



# **God of the Faithful, God of the Faithless: Belief and Doubt in Prayer**

***Rabbi Jan Uhrbach***

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Rabbi Jan Uhrbach brings a passion for prayer to the JTS community. Through her work as founding director of the Block / Kolker Center for Spiritual Arts, she develops and oversees programs and discussions, as well as prayer services on Shabbat and festivals, for the JTS community and the general public.

Rabbi Uhrbach loves being in the classroom at JTS, where she teaches courses on the meaning of liturgy, and a course she created titled “The Art of Leading Prayer.” She is tasked also with developing curriculum and resources for professionals and lay people seeking to revitalize their leadership and experience of prayer.

In addition to her role at JTS, Rabbi Uhrbach serves as the founding rabbi of the Conservative Synagogue of the Hamptons in Bridgehampton, Long Island, enabling her to mentor many of JTS’s rabbinical and cantorial students in a congregational setting. She has played a key role in the acclaimed *Lev Shalem* prayer book series as associate editor of *Siddur Lev Shalem*, the Shabbat and festival *siddur* published by the Rabbinical Assembly in 2016. She also served on the editorial committee for *Machzor Lev Shalem*.

A distinguished teacher of Torah, she is also a member of the Wexner Heritage faculty, and has taught and served as scholar-in-residence in many synagogues.

Rabbi Uhrbach was ordained at JTS, where she was a Wexner Graduate Fellow. A graduate of Harvard Law School (’85) and Yale University (’88), Rabbi Uhrbach served as Law Clerk to Federal District Judge Kimba M. Wood. She then joined the New York law firm of Satterlee Stephens Burke & Burke LLP, where she specialized in media litigation, becoming a partner of the firm in January 1996.

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## PREPARATORY PRAYERS

### *The Meaning of the Day*

One day a year we make a journey in the company of the whole community of Israel—all of us together, each of us alone. That day is “The Day,” the Day of Atonement, the day that is deathlike. It is the day we wear the *kittel*, the white gown that will one day be our shroud. It is the day when eating and drinking cease. It is a day when the world recedes and we are set free to uncover the true meaning of our lives.

—JONATHAN MAGONET  
(*adapted*)

### *Entering Community*

Prayer recited in community has a special dimension. Individuals may pray alone and keenly experience God. Judaism recognizes this and does not discourage solitary prayer. But Judaism is wary lest such aloneness become the norm and the permanent condition of the human being. Religion is not simply what we do with our aloneness, but what we do with others. Prayer should not isolate us, it should not lead us to believe that we need only God and ourselves, but prayer should lead us outward toward the love and care of the world we meet. Through prayer we discover how important the community is for sustaining our own salvation.

—REUVEN HAMMER (*adapted*)

God of the faithless  
and God of the faithful,  
with doubt, we come  
in loneliness, we wait  
silently, we pray  
expecting nothing,  
wanting everything.

God of the faithful  
and God of the faithless,  
You, who speak in  
whispered silence,  
You, whose reason is  
mystery—  
Your order is infinite;  
remember, we are finite  
and need words and  
reason.

God of the faithless  
and God of the faithful  
God in all forms and  
formless  
who was, and is, and  
will be,  
hear us and turn.

—EDWARD FELD  
(*after Myriam Kubovy*)

Shalom: shalom to those who are far off, shalom to those who are near, says ADONAI.

### *Meditation for Putting on the Kittel*

Just as I clothe myself in this white garment, so may You purify my soul and my body, as the prophet Isaiah said,

“Even if your sins are like crimson,  
they will turn snow-white.”

*K'shem she-ani mitlabbeish/mitlabbeshet b'veged lavan, kein talbin et nishmati v'gufati, ka-katuv: im yihyu hata-eikhem ka-shanim ka-sheleg yalbinu.*

### *B'rakhah for Putting on the Tallit*

*Barukh atah ADONAI*, our God, ruler of time and space, who has made us holy through mitzvot and instructed us to wrap ourselves in *tzitzit*.

*Barukh atah Adonai eloheinu melekh ha-olam, asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivvanu l'hitattef ba-tzitzit.*

## Genesis 24:1-7

<sup>1</sup> Abraham was now old, advanced in years, and Adonai blessed Abraham in all things. <sup>2</sup> And Abraham said to the senior servant of his household, who had charge of all that he owned, "Put your hand under my thigh <sup>3</sup> and I will make you swear by **Adonai, the God of heaven and the God of the earth**, that you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites among whom I dwell, <sup>4</sup> but you will go to the land of my birth and get a wife for my son Isaac." <sup>5</sup> And the servant said to him, "What if the woman does not consent to follow me to this land, shall I then take your son back to the land from which you came?" <sup>6</sup> Abraham answered him, "On no account must you take my son back there! <sup>7</sup> **Adonai, the God of heaven**, who took me from my father's house and from my native land, who promised me on oath..."

## Berakhot 26b

It has been stated: Rabbi Yose ben Rabbi Hanina said: The *tefillot* were instituted by the Patriarchs. Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi says: The *tefillot* were instituted to correspond to the daily sacrifices.

It has been taught in accordance with Rabbi Yose ben Rabbi Hanina . . . Abraham instituted the morning prayer, as it says, "Abraham got up early in the morning to the place where he had stood" (Gen. 19:27, i.e., post Sodom and Gomorrah), and "standing" means only prayer, as it says, "Then Pinhas stood up and prayed (Psalm 106:30). Yitzhak instituted the afternoon prayer, as it says, "Yitzhak went out to meditate in the field at evening" (Gen. 24:63), and 'meditation' means only prayer, as it says, "A prayer of the afflicted when he faints and pours out his meditation before Adonai" (Psalm 102:1). Yaakov instituted the evening prayer, as it says, "He lighted [*va-yifga*] upon the place" (Gen. 28:11), and *pegi'ah* means only prayer, as it says, "Therefore do not pray for this people, neither lift up prayer nor cry for them, nor make intercession to [*tifga*] Me" (Jer. 7:16).

## Tanhuma Chaye Sarah 5

Teach us our master: How many prayers should a person pray each day? Rabbi Shmuel bar Nahman said: Since the day consists of three different periods, therefore a person must pray three times each day. In the morning the sun is in the east, at noon the sun is in the middle of the sky, and in the evening it is in the west.

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said: Avraham instituted the morning prayer, as it is stated, "Avraham awoke early in the morning." Yitzhak instituted the afternoon prayer, as it is stated, "Yitzhak went out to meditate in the field toward evening." Yaakov instituted the evening prayer, as it is stated, "He reached the place and spent the night there because the sun had set."

<sup>נ</sup> וְאֲבָרְהָם זָקֵן בָּא בְּיָמָיו וְה' בֵּרַךְ אֶת־אֲבָרְהָם בְּכָל־  
<sup>ב</sup> וַיֹּאמֶר אֲבָרְהָם אֶל־עַבְדּוֹ זָקֵן בֵּיתוֹ הַמִּשְׁלֵל  
בְּכָל־אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ שִׁים־נָא יָדְךָ תַּחַת יָרְכִי: <sup>א</sup> וְאֲשַׁבְּעֶךָ בְּה'  
**אֱלֹהֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֱלֹהֵי הָאָרֶץ** אֲשֶׁר לֹא־תִקַּח אִשָּׁה לְבָנִי  
מִבְּנוֹת הַכְּנַעֲנִי אֲשֶׁר אֲנֹכִי יוֹשֵׁב בְּקִרְבָּם: <sup>א</sup> כִּי אֶל־אֲרָצִי  
וְאֶל־מוֹלְדֹתַי תֵּלְךָ וְלִקְחָתְךָ אִשָּׁה לְבָנִי לִיְצַחָק: <sup>ה</sup> וַיֹּאמֶר  
אֵלָיו הָעֶבֶד אוֹלֵי לֹא־תֵאָבֵה הָאִשָּׁה לְלֶכֶת אַחֲרַי  
אֶל־הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת הַהֶשֶׁב אֲשִׁיב אֶת־בְּנֶךָ אֶל־הָאָרֶץ  
אֲשֶׁר־יָצֵאתָ מִשָּׁם: <sup>א</sup> וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו אֲבָרְהָם הֲשִׁמְרָ לְךָ  
פְּרִי־תֵשִׁיב אֶת־בְּנִי שָׁמָּה: <sup>ה</sup> | **אֱלֹהֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם** אֲשֶׁר  
לָקַחְנִי מִבֵּית אָבִי וּמֵאָרֶץ מוֹלְדֹתַי וְאֲשֶׁר דָּבַר־לִי וְאֲשֶׁר  
נִשְׁבַּע־לִי לֵאמֹר לִיְרַעַךְ אֶתְּךָ אֶת־הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת הוּא יִשְׁלַח  
מִלְּאָכּוֹ לִפְנֵיךָ וְלִקְחָתְךָ אִשָּׁה לְבָנִי מִשָּׁם:

איתמר, רבי יוסי ברבי חנינא אמר: תפלות אבות תקנום רבי יהושע בן לוי אמר: תפלות כנגד תמידין תקנום. תניא כוותיה דרבי יוסי ברבי חנינא, ותניא כוותיה דרבי יהושע בן לוי. תניא כוותיה דרבי יוסי ברבי חנינא: אברהם תקן תפלת שחרית - שנאמר (בראשית י"ט) וישכם אברהם בבקר אל המקום אשר עמד שם, ואין עמידה אלא תפלה, שנאמר (תהלים ק"ו) ויעמד פינחס ויפלל יצחק תקן תפלת מנחה - שנאמר (בראשית כ"ד) ויצא יצחק לשוח בשדה לפנות ערב, ואין שיחה אלא תפלה, - שנאמר (תהלים ק"ב) תפלה לעני כי־יעטף ולפני ה' ישפך שיחו, יעקב תקן תפלת ערבית - שנאמר (בראשית כ"ח) ויפגע במקום וילן שם, ואין פגיעה אלא תפלה, שנאמר (ירמיהו ז') ואתה אל תתפלל בעד העם הזה ואל תשא בעדם רנה ותפלה ואל תפגע - בי.

ילמדנו רבינו כמה תפלות אדם מתפלל ביום רבי שמואל בר נחמן אמר לפי שהיום משתנה ג' פעמים בכל יום לפיכך צריך האדם להתפלל ג"פ בכל יום בשחרית השמש במזרח ובצהרים באמצע הרקיע ובמנחה במערב רבי יהושע בן לוי אמר אברהם תיקן תפלת הבקר שנאמר (בראשית כב) וישכם אברהם בבקר יצחק תיקן תפלת מנחה שנא' (שם כד) ויצא יצחק לשוח בשדה לפנות ערב יעקב תקן תפלת הערב שנאמר (שם כח) ויפגע במקום וילן שם כי בא השמש

Gen. 25:21-22

וַיִּתְרַצֵּצוּ הַבְּנִים בְּקִרְבָּהּ וַתֹּאמֶר אִם־כֵּן לָמָּה זֶה אֲנֹכִי וַתִּלְדָּךְ לְדָרֶשׁ אֶת־ה':  
Then Yitzhak entreated Adonai opposite his wife, for she was barren. Adonai was entreated by him, and Rivka has wife conceived. The children struggled within her and she said, "If so, why is there this 'I'?" So she went to inquire of Adonai.

Vilna Gaon on Gen. 25:22

ועל כן הרהרה שח"ו וש שתי רשויות, ותאמר "אמ כן למה זה אנכי," רצה לומר, מה שכתב בעשרת הדברות "אֲנֹכִי ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ לֹא־יְהִי לְךָ אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים" שהוא נגד מה שאירע לי ברציצה זו.

Therefore, **she began to have doubts that has v'shalom there are two authorities**, and she said, "If so, **what is this Anokhi**," that is to say, "that which is written in connection with the ten commandments, 'I am (Anokhi) Adonai your God, you shall not have other Gods,' which is contrary to what happened to me with this r'tzitza."

Bereshit Rabbah 63:6

ר' יוחנן ור"ל, ר"י אמר זה רץ להרוג את זה וזה רץ להרוג את זה, ר"ל אמר זה מתיר ציווי של זה וזה מתיר ציווי של זה . . . בשעה שהיתה עומדת על בתי כנסיות ובתי מדרשות יעקב מפרכס לצאת הה"ד (ירמיה א) בטרם אצרך בבטן ידעתך ובשעה שהיתה עוברת על בתי עבודת כוכבים עשו רץ ומפרכס לצאת הה"ד זורו רשעים מרחם

Rabbi Yochanan and Resh Lakish discussed this. Rabbi Yochanan said: This one ran to kill that one, and that one ran to kill this one. Resh Lakish said: This one annulled the laws of that one, and that one annulled the laws of this one. . . . When she stood near synagogues or schools, Yaakov struggled to come out; hence it is written, "Before I formed you in the belly I knew you" (Jer. 1:5). While when she passed idolatrous temples, Esav ran and struggled to come out; hence it is written, "The wicked are estranged from the womb" (Ps. 58:4).

Sefer Abudarham, Birkhot HaShahar, V'tzarikh

וכ' אבן הירחי נשאלתי על ענין הברכות שבהתחלתן מדבר כלפי השם כאלו הוא כנגדו ובסופן כאלו אינו כנגדו במדרש (שו"ט טז). טעם לכולם ממה שנא' (תה' קיט, פז) שויתי ה' לנגדי תמיד כי כשמזכיר את השם ואו' ברוך אתה ה' הוא עומד לנגדו וכיון שאו' אח"כ מלך העולם נמצא שאינו עומד נגדו שר"ל אותו אלהינו שהוא מלך העולם הוא קדשנו במצותיו וצונו לעשותם.

And the Ibn HaYarhi wrote: I was asked about the matter of blessings, in that one speaks at the beginning as though God is directly in front of one, but at the end as though God is not in front of one (in Misrash Sohar Tov 16). The reason, according to all, is as follows. From the verse [Psalms 119:87] "I have placed Adonai before me always," [we learn] that when one mentions the Divine Name and says, "*Barukh atah Adonai*," God stands directly in front of one. And since we say afterwards, "*melekh ha-olam*," we find that God is not standing directly in front of one. Which is to say, *Eloheinu*, who is Sovereign of all space/time, is the one who sanctifies us with God's commandments and commands us to do them.

והריב"א כ' שהטעם שתקנו הברכות בלשון נוכח ונסתר מפני שהקב"ה נגלה ונסתר נגלה מצד מעשיו ונסתר מצד אלהותו. And the Riva wrote that the reason they established the blessing formula in the language of the second person and then the third person (*nokheah v'nistar*), is because the Holy Blessed One is both revealed and concealed -- revealed from the perspective of God's deeds, and concealed from the perspective of God's Divinity.

וגם הנשמה נראית ונעלמת לכן הנפש מברכת בנכח ונסתר כמו שנא' ברכי נפשי את ה' וכל קרבי את שם קדשו (שם קד, א) ברכי נפשי את ה' אלהי גדלת מאד וגו' עוטה אור כשלמה וגו'. מגערתך ינוסון. והברכה היא בדבור הפה ומחשבת הלב. הלב נעלם והקול נשמע והאדם מורכב גוף ונשמה וראוי ה' לו לידבק בקונו ולעמוד נכחו תמיד מצד נשמתו אלא שאינו יכול מצד גופו לכך ברכותיו נכח ונסתר. וזה הטעם נכון הוא יותר מן הראשון.

And the soul (*neshamah*) too is "visible" and hidden. Therefore a person (*nefesh*) blesses in the second and third person, as it says, "Bless Adonai, O my soul, and all of my innards [bless God's] holy Name" (Psalms 103:1) and "Bless Adonai, O my soul. Adonai my God, You are very great . . . garbed in light as in a garment . . . At your rebuke [the waters] fled" (Psalms 104:1-2, 7). For blessing is made with the word of the mouth, and the thought of the heart; the heart is hidden, the voice is heard. And a human being is a composite of body and soul. From the aspect of the soul it is fitting to cleave always to one's Creator and to stand always in [God's] presence, but this is impossible from the aspect of the body; therefore the blessing is in both the second and the third person. And this reason is more correct than the first one.



Babylonian Talmud, Yoma 69b

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said: Why were they called men of the Great Assembly? Because they restored the crown of the divine attributes to its ancient completeness.

Moses had said: God, great, mighty, and awesome (Deut. 10:17).

Then Jeremiah came and said: Aliens are destroying God's Temple. Where then are [God's] awesome deeds? Hence he omitted 'awesome' (Jer. 32:18) (הַאֵל הַגָּדוֹל הַגִּבּוֹר).

Daniel came and said: Aliens are enslaving God's sons. Where are [God's] mighty deeds? Hence he omitted the word 'mighty' (Dan. 9:4) (הַאֵל הַגָּדוֹל) (וְהַנּוֹרָא).

But they came and said: On the contrary! Therein lie [God's] mighty deeds that [God] suppresses [God's] wrath, that [God] extends long-suffering to the wicked. Therein lie [God's] awesome powers: But for the fear of [God], how could one [single] nation persist among the [many] nations!

But how could the Rabbis abolish something established by Moses? R. Eleazar said: Since they knew that the Holy Blessed One insists on truth, they would not ascribe false [things] to [God].

דאמר רבי יהושע בן לוי: למה נקרא שמן אנשי כנסת הגדולה - שהחזירו עטרה ליושנה.

אתא משה אמר (דברים י) האל הגדל הגבר והנורא,

אתא ירמיה ואמר: נכרים מקרקרין בהיכלו, איה נוראותיו? לא אמר נורא.

אתא דניאל, אמר: נכרים משתעבדים בבנין, איה גבורותיו? לא אמר גבור.

אתו אינהו ואמרו: אדרבה, זו היא גבורת גבורתו שכובש את יצרו, שנותן ארך אפים לרשעים. ואלו הן נוראותיו - שאלמלא מוראו של הקדוש ברוך הוא היאך אומה אחת יכולה להתקיים בין האומות?

ורבנן היכי עבדי הכי ועקרי תקנתא דתקין משה! - אמר רבי אלעזר: מתוך שיודעין בהקדוש ברוך הוא שאמתו הוא, לפיכך לא כיזבו בו.

one say: Why was Moses killed a man of God? because he was able to answorm God's judgment to God's compassion.

MIDRASH ON PSALMS

our Refuge

od is the place in which the world is located. herefore, one of God's ames is Hamakom, "the lace."

MIDRASH ON PSALMS

prayers

on't let me fall like a stone that drops on the hard ground. and don't let my hands become dry as the twigs of a tree when the wind beats down the last leaves. and when the storm rips dust from the earth angry and howling. Don't let me become the last fly trembling terrified on a windowpane.

Don't let me fall. have so much prayer, but, as a blade of Your grass in a distant, wild field loses a seed in the lap of the earth

And dies away, how in me Your living breath, As You sow a seed in the earth.

KADYA MOLODOWSKY (translated by Kathryn Hellerstein)

A PRAYER OF MOSES, MAN OF GOD

Lord, You have been our refuge in every generation: before mountains were born, before You shaped earth and from the very beginning to the end of time, You are God.

You return humans to dust, saying:

"Return, children of Adam."

In Your sight, a thousand years are but a yesterday that has passed, a watch in the night.

People's lives flow by as in dreams:

fresh grass at daybreak; at daybreak newly sprouted, dried up and withered in the night.

We are consumed by Your anger,

terrified by Your fury.

You set our sins before You,

our secrets before the light of Your face.

For all our days face Your wrath;

our years end like a sigh.

Seventy years are spent thus,

or if we are given strength, eighty.

Most of them filled with toil and fatigue;

the years rush by quickly and we disappear.

Who can realize the strength of Your anger?

The fear of You matches Your wrath.

Teach us to make our days count

and so acquire a heart that is wise.

Turn to us, ADONAI; how long the wait?

Comfort Your servants:

at daybreak satisfy us with Your love and kindness,

that we may sing with joy all of our days.

Grant us days of happiness equal to those we suffered,

the years we saw so much wrong.

May Your servants see Your deeds;

may Your glory be upon their children.

► May the peace of the Lord, our God, be with us;

may the work of our hands last beyond us,

and may the work of our hands be lasting.

Psalms 90

PSALM 90 contemplates human mortality and then arrives at a prayerful moment in which we ask that the accomplishments of our short lives have lasting value. Ultimately it is a prayer that the abyss between the human and the Divine be bridged. This is the only psalm ascribed to Moses.

LORD. Both here and in the last verse of this psalm, the Hebrew does not spell out the personal name of God (yod-hei-vav-hei) but instead uses the substitute word adonai, meaning "my lord" or "my master."

REFUGE. Just as in Psalm 104:22, where the same word is used to describe the lion's hidden lair deep in the forest, the term suggests hiddenness and protection.

YOU SHAPED. The Hebrew verb describes the emptying of the mother's womb in birthing. God's act of creation is seen as the birthing of the world.

CHILDREN OF ADAM. The Hebrew phrase means "human beings." The curse of Adam and Eve in their expulsion from the Garden was mortality: "And you shall return to the ground" (Genesis 3:19).

TURN TO US, ADONAI. This is the only time in the psalm where the personal name of God is used. Earlier, the poet reminded us that humans must "return" to the earth; now, the poet, addressing God with God's personal name, calls upon God to turn to those who live on earth.

PEACE OF THE LORD. Instead of God's wrath, described at the beginning of the psalm, now we meet God's beneficence. The word no-am is associated with delight, beauty, grace, and peace. No-am reverses the spelling ma-on, "refuge," with which the psalm began.

MAY THE WORK OF OUR HANDS BE LASTING. The final plea of the psalmist is that we might partner with God in creation—that our work, like God's, may last and that our lives may thus have enduring meaning. We may not be immortal but we may be touched by a measure of eternity. Our experience of Shabbat may be such a moment.

תפלה למשה איש האלהים  
אדני, מעונו אמתה היית לנו בדר ורה.  
בטרם הרים ילדו ותחולל ארץ ותביל  
ומעולם עד עולם אמתה אל.

תשוב אנוש עד דבא, ותאמר שובו בני אדם.  
כי אלף שנים פעיניך פיום אתמול כי יעבה,  
ואשמודה בלילה.

ורמתם שנה יהיו, בפקר פחציר יחלה.  
בפקר יציו חלה, לערב ימולל ויבש.  
כי בלינו באפך, ובחמתך נבדלנו.

שמה עולתינו לנגדה, עלמנו למאור פניך.  
כי בלימינו פנו בעברתך, פלינו שנינו כמו הנה.  
ימי שנותיניו בהם שבעים שנה.

ואם בקבורת שמונים שנה ורהבם עמל ואנו,  
כי גו חיש ונעפפה. מי יודע עו אפך ויבא אתך עברתך.

למנות ימינו פן הודע, ונבא לבב חכמה.  
שובה יהוה, עד מתי, והנחם על עבדיך.  
שבענו בפקר חסדך, ונרונה ונשמחה בבל ימינו.

שמחנו בימות עפיתנו, שנות ראינו רעה.  
ראה אל עבדיך פעלה, וחדך על בניהם.  
וידי לעם אדני אלהינו עלינו,

ומעשה ידינו בוננה, ומעשה ידינו בוננה.  
הקלים צ