* attending religious services, the top choice is "I'm not religious." Two-thirds of infrequent attenders say this is a reason they do not go to services more often. Other common explanations are "I'm just not interested" (57%) and "I express my Jewishness in other ways" (55%). Fewer say "I don't know enough to participate" (23%), "I feel pressured to do more or give more" (11%), "I don't feel welcome" (7%), "I fear for my security" (6%) or "People treat me like I don't really belong" (4%).

While this research does not specify what exactly is needed in order to motivate individuals to participate in Jewish prayer more often, Jewish clergy can read into the 57% of Jews who expressed a disinterest and 23% who don't feel knowledgeable enough in the service in order to participate to be motivators for innovation. In addition to the 2020 study, Pew Research Center gauged rabbis and other Jewish leaders to get a sense of how they are responding to the low synagogue affiliation rates. Here is an excerpt from their interviews:

> Many of the rabbis interviewed are attempting various experiments – some rather modest, others more ambitious – designed to make Jews more comfortable in religious settings. For example, Rabbi Ron Fish of Temple Israel in Sharon, Massachusetts, said that for Jews disinclined to attend traditional services, his synagogue has a monthly Shabbat service that includes drumming and meditation. And, on the second day of Rosh Hashanah each year, it has

[4] see https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2021/05/11/jewish-americans-in-2020/

> offered an outdoor service – "Rosh Hashanah in the Woods," billed as "a Rosh Hashanah experience where we can be ourselves, pray differently, relate to God, and reach within to access a spiritual dimension not always attainable in a sanctuary."[5]

While many of our synagogues are facing similar challenges maintaining or increasing the number of congregants attending our religious services, our colleagues have tried different approaches to engage congregants in *tefillah* in order to pique their interest or to lower the barrier to entry by increasing their knowledge of the services.

The authors of this *teshuvah* feel strongly that each *mara d'atra* should evaluate the needs of their *kehillot* in order to respond to the challenge we face of helping our generation of Jews in America connect to *tefillah*. We believe that specifying some of the halakhic parameters for flexibility of our services will give each rabbi the space to build meaningful experiences in addition to the liturgy they choose to include. Some may seek to add additional singing, meditation, varied poetry, or study but feel they cannot do this if it will mean lengthening the tefillah experience. (Alternatively, some congregations may prefer to increase the length of their services in order to add additional experiences to their tefillah. If that decision is right for their congregation they are encouraged to do so.)

Additionally, some distinct populations, such as families with children, people in health care settings, and people who are very new to Jewish prayer, may require or appreciate shorter tefillah experiences that center their needs. And there are many individuals who want daily prayer to be a significant part of their lives but cannot see such a daily practice as sustainable, considering the length of the traditional liturgy (especially for Shaharit).

(b) KEVA AND KAVVANAH

Talmudic, halakhic, and theological writings through the centuries have identified that a successful prayer experience requires a balance of *keva* (the fixed, received liturgical tradition) and *kavannah* (the intention of the heart, the spontaneous dimension of

[5] https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2021/05/11/jewish-practices-and-customs/

prayer).[6] Kavvanah is considered a requirement for prayer,[7] and yet it has long been understood that Kavvanah is often difficult. A classic text that conveys this dilemma is in Maimonides' Mishneh Torah, *Hilkhot tefillah*:

כַּוָּנַת הַלֵּב כֵּיצַד. כָּל תְּפִלָּה שֶׁאֵינָהּ בְּכַוָּנָה אֵינָהּ תְּפִלָּה. וְאִם הִתְפַּלֵּל בְּלֹא כַּוָּנָה חוֹזֵר וּמִתְפַּלֵּל בְּכַוָּנָה. מָצָא דַּעְתּוֹ מְשֻׁבָּשֶׁת וְלִבּוֹ טָרוּד אָסוּר לוֹ לְהִתְפַּלֵּל עַד שֶׁתִּתְיַשֵּׁב דַּעְתּוֹ. לְפִיכָךְ הַבָּא מִן הַדֶּרֶךְ וְהוּא עָיֵף אוֹ מֻצַּר אָסוּר לוֹ לְהִתְפַּלֵּל עַד שֶׁתִּתְיַשֵּׁב דַּעְתּוֹ. אָמְרוּ חֲכָמִים יִשְׁהֶה שְׁלֹשָׁה יָמִים עַד שֶׁיָּנוּחַ וְתִתְקָרֵר דַּעְתּוֹ וְאַחַר כָּךְ יִתְפַּלֵּל:

> Proper intention: What is implied? Any prayer that is not [recited] with proper intention is not prayer. If one prays without proper intention, one must repeat the prayers with proper intention.
> One who is in a confused or troubled state may not pray until one becomes composed. Therefore, one who comes in from a journey and is tired or irritated is forbidden to pray until one becomes composed. Our Sages taught that one should wait three days until one is rested and one's mind is settled, and then one may pray.[8]

Kavvanah is required, and yet the stress of going on a journey may prevent someone from achieving Kavvanah for the next three days. (Later Halakhic sources like the Shulhan Arukh are more lenient with the requirement for Kavvanah -- or, one could say, they are stricter in requiring prayer even when Kavvanah cannot be achieved: שאין אנו מכוונים כל כך בתפילה, "Today, we do not keep focus very much in prayer," so it does not make sense to exempt someone from praying after a journey or when they feel especially distracted.[9])

The Shulhan Arukh also affirms that there is sometimes a tradeoff between the quantity of prayer text and the quality of Kavvanah; among the Shulhan Arukh's very first words of guidance about prayer are טוב מעט תחנונים בכוונה מהרבות בלא כוונה, "Better to say fewer supplications with Kavvanah, than to say more without Kavvanah."[10]

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[6] Kavvanah is what elevates prayer from being a rote activity, but the word "Kavvanah" has been understood in a wide variety of ways in Jewish discourse about prayer, including: the davenner's awareness that they are fulfilling the Jewish obligation of prayer; the davenner's awareness that they are addressing God; the davenner's understanding of the words that are being recited; the davenner's supplementing of the words of the Siddur with personal words and thoughts directed to God; the davenner's deep reflection or meditation on esoteric interpretations of the words of the Siddur. On the various ways that Kavvanah has been understood in halakhic and theological literature, see Seth Kadish, *Kavvana: Directing the Heart in Jewish Prayer* (Northvale NJ: Jason Aronson, 1997), and Joseph Tabory, "The Fixed and the Fluid in Jewish Prayer," Gabriel H. Cohn and Harold Fisch, eds., *Prayer in Judaism: Continuity and Change*, (New Jersey: Jason Aaronson, 1996), 53-68. We are grateful to Rabbis Aaron Alexander and Jeffrey Hoffman for their suggestions on this point.

[7] See, for example: Maimonides, *Hilkhot tefillah* 4:16.

[8] *Hilkhot tefillah*, 4:15. The encouragement not to pray for three days following a journey is based on the discussion in BT Eruvin 65a.

[9] Shulhan Arukh, OH 98:2. But see Nathan Lopes Cardozo, "Why I (refuse to) pray," https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/why-i-refuse-to-pray/, who defends the notion of refraining to pray when one's mind is not settled.

[10] Shulhan Arukh, OH 1:4.

Knowing that Kavvanah is both necessary and difficult, and that for some people and communities, more words may be deleterious to the achievement of Kavvanah, some communal leaders may seek ways to maximize Kavvanah such as abbreviating the service to allow more time for prayer education, meditation, singing niggunim, and other activities that may make sustained Kavvanah more likely.

(c) WHAT RULES DO WE FOLLOW WHEN DETERMINING HALAKHAH ON LITURGICAL MATTERS?

Liturgy is the first halakhic matter to be addressed in the Mishnah; its first tractate, *Masekhet Berakhot*, focuses on liturgical issues including *Kri'at Shema, Amidah, Birkat Ha-Mazon*, and other matters. Yet the first Jewish prayerbook was not written until several hundred years after the codification of the Talmud.[11] Since that time, thousands of prayerbooks have been published with numerous differences among them. Much of the content of the Siddur is considered to fall under the domain of *minhag* (custom) rather than halakhah (law), especially with regard to the numerous regional variations from one rite to another.[12]

Determining the halakhic status of passages of the siddur is not always easy. *Pesukei Dezimra* is an example of a liturgical unit that poses such a difficulty, in that it is described within the Talmud as a meritorious but optional practice,[13] but because it became a normative practice, major halakhic codifications assume that it is obligatory.[14] Should we classify it as meritorious but optional, per the Talmud, or as obligatory, per the Shulhan Arukh? Our approach is to regard a liturgical passage as halakhically obligatory if Talmudic and contemporaneous literature assert that it is obligatory.[15] For this reason, we regard the recitation of Pesukei Dezimra as meritorious but optional, while also acknowledging that it has been considered a standard part of the liturgy for many centuries.

One of the halakhic principles most relevant to questions of liturgical change is כל המשנה ממטבע שטבעו חכמים בברכות לא יצא ידי חובתו, "Anyone who changes from the formula that was

[11] *Seder Rav Amram Gaon* was written in the mid-9th century. See Goldschmidt, Daniel, ed., *Seder Rav Amram Gaon* (Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1971).

[12] Of course, the category of halakhah includes minhag, and minhagim are treated very seriously in halakhic literature. However, the halakhic system makes it significantly easier to take countervailing factors into account when dealing with a minhag (especially one that is not universal among the Jewish people) rather than with something that is recognized as halakhically obligatory. See Joel Roth, *The Halakhic Process: A Systemic Analysis* (JTS, 1986), p. 205ff, especially p. 208-209.

[13] BT Shabbat 118b.

[14] The Mishneh Torah is careful to specify that the sages praised those who recite Pesukei Dezimra (rather than suggesting that it is obligatory), *Hilkhot tefillah* 7:12. However, the *Tur* and *Shulhan Arukh* (OH 51) use language that describes it as obligatory.

[15] This approach is inspired by scholars of liturgy and Minhag including Daniel Sperber, Ruth Langer, and Yisrael Ta-Shema. Ta-Shema, in particular, defines "Minhag" as authoritative practices that do not have their root in the Talmud; Yisrael Ta-Shema, *Minhag ashkenaz ha-kadmon* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1992), p. 20.

coined by the sages for blessings has not fulfilled their obligation."[16] However, there are a variety of interpretations of this statement. The plain meaning of this statement as found in the Talmud appears to be that halakhah demands that berakhot use an official berakhah formula, i.e. ברוך אתה ה' א' מלך העולם. This principle has also been used to suggest that the sages fixed particular texts and that if one changes them, one has no longer fulfilled one's obligation for the recitation of that prayer.[17] Others suggest an intermediate perspective, which is that there are aspects of a liturgical passage that have the status of *matbe'a*, "fixed formula," which cannot be changed, and other aspects of a liturgical passage have the status of *nusah*, "wording," that can be changed. In general, *matbe'a* refers to the structure of the passage, its theme, and its formal characteristics, which should remain stable, while *nusah* refers to the specific language used, which is different from community to community and could potentially be different for an individual in different prayer experiences.[18] If a given part of the liturgy is determined to be halakhically required, there still may be flexibility in how it is to be recited.

(d) **LITURGICAL ABBREVIATION: PRECEDENTS**

In a famous essay on the history of Jewish liturgy, Jakob Petuchowski wrote: "There is, and there is not, such a thing as 'the' traditional Jewish prayerbook. There is less of one than some Orthodox Jews would like to believe; and there is more of one than some Reform apologists are willing to admit."[19] Petuchowski notes that so many parts of Jewish liturgy have been in flux throughout much of Jewish history, and there is such variation across the Jewish world, that the notion of "the" traditional Jewish prayerbook is a fiction. However, there are some who use this fact to deny that traditional Jewish liturgy has a stable core at all, or to assert (often for ideological reasons) that every part of Jewish liturgy has always been infinitely flexible, and such a statement is also a fiction.

In particular, there are sections of Jewish liturgy that have been generally stable since Talmudic times. For example: The morning service includes the three biblical paragraphs of the Shema, embedded within three blessings, followed by an Amidah which has 18 or 19 blessings. The afternoon service includes the Amidah. The evening service includes the three biblical paragraphs of the Shema, embedded within four

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[16] Berakhot 40b.
[17] This is arguably how Maimonides uses this quotation in Hilkhot Kriat Shema, 1:7.
[18] See, for example, the discussions of *matbe'a* in Debra Reed Blank, "Some Considerations Underlying Jewish Liturgical Revisions." *CCAR Journal*, Winter 2003, p. 11-20; and Ethan Tucker, "Liturgical Change and its Limits," https://mechonhadar.s3.amazonaws.com/mh_torah_source_sheets/CJLVLiturgicalChange.pdf, p. 22. Tucker notes that Talmudic sources are inconsistent in their use of the word *matbe'a*, and Maimonides follows them in being similarly inconsistent in his use of this term in the Mishneh Torah.
[19] Jakob J. Petuchowski, "Some Laws of Jewish Liturgical Development." *Judaism* 34:3 (1985), p. 324.

blessings.[20] Meals are preceded and followed by blessings, whose wording and length varies based on what was eaten. There are special versions of the Amidah for Shabbat and holidays. A Musaf Amidah is added on Shabbat and on those holidays when the Musaf offering was prescribed in the Torah.

Even within these guidelines, however, some experts in Jewish liturgy have suggested that the tradition has more room for innovation than some assume. The liturgical scholar Yosef Heinemann commented in a 1973 symposium:

> ….I think of the weekday morning service, to which a person would need to devote a least one hour if he wished to recite it properly and suitably in a quorum, and this hardly any synagogue in the world is prepared for. We can say that this prayer really stultifies itself. Moreover, we ought not to wait for the Rabbis to come along and give their halakhic approval to needful changes. Halakhic rulings of that sort will never be given, and they are also not necessary because this is an area where, in large measure, we may do as we see fit, so long as we do not add to, or subtract from the (eighteen) blessings of the Amidah. Everything else is really in our own hands, including the reformulation of several of the eighteen blessings themselves if we feel that it is necessary. It seems to me that this can be done, if there is a community prepared to do it. The main problem is that no "ultra-orthodox" group is prepared to contemplate such an attempt, at least not here in Israel. Even in synagogues made up of thinking, educated people, a great uproar ensues as soon as someone attempts the smallest change, such as omitting the Yekum Purkan, in which we pray for the Exilarch in Babylon! As against this, it would seem that it is possible to do things of this sort in Conservative congregations in the United States, as we have seen in the Mahzor of Jules Harlow, which is truly a masterpiece of both expansion and contraction, an example of a kind of plastic surgery which in my opinion, revitalizes the Mahzor and its spirit. [21]

One precedent for liturgical abbreviation is *piyyutim*, liturgical poems that were incorporated into the liturgy. This may sound surprising, as today we are likely to think of piyyutim as expansions and supplements to the traditional liturgy, but the scholarly consensus is that classical piyyutim were originally intended as substitutions for sections of the traditional liturgy.[22] Thus piyyutim give us a window into what elements of a particular statutory prayer were considered its essence such that a poetic version of that prayer would fulfill a person's obligation.

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[20] The obligatory status of the evening Amidah is a matter of dispute in the Talmud; see BT Berakhot 27b and ff.

[21] Gabriel H. Cohn and Harold Fisch, ec., *Prayer in Judaism: Continuity and Change. Based upon the proceedings of an international conference held in the summer of 1973* (Northvale NJ: Jason Aaronson, 1996). p. 31-32.

[22] See Petuchowski, Jakob J., *Theology and Poetry: Studies in the Medieval Piyyut* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), p. 14-15: "Only later editions of the liturgy, including both the standard prayers and the piyyutim, make the latter look like inserts into the former." See also Ezra Fleischer, עיונים בבעיות תפקידם הליטורגי של סוגי הפיוט הקדום, *Tarbitz*, 40 (1970), p. 52.

Another precedent for liturgical abbreviation is the shortened forms of Birkat HaMazon that are found in halakhic literature. The Shulhan Arukh makes reference to an abbreviated Birkat HaMazon to be recited by workers, but says that "today, one always recites all four berakhot [of the complete Birkat HaMazon]."[23] The 17th century author of *Ateret Zekenim*[24] notes that this is regardless of the fact that Birkat HaMazon is understood as a *mide'oraita* commandment; the only way to explain it is that this is an example of יש כח ביד חכמים לעקור דבר מן התורה, this is an example of the power of the Sages to uproot a positive commandment from the Torah when necessary, and the workers' responsibilities to their employer warrant this more lenient ruling. Further, *Ba'er Heitev*[25] to *Shulhan Arukh* 192:1 includes an abbreviated version of Birkat HaMazon attributed to Rav Naftali, which includes all four paragraphs but has each one in a shortened form, concluding with the *hatimah* for each paragraph.

Bah (OH 192:6) discusses various abbreviated versions of the Birkat HaMazon, including one found in the Kol Bo that includes a poetic stanza of four lines for each of the four berakhot of Birkat haMazon.[26] For the Bah, this shortened version is too abbreviated, especially in that it presents an alternative version of the first berakhah. He prefers the version of Rav Naftali, published in Venice, which includes the first berakhah "in its entirety" (though we are aware that multiple versions of that first berakhah exist so it is not possible to know what is the "entire" version). It is clear that

[23] Shulhan Arukh, OH 191:1.
[24] Menahem Mendel Auerbach, 17th c. Vienna.
[25] Zechariah Mendel ben Aryeh Leib of Crakow, 17th c.
[26] We are including the full text of this poetic abbreviated Birkat Hamazon here as it can serve as a paradigm for liturgical abbreviation (though it was not acceptable to the Bah).

בא"י אמ"ה
הזן את העולם כולו.
ברוב גדלו.
המכין לכל בריותיו מאכלו.
ושלחנו ערוך לכל
בא"י הזן את הכל:

נודה לאל גואלנו.
המעדיף מטובו עלינו.
לא חסר כלום ממאכלינו
ברית ותורה וחיים ומזון
בא"י על הארץ ועל המזון:

רחם על עם עני ואביון.
הנתונים ללעג ולבזיון.
ודוד עבדך מהרה תמלוך בציון
ותכין בתוכה עם עמוסי יריכים
בא"י בונה ירושלים אמן:

בחיי יהודה ואפרים.
תמלוך מלך בירושלים.
ותבט עניי עמך ותפן
בא"י אמ"ה בורא פרי הגפן

both of these shortened versions were conscious abridgments of longer texts. Conservative Judaism has embraced this notion in principle in adopting abbreviated versions of Birkat Hamazon.[27]

See also the discussion of Havineinu (abbreviated Shmoneh Esreh), below, section (e).

More recently, CJLS teshuvot since at least the 1980s have addressed the concern about time constraints in tefillah and suggested and validated abbreviating the Torah reading (adopting the triennial cycle) and the use of *hoikhe kedusha* even in non-urgent circumstances.[28]

These precedents give us a method for abbreviating portions of the statutory liturgy in a halakhically appropriate manner, for those contexts when such abbreviation is necessary.

(e) **GUIDANCE REGARDING SPECIFIC SECTIONS OF THE LITURGY**

Jewish tradition is rarely univocal on liturgical issues. The answer to the question about what changes are appropriate is usually very contextual, and the answer for one community will differ from the answer for another community. Additionally, if a community exploits every possible legal leniency about liturgy (and there are many that could be employed), that community might quickly discover that the liturgical experience is not as valuable to the community as it used to be. People who love Jewish liturgy often love it because it is so varied and addresses so many different moods and emotions - but of course, the more liturgical abbreviation and streamlining that a community gets used to, the less true that is.

For all these reasons, this teshuvah does not simply list what parts of the liturgy are minimally acceptable and what parts can simply be skipped. Rather, this teshuvah endeavors to provide some sense of the histories of the various sections of the liturgy (as normally, the parts that are oldest are most authoritative), as well as which parts have been traditionally regarded as halakhically required. Ideally, this gives the community leaders the information they will need to make thoughtful decisions that will fit their own community, as well as the way the particular service is described to the community.

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[27] See Harlow, Jules, ed., *Siddur Sim Shalom* (Rabbinical Assembly, 1985), p. 778.

[28] CJLS teshuvot on abbreviation of tefillah include: Jeremy Kalmanofsky, "The Abbreviated Amidah" OH 124:1.2017; Elliot Dorff, "Annual and Triennial Systems for Reading the Torah" OH 137.1987a; Lionel E. Moses, "Is There an Authentic Triennial Cycle of Torah Readings?" OH 137.1987b; Richard Eisenberg, "A Complete Triennial Cycle for Reading the Torah" OH 137.1988, 1995, 2020; Avram Reisner, "Haftarot for a Triennial Cycle Torah Reading" OH 284:1.2014a; Kassel Abelson, "Omission of the Silent Amidah" OH 582.1995. Also see David Golinkin, "How May One Abbreviate the Loud Repetition of the Amidah?,"https://schechter.edu/how-may-one-abbreviate-the-loud-repetition-of-the-amidah-responsa-in-a-moment-volume-13-number-2-1/.

This section employs a color-coded approach adapted from Jacob Freedman's *Polychrome Historical Haggadah*[29], highlighting the sections that are first referenced in Biblical, Talmudic (Tannaitic and Amoraic), Geonic, Medieval, Modern, and Contemporary sources. Additionally, passages whose titles are underlined are passages that have been traditionally regarded as halakhically required. In general, the earlier that a passage entered the standard Jewish liturgical sources, the more authoritative it is, and the more strongly we would recommend that it be included in liturgical experiences of Conservative Judaism.

Those who are especially knowledgeable about the history of the liturgy may find that this teshuvah reiterates what they already know. We imagine, though, that there are many communal leaders who would find this guide helpful as they seek to make judicious decisions about liturgical abbreviations in their communities.

[29] Jacob Freedman, *Polychrome Historical Haggadah* (Springfield, MA: Jacob Freedman Liturgy Research Foundation, 1974).

Inspired by Rabbi Jacob Freedman's *Polychrome Historical Haggadah*

Underlined: sections that have been unambiguously regarded as halakhic requirements

Black: Biblical-era

Red: Talmudic era (1-500 CE)

Green: Geonic era (500-1000 CE)

Gold – Medieval era (1000-1500 CE)

Blue –anything after 1500 CE

***Birkhot ha-Shahar* (Talmudic era (1-500 CE))**

Whereas the *Birkhot HaShahar* are traditionally regarded as halakhically required, they are regarded as an obligation upon the individual, rather than the community. These blessings are found in the Babylonian Talmud, *Berakhot* 60b (the blessings that correspond with steps in a morning routine), and *Menahot* 43b (the blessings about identity categories). Maimonides[30] indicates that each of the berakhot is appropriately recited together with the action for which it is specified in *Berakhot* 60b, and those who do not perform the specified action do not recite the berakhah on that day. He notes (7:9) that a custom developed to recite these berakhot communally in the synagogue, but he does not think this practice is appropriate. The prayerbook of Saadia Gaon lists these berakhot as among the *Birkhot ha-Nehenin* rather than in his section describing the daily morning prayers.[31] The Tur[32] notes the custom to recite all of them in the synagogue, both because of the concern that one's hands may not be pure immediately after rising, and for the benefit of people who do not know how to recite the blessings independently.[33]

Birkhot ha-Shahar (until *gomel hasadim tovim le-amo yisrael*) are considered part of a normative daily Jewish prayer for individuals. Communities can use their discretion about whether to recite this section publicly or to leave it to individuals.[34]

Sections that follow Birkhot ha-Shahar

The title *Birkhot ha-Shahar* is used both to refer to the berakhot included in the two

[30] Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Tefillah 7:3-9.
[31] *Siddur Rav Saadia.* ed. Davidson, Assaf, and Joel (Mekitzei Nirdamim, Jerusalem, 1963), p. 88.
[32] Tur, OH 46:1.
[33] Both of these explanations are also found in texts of Seder Rav Amram Gaon, p. 2. A teshuvah of Natronai Gaon (Geonica 2:114) addresses the hand purity issue.
[34] See section (f), below, for some considerations about private recitation of parts of the liturgy.

sugyot listed above, or more generally to the contents of the siddur that precede Pesukei Dezimra. Above, we used the phrase *Birkhot ha-Shahar* to refer to the first of these possibilities. Below are descriptions of the passages that follow *gomel hasadim tovim le-amo yisrael* until the beginning of Pesukei Dezimra.

Yehi Ratzon (Talmudic era (1-500 CE))

This prayer, found in Berakhot 16b as the private prayer of Rabbi Judah Hanasi, is a later insertion in the siddur, as indicated by its presence in some but not all manuscript versions of Seder Rav Amram.[35] It is present in Abudraham and referred to in the Tur (OH 46). It can be considered optional.

Akedah (Medieval era (1000-1500 CE))

At this point in Birkhot ha-Shahar, some siddurim add the Akedah, together with the paragraph referencing the Akedah from the end of Zikhronot for Rosh HaShanah. This was among the practices inspired by the Kabbalistic Jewish community of Tzfat in the 1500s. The Akedah is not included in 20th and 21st century Conservative siddurim at this point in the service. It may be considered optional.

Le'olam + Shema + mekadesh et shimkha ba-rabbim + amar adonai (Geonic era (500-1000 CE)

This passage is found in the midrashic collection *Tanna DeVei Eliyahu* 21. It is found in all major manuscripts of Seder Rav Amram (though it appears to be brought there as a study passage)[36] but is absent in Siddur Rav Saadia. Abudraham notes that it was his community's practice not to say it.[37] As it is a post-Talmudic passage that was not considered a standard part of the liturgy in many communities in medieval times, it can be considered optional.

Korbanot + Rabbi Yishmael (Geonic era (500-1000 CE)

Medieval sources such as Abudraham discuss the recitation of the chapter of Mishnah Zevahim beginning with the words *Ezehu Mekoman*.[38] This practice is referenced in Seder Rav Amram[39] and is absent in Siddur Rav Saadia. It can be considered optional. (The Korbanot are not included in any Conservative movement Siddur.) The Korbanot are followed by the 13 hermeneutic principles quoted in the name of Rabbi Yishmael, drawn from Sifre Chapter 1. These are included in Conservative movement siddurim among other options for study materials and are appropriately regarded as optional.

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[35] *Seder Rav Amram*. Ed. Daniel Goldschmidt. p. 3.
[36] Seder Rav Amram, p. 6-7.
[37] Abudraham, p. 58. Note also that some siddurim, including Seligmann Baer's *Seder Avodat Yisrael*, include the hatimah without the use of *shem u-malkhut*, indicating that it is not a mandated berakhah (and in the opinion of Baer and those he followed, would even have been a *berakhah le-vatalah*).
[38] Abudraham (Jerusalem edition, 1963), p.48.
[39] Seder Rav Amram, p. 7.

Mizmor Shir Hanukkat … (after 1500 CE)

This is one of the latest passages to become a standard addition to the siddur, even absent in 19th century traditional siddurim such as Seder Avodat Yisrael (1868).[40] *Divrei Kehillot* (a Frankfurt minhag collection from the mid-19th century) also does not include it.[41] Abraham Berliner suggested that it was added to the daily liturgy only in the 17th century and was originally an insertion specifically for Hanukkah.[42] It can be considered optional.

Pesukei Dezimra: (Talmudic era (1-500 CE))

The Mishnah expresses a value that one should spend time in preparation before standing in prayer.[43] *Pesukei Dezimra* is alluded to in the Talmud,[44] in a passage usually understood as indicating that the core of *Pesukei Dezimra* is the daily recitation of the final psalms of the book of Psalms. Jeffrey Hoffman suggests, however, that *Pesukei Dezimra* as we know it may have developed in Geonic times, and that the Talmud may be using the phrase *Pesukei Dezimra* to refer to a different liturgical structure. In any event, *Pesukei Dezimra* is clearly described in the Talmud as optional. Siddur Rav Saadia also describes *Pesukei Dezimra* as a voluntary practice.[45] As Hoffman notes, in Geonic times, the definition of *Pesukei Dezimra* ranges widely from five psalms (Rav Saadia Gaon) to thirty-one psalms (Psalms 120-150), supporting a flexible approach to this part of the liturgy.[46]

Barukh She'amar (Geonic era (500-1000 CE)

Barukh She-amar, the opening blessing of Pesukei Dezimra (or more precisely, a poem that precedes the opening blessing of Pesukei Dezimra, followed by that opening blessing itself), is not mentioned in the Talmud and is first referred to in Geonic writings.[47] Halakhic writings assume it is obligatory to recite Barukh She'amar (or rather, the berakhah part of Barukh She'amar) when Pesukei Dezimra psalms are recited.

Whereas the practice of Pesukei Dezimra is clearly labeled in the Talmud as meritorious but discretionary, it later became a standard part of the Shaharit service, but halakhic authorities continue to recognize its optional status. Discussions of procedure when someone has arrived late to the synagogue and is catching up, or when someone is short on time, indicate the following principles:

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[40] Baer, p. 58.
[41] Solomon Geiger, *Divrei Kehillot*, p. 24.
[42] Abraham Berliner, הערות על הסידור, p. 27
[43] Berakhot 5:1: חֲסִידִים הָרִאשׁוֹנִים הָיוּ שׁוֹהִים שָׁעָה אַחַת וּמִתְפַּלְּלִים, כְּדֵי שֶׁיְּכַוְּנוּ אֶת לִבָּם לַמָּקוֹם. Also see BT Berakhot 31a.
[44] BT Shabbat 118b.
[45] Saadia, p. 32: והתנדבה אומתנו לקרוא מזמורים מספר תשבחות הקב''ה….
[46] Jeffrey Hoffman, *Weaving Prayer: An Analytical and Spiritual Commentary on the Jewish Prayer Book* (New Jersey: Ben Yehuda Press, 2024), 8-17. See Hoffman's suggestions for shortening *Pesukei DeZimra*, 17-19.
[47] See Siddur Rav Saadia p. 32; Rif, Berakhot 23a.

- Barukh She'Amar and Yishtabah are counterparts, and if one of them is said, the other should be said.[48]
- Both should only be said if there will be at least one psalm recited between them.
- If there is time for only one psalm, that psalm would be Psalm 145 (in its expanded "Ashrei" form). If there is time for two psalms, they would be Psalm 145 and Psalm 150. If there is time for a third psalm, one would add Psalm 148.[49]

Hodu (Medieval era (1000-1500 CE))

Hodu, a passage from I Chronicles 16:8-37, is specifically described in the Kol Bo as a minhag.[50] It is absent in both Seder Rav Amram and Siddur Rav Saadia. It can be regarded as optional.

Mizmor Letodah (Medieval era (1000-1500 CE))

Psalm 100 (*Mizmor Le-todah)* is not found in Seder Rav Amram[51] or Siddur Rav Saadia. It can be regarded as optional.

Yehi Khevod (Geonic era (500-1000 CE))

The collection of Biblical verses beginning with the words *Yehi Khevod* is found in Masekhet Sofrim[52] , Amram[53] and Saadia.[54] Elbogen suggests that Yehi Khevod was originally intended for recitation on festive days rather than for daily use.[55] Like other later additions to Pesukei Dezimra, it can be considered optional.

Ashrei and other Psalms (Talmudic era (1-500 CE))

The core of Psukei D'zimra is the Psalms 145-150. Reciting Psalm 145 (which we usually refer to as "Ashrei," though Ashrei is really Psalm 145 plus two verses at the beginning and one verse at the end) was already clearly a daily practice in the time of the Amora'im (see BT Berakhot 4b).[56] The Shulhan Arukh recommends that if there is time for only one psalm of Pesukei Dezimra, that psalm would be Psalm 145 (in its

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[48] See Tur, OH 52, citing Natronai Gaon and Seder Rav Amram Gaon. For this reason, if (as is the practice in some Conservative synagogues) the public Shaharit service begins at Shokhen Ad or Yishtabah, it is advisable for the shaliah tzibbur to recite Barukh She'amar and at least one psalm before the public service begins.

[49] Shulhan Arukh, OH 52:1.

[50] Kol Bo, 4; see B.S. Jacobsohn, B.S., *Netiv Binah*. Sinai, Tel Aviv, 1968. Volume 1, p. 194.

[51] See p. 7-10.

[52] Jacobsohn, *Netiv Binah,* volume 1, p. 200.

[53] Seder Rav Amram, p. 8.

[54] Siddur Rav Saadia Gaon, p. 33.

[55] Elbogen, Ismar, *Jewish Liturgy*: A Comprehensive History. tr. Raymond Scheindlin (JPS/JTS, New York, 1993), p. 74. Also see Rodman, Peretz, "The art of collage in Jewish liturgy: compilations of Biblical verses in Pesuqei De-Zimra." *Hebrew Studies* 59 (2018): 221–236.

[56] Note that the citation in printed editions of the Babylonian Talmud says that it is a meritorious practice to recite Ashrei three times each day, but the words "3 times" ג' פעמים are not found in manuscript versions of the Talmud, suggesting that reciting Ashrei three times each day (during Pesukei Dezimra, following the Shaharit Amidah, and to introduce Minhah) is a practice that developed later than the Talmudic era.

expanded "Ashrei" form), if there is time for two psalms, they would be Psalm 145 and Psalm 150, and if there is time for a third psalm, one would add Psalm 148.[57]

Typically we add additional psalms to Pesukei Dezimra on Shabbat and festivals (before Yehi Khevod) though communities differ as to which psalms are added and where exactly in the liturgy they are added.[58] All versions of Seder Rav Amram include these additional psalms,[59] while Siddur Rav Saadia does not.[60] This tradition notwithstanding, the abbreviating guidelines above also stand for the Shabbat/Festival version of Pesukei Dezimra; those additional psalms (19, 34, 90, 91, 135, 136, 33, 92, 93) can be considered optional.

The Song of the Red Sea (Medieval era (1000-1500 CE))

The Song of the Red Sea (Exodus 15) is a later addition to the Shaharit service. Maimonides knows of the practice of adding it and specifically refers to it as a minhag.[61] It is appropriately regarded as optional.

Yishtabah (Geonic era (500-1000 CE)

Yishtabah is often considered a Geonic product just as Barukh She-amar is; however, one could argue that Yishtabah is part of what the Mishnah refers to as Birkat Ha-Shir in its discussion of the conclusion of the Passover Seder.[62] Even if so, the notion that a berakhah should be recited following the recitation of Pesukei Dezimra is not found in Talmudic literature. However, Yishtabah is assumed by later halakhic sources to be a requirement when Pesukei Dezimra is recited.

On Shabbat and festivals, Nishmat Kol Hai is recited; it is best understood as an extended version of Yishtabah (or that Yishtabah is a shortened version of Nishmat, or that both are versions of Birkat ha-Shir discussed in Mishnah Pesahim). The sections beginning with the words *Ha-el be-ta'atzumot uzekha* and *Shokhen Ad* are best understood as the conclusion of Nishmat Kol Hai rather than as independent units.[63]). Any Talmudic reference to Nishmat Kol Hai is not a reference to its role in following Pesukei Dezimra on Shabbat and holidays.[64]

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[57] Shulhan Arukh, OH 52:1.
[58] The typical practice is for Ashkenazim to add them after Hodu and before Yehi Khevod, and for Sefardim to add them before Barukh She-amar.
[59] p. 69.
[60] p. 118-119.
[61] Hilkhot Tefillah, 7:13.
[62] Mishnah Pesahim 10:7.
[63] The practice to begin the formal chanting of Shaharit at Shokhen Ad (on Shabbat), Ha'el (on festivals), and Hamelekh (on Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur) obscures the fact that these are all part of the same composition/unit; see Kol Bo (R. Aharon ben R. Jacob ha-Cohen of Narbonne, France, 13th c.), 37.
[64] i.e., Nishmat Kol Hai is described as part of the Passover Seder (Pesahim 118a) and portions of it are described as part of the prayer of thanksgiving following a rainfall (Berakhot 59b), but it is not referenced in the Talmud as the conclusion of Pesukei Dezimra.

Our presentation of Pesukei Dezimra highlights that a nuanced approach is necessary for these decisions, rather than regarding these decisions as simple questions of "permitted" or "forbidden." All of Pesukei Dezimra appropriately can be considered to have optional status. Within Pesukei Dezimra, however, there are some passages (like Mizmor Letodah; the Song of the Red Sea) that were regarded as optional even for those who regarded Pesukei Dezimra as a standard and required part of the liturgy. Conversely, there are some parts of Pesukei Dezimra (like Barukh She-amar, Ashrei, Psalm 150, and Yishtabah) which have long been considered indispensable, even within an understanding that Pesukei Dezimra is technically an optional unit. Also, Pesukei Dezimra fulfills a helpful role as preparation for the core portions of the Shaharit service, and the prayer experience could suffer if this preparation time is omitted. The decisions about how much of Pesukei Dezimra to do (or even to omit it entirely) is likely to vary widely based on the specific situation and the needs of the community.

Shema u-virkhoteha: Barekhu; Shema embedded within the berakhot of the *Shema*

Barekhu, described in Mishnah Berakhot 7:3, is part of the oldest recorded structure of rabbinic liturgy and is considered an obligatory part of the service (when a minyan is present).

Halakhic sources indicate that the mitzvah of Kriat Shema is fulfilled by one who recites the three Biblical excerpts (Deut 6:4-9, Deut 11:13-21, Num 15:37-41). There are discussions of what parts require Kavvanah and what parts could even be read in a perfunctory manner, but it is an assumption in halakhic sources that those interested in fulfilling their halakhic obligation will be reciting the three paragraphs of the Shema in their entirety. From a pshat perspective, the Torah does not seem to highlight these verses or suggest that they have a special status. However, rabbinic tradition tends to assign them as *de-oraita*, at least in part.[65] Synagogue services designed for adults should include time for the recitation of these paragraphs if they are not recited out loud.

The institution of the Berakhot before and after the Shema is attested to in the earliest strata of rabbinic literature.[66] Details about the text of the first of these berakhot (including that the first of these berakhot, Yotzer, references Isaiah 45:7 in a modified form) are found in the Gemara.[67] Whereas some authorities suggest that one who omits them has fulfilled their obligation *bedi'avad*, they are regarded as obligatory *lekhathilah*.[68]

Yotzer is found in a relatively lengthy version in contemporary siddurim, largely because of the addition of the Kedushah de-Yotzer section (the call-and-response section of Yotzer that makes reference to the angels reciting the verses from Isaiah 6:3

[65] See Maimonides, *Sefer Hamitzvot*, Positive commandment #10. Authorities differ on exactly how much of Kriat Shema should be classified as de'oraita.
[66] See Mishnah Berakhot 1:4, בַּשַּׁחַר מְבָרֵךְ שְׁתַּיִם לְפָנֶיהָ וְאַחַת לְאַחֲרֶיהָ, וּבָעֶרֶב שְׁתַּיִם לְפָנֶיהָ וּשְׁתַּיִם לְאַחֲרֶיהָ.
[67] Berakhot 11b.
[68] See Tur OH 60.

and Ezekiel 3:12). The Kedushah de-Yotzer is not mentioned in the Talmud. Reciting it daily appears to have been a minhag of Babylonia, and it was recited in Eretz Yisrael only with a minyan and only on shabbat and festive days.[69] Siddur Rav Saadia includes (what today appears to us to be) an abbreviated version of Yotzer for individual use; it is an appropriate shortened version of Yotzer for individuals requiring such a shortened version. Considering that there was precedent in ancient Eretz Yisrael for omitting the Kedushah de-Yotzer on weekdays even in the presence of a minyan, a case could be made for using this shortened version on weekdays even with a minyan (but note the caveats in section "f" below).

From *Siddur Lev Shalem for Weekdays*, Forthcoming:
An Alternate B'rakhah: Saadiah Gaon (10th century) offers the following shortened version of this b'rakhah, for when an individual prays alone:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' א' מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, יוֹצֵר אוֹר וּבוֹרֵא חֹשֶׁךְ,עֹשֶׂה שָׁלוֹם וּבוֹרֵא אֶת־הַכֹּל. הַמֵּאִיר לָאָרֶץ וְלַדָּרִים עָלֶיהָ בְּרַחֲמִים רַבִּים וּבְטוּבוֹ מְחַדֵּשׁ בְּכָל־יוֹם תָּמִיד מַעֲשֵׂה בְרֵאשִׁית. בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה', יוֹצֵר הַמְּאוֹרוֹת

Barukh atah Adonai, our God, sovereign of time and space, forming light and creating darkness, bringing harmony while creating all. With kindness, You illumine the earth and all who dwell on it; in Your great goodness, You renew creation day after day. *Barukh atah Adonai*, creator of lights.[70]

Rabbi Edward Feld has written abbreviated poetic versions of Yotzer, Ahavah Rabbah and Geulah blessings for inclusion in Siddur Lev Shalem for Weekdays. As these include the essence of each berakhah, the themes of each berakhah that are halakhically mandated, and the hatimah of each berakhah, they (like Saadia Gaon's version of Yotzer) are appropriate options for abbreviated prayer (but note the caveats in section "f"). These poetic versions are certainly within the continuity of the tradition of poetic versions of sections of the liturgy created by the paytanim of Eretz Yisrael in the 1st millennium.[71]

The expansions to the Yotzer berakhah on Shabbat are not discussed in the Talmud and are best classified as piyyutim (*Ha-kol yodukha, El Adon*, *La'el asher shavat mi-kol ha-ma'asim*) which, while time-honored, do not prevent one of the abbreviated versions of Yotzer (from Siddur Rav Saadia, or the contemporary piyyut below) to be used on Shabbat, even though this is clearly non-normative.

[69] Lee Levine, *The Ancient Synagogue: The First Thousand Years* (Yale University Press, 2000), p. 540, citing the writings of the Geonic era sage Pirqoi ben Baboi, c. 800 CE.
[70] Siddur Lev Shalem for Weekdays, Rabbinical Assembly, forthcoming.
[71] For example, see Ezra Fleischer, שירת הקדש העברית בימי הביניים (Keter, 1975), examples of abbreviated Kerovot on p. 201-202 and Shiv'atot on p. 185-188. Also see poetic form of Birkat HaMazon, section (d) above.

KEY: Black: Biblical-era; Red: Talmudic era (1-500 CE); Green: Geonic era (500-1000 CE); Gold – Medieval era (1000-1500 CE); Blue –anything after 1500 CE

Edward Feld, piyyut corresponding to Yotzer, *Siddur Lev Shalem for Weekdays*, forthcoming:

Some recite this piyyut as a meditation; others recite the opening line of the b'rakhah followed by this piyyut and conclude with the last line of the b'rakhah as a substitute for the traditional liturgy

יוֹם לְיוֹם יַבִּיעַ אִמָּרָתְךָ,
בְּחִידּוּשׁ עוֹלָמְךָ בְּכָל עֵת.
אוֹרְךָ וַאֲמִתְּךָ הֵמָּה יְצָרוּנִי,
וּתְחַדְּשׁוּ דְמְיוֹנְךָ בִּי.

One day whispers Your speech to the next,
as You create the world anew each moment.
Your light and Your truth formed me,
and renews Your image within me.

Edward Feld, piyyut corresponding to Ahavah Rabbah, *Siddur Lev Shalem for Weekdays*, forthcoming:

Some recite this piyyut as a meditation; others substitute it for the traditional liturgy and conclude with the closing line at the end of the paragraph in the main column.

תָּאִיר עֵינֵינוּ בְּתוֹרָתֶךָ,
וְתוּקַד לִבֵּנוּ אַהֲבָה.
חֻקֵּי חַיִּים תְּלַמְּדֵנוּ,
וְדַעַתְךָ אֱלֹהִים תּוֹרֵנוּ.

Cause our eyes to shine with Your teaching,
So that our hearts are ignited with love.
Teach us the laws of life,
and instruct us to know You.

Edward Feld, piyyut corresponding to Emet / Ga'al Yisrael, *Siddur Lev Shalem for Weekdays*, forthcoming:

Some recite this piyyut as a meditation; others substitute this piyyut for the traditional liturgy and conclude with … [מי כמכה באלים ….]

Redemption

אֱמוּנָתֵנוּ תְּנַהֲלֵנוּ
וַחֲלוֹמוֹתֵינוּ תַּדְרִיכֵנוּ
וּמַעֲשֵׂינוּ יָבִיאֻנוּ לְהַר קָדְשֶׁךָ
וְנָרַנְּנָךְ כְּמֹשֶׁה וּמִרְיָם עַל שְׂפַת הַיָּם: (מי כמכה באלים וכו')

Our faith shall guide us,
our dreams shall direct us,
and our deeds shall bring us to Your holy mountain,
and we shall praise You
as Moses and Miriam did on the banks of the Sea….

Amidah: (Talmudic era (1-500 CE))

The Mishnah indicates that the recitation of 18 berakhot three times each day, which became the normative practice, was originally just one of three opinions: Rabbi Joshua held that "*me'ein shmoneh esreh*" is an appropriate option for all people, while Rabbi Akiba held that it was only appropriate for people who would have difficulty reciting the more normative Shmoneh Esreh Berakhot.[72]

Halakhic sources since the Talmud have suggested the use of a paragraph beginning with the word "*Havineinu*" as the text of "*Mei-ein shmoneh esreh*," even though this paragraph is really a summary of the 12 (or 13) intermediate berakhot.[73] Abbaye is cited as cursing those who say *Havineinu*, because it is authorized only for urgent circumstances (such as when one is traveling). Halakhic sources also indicate that Havinenu should not be used during the winter months because it does not include the wintertime petition for rain. Even in the Talmudic period, recitation of Havinenu was discouraged by many sages (for example, Abbaye, above). Later sources[74] indicate that even if Havineinu is permitted for recitation, observant Jews do not say it. A rationale for this reluctance to permit Havineinu is that the level of expected kavvanah for everyone has deteriorated, and if someone should omit a prayer with the rationale that they are on a journey or otherwise preoccupied, there is no guarantee that they will be any more likely to have appropriate kavvanah with the shorter prayer either. However, Havineinu is included in a variety of traditional siddurim,[75] indicating that people were using it. It is also included in Conservative Movement siddurim.[76] The use of Havinenu (embedded within the first three and last three berakhot) is appropriate as a substitute for the Amidah for individuals in circumstances where the complete weekday Amidah cannot be recited.

See teshuvot on Hoikhe Kedusha for info on this practice in necessary circumstances.[77]

In truly urgent circumstances, the Talmud and halakhic codes include a further abbreviated passage, צרכי עמך ישראל מרובין ודעתן קצרה יר"מ ה' אלהי שתתן לכל אחד ואחד כדי פרנסתו ולכל גויה וגויה די מחסורה והטוב בעיניך עשה בא"י שומע תפלה "The needs of Your nation, Israel, are many and their minds are limited. May it be Your will, Adonai our God, to provide each and every one with their necessary sustenance, and to each and every body all that it lacks. Blessed are You, Adonai, Who listens to prayer."[78]

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[72] Mishnah Berakhot 4:3
[73] Berakhot 29a
[74] See, for example, *Arukh ha-Shulhan*, OH 110.
[75] Including Baer's *Seder Avodat Yisrael*, p. 108.
[76] Siddur Sim Shalom (1985), p. 228-230.
[77] See Jeremy Kalmanofsky, "The Abbreviated Amidah," OH 124:1.2017.
[78] BT Berakhot 29b.

Kedushah: (Geonic era (500-1000 CE)

When the Amidah is recited in the presence of a minyan, the normative practice is to recite the antiphonal version of the 3rd berakhah, otherwise known as the Kedushah d'Amidah. It is questionable whether there are references to the Kedushah of the Amidah in the Talmud.[79] It is a standard practice to recite the Kedushah. The extended version of the Kedushah on shabbat and festivals, however, is a custom (that differs among different segments of the Jewish community), and whatever halakhic obligation there may be to recite the Kedusha would be fulfilled with the simpler and shorter form of the daily Kedushah (though note that such a switch would probably involve more complicated page announcements and would not save much time).

Tahanun: (after 1500 CE)

Whereas Tahanun is attested to in the Talmud,[80] Tahanun in contemporary siddurim is a much more formal liturgical unit than it was in earlier siddurim,[81] and even today there is significant divergence in the presentation of Tahanun among different siddurim. The Shulhan Arukh notes that each community has its own way of doing Tahanun, and there are also various customs about the festive days when Tahanun is omitted.[82] Tahanun is recited individually rather than communally. Tahanun can be considered optional in a communal weekday service (and large numbers of communal davening experiences, including weekday services at which semahot are celebrated, are at times when Tahanun is omitted anyway).
Elongating Tahanun on Mondays and Thursdays is specifically described in the Shulhan Arukh as a minhag.[83]

Torah service (Geonic era (500-1000 CE) and Torah reading: (Talmudic era (1-500 CE))

The blessings before and after each Torah reading, and the number of aliyot on different days, are part of the ancient liturgical structure described in the Mishnah and Gemara.[84] However, most of the prayers recited as the torah is taken out of the ark or returned to the ark are found first in Masekhet Sofrim, which is a post-talmudic source.[85] Abbreviation of the Torah reading itself is described in CJLS teshuvot on the triennial cycle and on abbreviating Haftarot.[86]

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[79] See Lee Levine, *The Ancient Synagogue: The First Thousand Years* (Yale University Press, 2000), p. 540-544. The discussion in BT Berakhot 21b is traditionally understood as a reference to the Kedusha in the Amidah as we know it, but this is not without debate.
[80] See, for example, BT Bava Metzia 59b.
[81] For example, Tahanun looks very different in Siddur Rav Saadia (p. 24) than it does in contemporary Ashkenazic siddurim, and the section for which one leans on one's arm is completely different. See the discussion in Ismar Elbogen, *Jewish Liturgy* (tr. Raymond Scheindlin, JPS/JTS, 1993), p. 66-70.
[82] Shulhan Arukh, OH 131:1.
[83] OH 134:1.
[84] BT Megillah 21a ff.
[85] *Soferim* 14:8ff (Vilna edition).
[86] See these teshuvot of the CJLS: Elliot Dorff, "Annual and Triennial Systems for Reading the Torah" OH 137.1987a; Lionel E. Moses, "Is There an Authentic Triennial Cycle of Torah Readings?" OH 137.1987b; Richard

Kedusha DeSidra (Talmudic era (1-500 CE)) and other concluding material (Geonic era (500-1000 CE):

Kedusha De-Sidra is the traditional name for the section beginning with the words "U-va Le-tziyon," which includes the verses from Isaiah 6:3 and Ezekiel 3:12 together with their Aramaic interpretations. There is one reference in the Babylonian Talmud to Kedusha De-Sidra, but the reference is cryptic enough that it is unclear if it refers to the same thing that we refer to by that name.[87] Based on a teshuvah by Natronai Gaon, Elbogen assumes that this is a vestige of a study session that used to follow Shaharit.[88] Others suggest that it was introduced as a substitution for the earlier Kedusha in the service at a time when its recitation was prohibited because of anti-Jewish persecution.[89] In the siddur of Saadia Gaon, Kedusha DeSidra (like the Kedusha de-Yotzer) is recited only in the presence of a minyan, and is omitted by individuals.[90] The section that includes the verses from Isaiah 6:3 and Ezekiel 3:12 together with the Targum of the verses is the core of Kedusha De-Sidra; other parts of the U-va le-tziyon paragraph clearly have optional status, and arguably so does Kedusha De-Sidra in its entirety.

Aleinu: (Medieval era (1000-1500 CE))

Aleinu originated as part of the Rosh HaShanah Musaf and was incorporated into the daily liturgy much later.[91] Aleinu's inclusion in the daily prayer service is medieval and began in Ashkenazic communities; this innovation eventually spread to the Sefardic world.[92] Whereas it is hard to imagine a prayer service without Aleinu (and omitting Aleinu would not save much time), its halakhic status is appropriately regarded as optional.

Eisenberg, "A Complete Triennial Cycle for Reading the Torah" OH 137.1988, 1995, 2020; Joshua Z. Heller, "An Emendation to Richard Eisenberg's Complete Triennial System for Reading Torah, to Address a Rare Situation" OH 137.2012; Miles B. Cohen, "Modification of the Triennial Cycle Readings for Combined Parashot in Certain Years" OH 137.2020a; David J. Fine, "A Dissent to 'Modification of the Triennial Cycle Readings for Combined Parashot in Certain Years'" OH 137.2020b; Avram Reisner, "Haftarot for a Triennial Cycle Torah Reading" OH 284:1.2014a; David Booth, "Dissent on Triennial Haftarot" OH 284:1.2014b; Avram Reisner, "Supplement: Haftarot for a Triennial Cycle Torah Reading" OH 284:1.2014c.

[87] BT Sotah 49a.

[88] Elbogen, p. 70.

[89] Beit Yosef, OH 132:2. Note that such explanations that root the history of liturgical phenomena in persecution tend to be doubted by liturgical scholars.

[90] See p. 25 (where it is omitted for individuals) and p. 39 (where it is included in the presence of a minyan).

[91] For a detailed history of when and why Aleinu entered the service for Rosh HaShanah, and then Yom Kippur, and from there to the other services, as well as a chart of how contemporary North American siddurim have dealt with its difficult passages, see Jeffrey Hoffman, "The Image of the Other in Jewish Interpretations of *Aleinu*," *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations*, 10:1, February 2015, 1-41.https://ejournals.bc.edu/index.php/scjr/article/view/5904. See also Ruth Langer, "The Censorship of Aleinu in Ashkenaz and Its Aftermath," in Debra Reed Blank, ed., *The Experience of Jewish Liturgy* (Brill, 2014), p. 147-152, and literature cited there.

[92] See B.S. Jacobson, *Netiv Binah*, I:373-374.

Shir Shel Yom: (Medieval era (1000-1500 CE))

Whereas the Mishnah includes a list of the psalms that the Levites sang on each day of the week in the Temple,[93] there was not a continuous practice of reciting these psalms in the synagogue. Maimonides describes this as a minority custom.[94]

Kaddish: (Talmudic era (1-500 CE))

The refrain of the Kaddish is referenced a few times in the Talmud,[95] though historians of liturgy have tended to regard the Kaddish at its origin as part of the domain of the study hall rather than of the synagogue.[96] The Mourner's Kaddish did not exist until the era of the Crusades.[97] The 19th c. Arukh ha-Shulḥan notes that there was a time when there were seven recitations of the Kaddish each day (three in Shaḥarit: Hatzi kaddish before Barekhu, Hatzi Kaddish after the Amidah, and Kaddish Shalem after Kedusha de-Sidra; two in Minhah: Hatzi Kaddish before the Amidah and Kaddish Shalem after the Amidah; and two in Maariv: Hatzi Kaddish before the Amidah and Kaddish Shalem after the Amidah). Only thereafter was the Kaddish Yatom added to the conclusion of each service, for a total of 10 Kaddish recitations each day (plus an additional Hatzi Kaddish following the Torah reading on days the Torah is read). He notes that in his day, some communities would recite even more Kaddishes than this (additional recitations of the Mourner's Kaddish and Kaddish De-rabbanan), but he feels that is inappropriate.[98] Hatzi Kaddish and Kaddish Shalem, wherever they occur, are usually regarded as part of the Matbea during communal prayer with a minyan (and are done essentially the same way in all minhagim, and in the oldest siddurim). Even if the Mourner's Kaddish developed later and has the status of minhag, pastorally it is very important and we would discourage eliminating it.

Minhah and Maariv: (Talmudic era (1-500 CE))

For individuals, the core of Minhah is the Amidah. (Ashrei and Aleinu can be considered optional.[99]) The core of Maariv is the Shema (embedded within its blessings) and the Amidah. The blessings surrounding the Shema in Maariv are already very brief.

Musaf: (Talmudic era (1-500 CE))

The Musaf Amidah on Shabbat and holidays is a key part of the *matbea shel tefillah*. As Jeffrey Hoffman has shown, whereas the Musaf Amidah corresponds to the additional sacrifice in Temple times, this does not particularly differentiate it from the other

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[93] Mishnah Tamid 7:4.

[94] Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, Seder Tefillot Kol Hashanah, 2:36: נָהֲגוּ מִקְצָת הָעָם לִקְרֹא בְּכָל יוֹם אַחַר תַּחֲנוּנִים אֵלּוּ

[95] For example, see BT Berakhot 21b, where there is a discussion among Amora'im about whether one can interrupt other prayers in order to respond יהא שמו הגדול מבורך.

[96] Lee Levine, *The Ancient Synagogue*: *The First Thousand Years* (Yale University Press, 2000), p. 590.

[97] See David Shyovitz, " 'You have saved me from the judgment of Gehenna': The origins of the Mourner's Kaddish in Medieval Ashkenaz" (AJS Review, 2015), p. 49-50 and works cited there.

[98] Arukh ha-Shulḥan, OH 55:4.

[99] Regarding Ashrei, see note 56 in the Pesukei Dezimra section, regarding the absence in Talmudic manuscripts of an instruction for Ashrei to be recited three times a day. Regarding Aleinu, see discussion above.

Amidot, as all the Amidot (morning, afternoon, and evening) correspond to sacrifices in Temple times.[100] The Musaf Amidah need not make specific reference to sacrifice, but we are regarding it as a standard part of the liturgy because it is clearly described in the Talmud as being halakhically required. The Mishnah cites an opinion that Musaf is recited only with a minyan and is omitted by individuals[101], but the halakhah is not deemed to be in accordance with that opinion. (Per the guidance in section "f" below, theoretically, a community could decide not to recite it communally with the assumption that those who wanted to recite it individually would do so.)

Kabbalat Shabbat is the latest liturgical addition to the siddur that has become standard throughout the global Jewish community. Most of Kabbalat Shabbat was an innovation of the community of 16th century Kabbalists in Tzfat (though Psalms 92 and 93 have been recited on Shabbat evenings since the 5th century).[102] These psalms plus Lekhah Dodi are an important part of the experience of welcoming Shabbat for many Jews, but from a halakhic perspective, they are in the more optional category.

***Berakhah Aḥat Me'ein Sheva* (Talmudic era (1-500 CE))** refers to the brief passage recited towards the end of Friday night prayers (in the presence of a minyan) that includes an abbreviation of the Shabbat Amidah. Reciting the *Berakhah Aḥat Me'ein Sheva* is specifically mentioned in the Babylonian Talmud[103], where it is noted that normally, there is no public recitation of the Amidah in the evening service, and that this public quasi-repetition of the (abbreviated) Amidah was instituted as a *takanah*, a rabbinic enactment, for safety reasons (to enable the community to conclude the service at the same time so that people would be less likely to have to walk home alone at night). The Talmud Yerushalmi, however, gives an entirely different explanation, suggesting that *Berakhah Aḥat Me'ein Sheva* is a Babylonian custom that substitutes for Kiddush in the event that no wine is available.[104] Whereas its recitation is mandated in halakhic sources, the Shulḥan Arukh notes that it is not recited in ad hoc minyanim in a mourner's home or in a post-wedding gathering where it is clear that the concern about latecomers walking home alone would not be relevant.[105] Whereas the recitation of this passage is normative, it has clearly been treated with some flexibility throughout the history of halakhah. It could be omitted if there is a compelling reason to do so.

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[100] Jeffrey Hoffman, "The Surprising History of the Musaf Amidah." *Conservative Judaism*, 42(1), Fall 1989. Hoffman adduces ancient sources that demonstrate that the Musaf service sometimes focused on themes other than sacrifices. See an expanded approach in his *Weaving Prayer: An Analytical and Spiritual Commentary on the Jewish Prayerbook* (New Jersey: Ben Yehuda Press, 2024), 294-307.

[101] Mishnah Berakhot 4:7.

[102] See Lawrence Hoffman, ed., *My People's Prayer Book, Volume 5: Kabbalat Shabbat* (Jewish Lights, 1997), p. 11-13.

[103] Shabbat 24b.

[104] JT Berakhot 8:1.

[105] Shulhan Arukh OH 268:10. Similarly, it is not recited on the first night of Passover that coincides with Shabbat; OH 487:1.

High Holy Days:
During the Covid era, the CJLS published guidelines for abbreviating High Holy Day services when safety required that public gatherings be of minimal length.[106]

[106] Steven Kane, Robert Scheinberg, Deborah Silver, and Scott Sokol, "Abbreviating Prayer Services for the High Holy Days of 5781/2020." https://www.rabbinicalassembly.org/story/abbreviating-prayer-services-high-holy-days-57812020.

(f) THE ROLE OF SYNAGOGUE LEADERS IN MAKING LITURGICAL DECISIONS

Historically, the role of the Shaliah Tzibbur has been to enable all people in the community to fulfill their halakhic obligation by listening attentively and saying "Amen" following each mandated blessing. The halakhic literature about Shaliah Tzibbur predominantly discusses this idea.[107] However, the situation may be different in the contemporary world. Some have suggested that in the contemporary world where all worshipers have access to prayerbooks, the role of the Shaliah Tzibbur now is simply to keep people praying together, and that in most cases the historic function of the Shaliah Tzibbur is not operative.[108] This suggests that in most Conservative congregations, individuals are in their own "driver's seat" with regard to the fulfillment of their halakhic obligations; decisions of the Shaliah Tzibbur do not even make it more likely that a particular congregant's halakhic obligations will be discharged.

As a halakhic movement, of course we want our congregants as much as possible to fulfill their halakhic obligations for tefillah. However, whether they do fulfill these obligations is much more a matter of their own decisions than the decisions of the *shaliah tzibbur*. This may give more latitude to those who are designing worship, on an occasional basis or for a particular population, to make a judgment that there is a factor that overrides the need to facilitate a service that makes an effort to discharge the halakhic obligation of the congregation. For example, in a hospital or elder care facility, a leader may decide to present a service that does not include various halakhically mandated pieces, with the assumption that those who want to do them will do them independently, and that those who would not have done them independently would not have had their halakhic obligations fulfilled anyway. Similarly, whereas Birkhot ha-Shahar blessings are regarded as halakhically obligatory, there is a long history of having them recited at home rather than in the synagogue,[109] and a community that makes this decision has ample precedent for doing so.

Even if a particular liturgical change or abbreviation can be validated according to halakhah, that does not mean that that change is right for every individual or every community. What is lost when abbreviations are made in the liturgy, individually and in aggregate, should be weighed against what is gained. Factors that should be

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[107] See, for example, Shulhan Arukh OH 124:1. See Mishnah Berurah there, s.k. 2, who holds that someone has their obligation fulfilled by the Shaliah Tzibbur only if they understand Hebrew.

[108] Mayer Rabinowitz, "An Advocate's Halakhic Responses on the Ordination of Women," CJLS responsum HM 7:4.1984a.p. 728-730. David Golinkin, https://responsafortoday.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/vol6_4.pdf, notes that the Shaliah Tzibbur's role as a fulfiller of communal obligations is relevant for some parts of the liturgy (e.g., the Amidah), and not relevant for other parts (such as the Shema, for which an earlier tradition of *porsin al shema* existed but is no longer practiced).

[109] For example, this is how they are originally described in Berkahot 60b, and this is how the Rambam insists that they be recited (*Hilkhot tefillah* 7:4-8; he is aware of the practice of reciting the blessings in the synagogue but rejects that practice, 7:9.)

considered when making a change or abbreviation should include the age and educational level of the community and the frequency of making this particular change.

Jewish educator Rivkah Katz tells the true story of a man she knew, a pious Jewish immigrant from Lithuania to South Africa, whose adult children were embarrassed that he was still wearing the *kapote* that he had worn in Lithuania. The two children had each decided to trim the *kapote* into a more stylish jacket, but one of the children trimmed the bottom of the *kapote* while the other trimmed the top, and the result was that in their zeal to make it into a shorter jacket, it had ceased to be a jacket at all. For Katz, this story is a metaphor for liturgical change and abbreviation. While not being averse to liturgical change in principle, she notes that too many liturgical omissions can deprive the liturgy of its most valuable characteristics, including the way that Jewish liturgy reflects the full spectrum of human emotion.[110]

(g) CONCLUSION AND PSAK

It is clear that there are many opportunities to make liturgical abbreviations without being halakhically out of bounds. However, making all such abbreviations all the time would rob the liturgy of its power. And such abbreviations ought to be for the purpose of making Jewish prayer a more powerful experience, and accompanied by the investment of time and energy and creativity in making Jewish prayer experiences more meaningful.

This teshuvah does not, and could not, create definite rules about what kinds of changes are appropriate under which specific circumstances. Instead, we have provided a document that we hope gives rabbis and other communal leaders some of the necessary halakhic and historical background to make thoughtful and appropriate decisions about occasional liturgical abbreviations within the bounds of halakhah.

Psak:

1. *Marei de-atra* have the responsibility to balance our respect for and connection to liturgical tradition, with the needs of each individual community.

2. When necessary, it is permissible to abbreviate the liturgy per the guidelines in this teshuvah. These guidelines should be employed judiciously and considering the needs of the particular community. The goal should not be simply to shorten but to promote meaningful engagement with Jewish prayer.

3. Individuals who would like to fulfill their halakhic obligation for daily prayer though the full traditional liturgy is not right for them (perhaps because they are towards the beginning of their daily davening journey, or because of an

[110] Gabriel Cohn and Harold Fisch, *Prayer in Judaism: Continuity and Change.* Jason Aronson, 1996. p. 38.

extenuating circumstance) can do so in the morning by reciting Birkhot ha-Shaḥar, the Shema (embedded within some form of its blessings), and the Amidah; in the afternoon, the Amidah; in the evening, the Shema (embedded within some form of its blessings) and the Amidah.