S'fatai Tiftach **– When do we sing this, what does it mean?**

אֲדֹנָי שְׂפָתַי תִּפְתָּח וּפִי יַגִּיד תְּהִלָּתֶךָ׃

Adonai s'fatai tiftach, ufi yagid t'hilatecha

Adonai, open my lips, and let my mouth declare Your praise.

- How do you feel when we are singing this?
- When do we sing this?
- Where does this come from?

Shulchan Arukh, Orach Chayim 123:6

כשיחזור ש״צ התפל׳ יאמר ג״כ ה׳ שפתי תפתח

When the prayer leader repeats the [Amidah] prayer, [the leader] should also say "Adonai, s'fatai tiftach" [the verse that precedes the Amidah].

- Let's review a little Talmud on the times of prayer before we go much further:

Talmud Berakhot 26a:11

מַתְנִי׳ **תְּפִלַּת הַשַּׁחַר** עַד חֲצוֹת. רַבִּי יְהוּדָה אוֹמֵר: עַד אַרְבַּע שָׁעוֹת. תְּפִלַּת הַמִּנְחָה עַד הָעֶרֶב, רַבִּי יְהוּדָה אוֹמֵר: עַד פְּלַג הַמִּנְחָה.

MISHNA: This mishna determines the times beyond which the different prayers may not be recited. According to the Rabbis, **the morning prayer** may be recited **until noon. Rabbi Yehuda says:** It may be recited only **until four hours** after sunrise. According to the Rabbis, **the afternoon prayer** may be recited **until the evening. Rabbi Yehuda says:** It may be recited only **until the midpoint of the afternoon [*pelag haminḥa*],** i.e., the midpoint of the period that begins with the sacrifice of the daily afternoon offering and ends at nightfall, which is the end of the afternoon.

(Materials Prepared by Rabbi Lisa Bock)

תְּפִלַּת הָעֶרֶב אֵין לָהּ קֶבַע. וְשֶׁל מוּסָפִים כָּל הַיּוֹם, רַבִּי יְהוּדָה אוֹמֵר: עַד שֶׁבַע שָׁעוֹת.

The evening prayer may be recited throughout the night and **is not fixed** to a specific hour. According to the Rabbis, **the additional prayer** may be recited **all day. Rabbi Yehuda says:** It may be recited only **until seven hours** after sunrise.

The Talmud section here continues with the *Gemara*, and some passages later there is a dispute between the Rabbis and Rabbi Yehuda…

Talmud Berakhot 26b:4-11

אִיתְּמַר, רַבִּי יוֹסֵי בְּרַבִּי חֲנִינָא אָמַר: תְּפִלּוֹת אָבוֹת תִּקְּנוּם. רַבִּי יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בֶּן לֵוִי אָמַר: תְּפִלּוֹת כְּנֶגֶד תְּמִידִין תִּקְּנוּם.

The dispute between the Rabbis and Rabbi Yehuda with regard to the times beyond which the different prayers may not be recited is rooted in a profound disagreement, also manifest in a later amoraic dispute. **It was stated: Rabbi Yosei, son of Rabbi Ḥanina, said:** The practice of praying three times daily is ancient, albeit not in its present form; **prayers were instituted by the Patriarchs.** However, **Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said** that the **prayers were instituted based on the daily offerings** sacrificed in the Holy Temple, and the prayers parallel the offerings, in terms of both time and characteristics.

תַּנְיָא כְּוָותֵיהּ דְּרַבִּי יוֹסֵי בְּרַבִּי חֲנִינָא, וְתַנְיָא כְּוָותֵיהּ דְּרַבִּי יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בֶּן לֵוִי. תַּנְיָא כְּוָותֵיהּ דְּרַבִּי יוֹסֵי בְּרַבִּי חֲנִינָא: אַבְרָהָם תִּקֵּן תְּפִלַּת שַׁחֲרִית, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: ״וַיַּשְׁכֵּם אַבְרָהָם בַּבֹּקֶר אֶל הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר עָמַד שָׁם״, וְאֵין ״עֲמִידָה״ אֶלָּא תְּפִלָּה, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: ״וַיַּעֲמֹד פִּינְחָס וַיְפַלֵּל״.

The Gemara comments: **It was taught** in a *baraita* **in accordance with** the opinion of **Rabbi Yosei, son of Rabbi Ḥanina, and it was taught** in a *baraita* **in accordance with** the opinion of **Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi.** The Gemara elaborates: **It was taught** in a *baraita* **in accordance with** the opinion of **Rabbi Yosei, son of Rabbi Ḥanina: Abraham instituted the morning prayer, as it is stated** when Abraham came to look out over Sodom the day after he had prayed on its behalf: **"And Abraham rose early in the morning to the place where he had stood** before the Lord" (Genesis 19:27), **and** from the context as well as the language utilized in the

verse, the verb **standing** means **nothing other than prayer,** as this language is used to describe Pinehas' prayer after the plague, **as it is stated: "And Pinehas stood up and prayed** and the plague ended" (Psalms 106:30). Clearly, Abraham was accustomed to stand in prayer in the morning.

יִצְחָק תִּקֵּן תְּפִלַּת מִנְחָה, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר ״וַיֵּצֵא יִצְחָק לָשׂוּחַ בַּשָּׂדֶה לִפְנוֹת עָרֶב״, וְאֵין ״שִׂיחָה״ אֶלָּא תְּפִלָּה, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר ״תְּפִלָּה לְעָנִי כִּי יַעֲטֹף וְלִפְנֵי ה׳ יִשְׁפֹּךְ שִׂיחוֹ״.

Isaac instituted the afternoon prayer, as it is stated: "And Isaac went out to converse [*lasuaḥ*] in the field toward evening" (Genesis 24:63), **and conversation** means **nothing other than prayer, as it is stated: "A prayer of the afflicted when he is faint and pours out his complaint [*siḥo*] before the Lord"** (Psalms 102:1). Obviously, Isaac was the first to pray as evening approached, at the time of the afternoon prayer.

יַעֲקֹב תִּקֵּן תְּפִלַּת עַרְבִית, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: ״וַיִּפְגַּע בַּמָּקוֹם וַיָּלֶן שָׁם״, וְאֵין ״פְּגִיעָה״ אֶלָּא תְּפִלָּה, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: ״וְאַתָּה אַל תִּתְפַּלֵּל בְּעַד הָעָם הַזֶּה וְאַל תִּשָּׂא בַעֲדָם רִנָּה וּתְפִלָּה וְאַל תִּפְגַּע בִּי״

Jacob instituted the evening prayer, as it is stated: "And he encountered [*vayifga*] the place and he slept there for the sun had set" (Genesis 28:11). The word **encounter** means **nothing other than prayer, as it is stated** when God spoke to Jeremiah: **"And you, do not pray on behalf of this nation and do not raise on their behalf song and prayer, and do not encounter [*tifga*] Me** for I do not hear you" (Jeremiah 7:16). Jacob prayed during the evening, after the sun had set.

וְתַנְיָא כְּוָותֵיהּ דְּרַבִּי יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בֶּן לֵוִי: מִפְּנֵי מָה אָמְרוּ תְּפִלַּת הַשַּׁחַר עַד חֲצוֹת — שֶׁהֲרֵי תָּמִיד שֶׁל שַׁחַר קָרֵב וְהוֹלֵךְ עַד חֲצוֹת. וְרַבִּי יְהוּדָה אוֹמֵר: עַד אַרְבַּע שָׁעוֹת שֶׁהֲרֵי תָּמִיד שֶׁל שַׁחַר קָרֵב וְהוֹלֵךְ עַד אַרְבַּע שָׁעוֹת.

And it was taught in a *baraita* **in accordance with** the opinion of **Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi** that the laws of prayer are based on the laws of the daily offerings: **Why did** the Rabbis **say** that **the morning prayer** may be recited **until noon? Because,** although the **daily morning offering** is typically brought early in the morning, it may be **sacrificed until noon. And Rabbi Yehuda says:** My opinion, that the morning prayer may be recited **until four hours** into the day, is **because the daily morning offering is sacrificed until four hours.**

וּמִפְּנֵי מָה אָמְרוּ תְּפִלַּת הַמִּנְחָה עַד הָעֶרֶב — שֶׁהֲרֵי, תָּמִיד שֶׁל בֵּין הָעַרְבַּיִם קָרֵב וְהוֹלֵךְ עַד הָעֶרֶב. רַבִּי יְהוּדָה אוֹמֵר: עַד פְּלַג הַמִּנְחָה, שֶׁהֲרֵי תָּמִיד שֶׁל בֵּין הָעַרְבַּיִם קָרֵב וְהוֹלֵךְ עַד פְּלַג הַמִּנְחָה.

And why did the Rabbis **say** that **the afternoon prayer** may be recited **until the evening? Because the daily afternoon offering is sacrificed until the evening. Rabbi Yehuda says** that **the afternoon prayer** may be recited only **until the midpoint of the afternoon because,** according to his opinion, **the daily afternoon offering is sacrificed until the midpoint of the afternoon.**

וּמִפְּנֵי מָה אָמְרוּ תְּפִלַּת הָעֶרֶב אֵין לָהּ קֶבַע — שֶׁהֲרֵי אֵבָרִים וּפְדָרִים שֶׁלֹּא נִתְעַכְּלוּ מִבָּעֶרֶב, קְרֵבִים וְהוֹלְכִים כָּל הַלַּיְלָה.

And why did they say that **the evening prayer is not fixed? Because** the burning of the **limbs and fats** of the offerings that were **not consumed** by the fire on the altar **until the evening.** They remained on the altar and were **offered continuously** throughout **the entire night.**

וּמִפְּנֵי מָה אָמְרוּ שֶׁל מוּסָפִין כָּל הַיּוֹם — שֶׁהֲרֵי קָרְבָּן שֶׁל מוּסָפִין קָרֵב כָּל הַיּוֹם. רַבִּי יְהוּדָה אוֹמֵר: עַד שֶׁבַע שָׁעוֹת, שֶׁהֲרֵי קָרְבַּן מוּסַף קָרֵב וְהוֹלֵךְ עַד שֶׁבַע שָׁעוֹת.

And why did the Rabbis **say** that **the additional prayer** may be recited **all day? Because the additional offering is brought** throughout **the entire day.** However, **Rabbi Yehuda says** that **the additional prayer** may be recited **until the seventh hour** of the day, **because the additional offering is sacrificed until the seventh hour.**

- What does this Talmudic conversation reveal to us about prayer, its origin and purpose?

Berakhot 26b:14

נֵימָא תֶּיהֱוֵי תְּיוּבְתֵּיהּ דְּרַבִּי יוֹסֵי בְּרַבִּי חֲנִינָא? אָמַר לְךָ רַבִּי יוֹסֵי בְּרַבִּי חֲנִינָא: לְעוֹלָם אֵימָא לָךְ, תְּפִלּוֹת, אָבוֹת תִּקְּנוּם, וְאַסְמְכִינְהוּ רַבָּנַן אַקְּרְבָּנוֹת. דְּאִי לָא תֵּימָא הָכִי, תְּפִלַּת מוּסָף לְרַבִּי יוֹסֵי בְּרַבִּי חֲנִינָא מַאן תַּקְּנַהּ. אֶלָּא תְּפִלּוֹת אָבוֹת תִּקְּנוּם, וְאַסְמְכִינְהוּ רַבָּנַן אַקְּרְבָּנוֹת.

In any case, it is clear that according to this *baraita* the *halakhot* of prayer are based on the Temple offerings. The Gemara suggests: **Let us say that this is a conclusive refutation of** the opinion of **Rabbi Yosei, son of Rabbi Ḥanina,** who held that the forefathers instituted the prayers. **Rabbi Yosei, son of Rabbi Ḥanina,** could have **said to you: Actually, I will say to you** that **the Patriarchs instituted the prayers and the Sages based** the times and characteristics of prayer **on the Temple offerings,** even though they do not stem from the same source. **As, if you do not say so,** that even Rabbi Yosei, son of Rabbi Ḥanina, would agree that the laws of offerings and those of prayers are related, **then, according to Rabbi Yosei, son of Rabbi Ḥanina, who instituted the additional prayer?** It is not one of the prayers instituted by the forefathers. **Rather,** even according to Rabbi Yosei, son of Rabbi Ḥanina, **the prayers were instituted by the Patriarchs and the Sages based them** on the laws of the **offerings.**

The Prayer/Tefillah/Amidah: The Amidah — The Prayer, the "standing prayer" in English — is a central part of each of the three daily Jewish prayer services. It is also called *Shemoneh Esrei,* which means "18," a reference to the fact that the prayer originally consisted of 18 blessings, though the rabbis later added an additional one. The Amidah can be broken down into three parts: praise, national and personal requests, and thanksgiving. (Sefaria.org on Amidah)

The First two blessings of the Amidah are always the same at any service throughout the year, the 3rd blessing changes on Shabbat & holidays, the middle blessings are prayers of request, and change between weekdays and Shabbat and holidays, the final 3 blessings are the same themes in every *Amidah,* but the peace blessing changes based on time of day and weekday vs. Shabbat/holidays.

Berakhot 34a:10

אָמַר רַב יְהוּדָה: לְעוֹלָם אַל יִשְׁאַל אָדָם צְרָכָיו לֹא בְּשָׁלֹשׁ רִאשׁוֹנוֹת, וְלֹא בְּשָׁלֹשׁ אַחֲרוֹנוֹת, אֶלָּא בְּאֶמְצָעִיּוֹת. דְּאָמַר רַבִּי חֲנִינָא: רִאשׁוֹנוֹת — דּוֹמֶה לְעֶבֶד שֶׁמְּסַדֵּר שֶׁבַח לִפְנֵי רַבּוֹ. אֶמְצָעִיּוֹת — דּוֹמֶה לְעֶבֶד שֶׁמְּבַקֵּשׁ פְּרָס מֵרַבּוֹ. אַחֲרוֹנוֹת — דּוֹמֶה לְעֶבֶד שֶׁקִּבֵּל פְּרָס מֵרַבּוֹ, וְנִפְטָר וְהוֹלֵךְ לוֹ.

Rav Yehuda said: There is an additional distinction between the various sections of the *Amida* prayer: **One must never request his** own **needs in the first three or in the last three** blessings; **rather,** he should do so **in the middle** blessings. **As Rabbi Ḥanina said:** During the **first** three blessings, he **is like a servant who arranges praise before his master;** during the **middle** blessings, he **is like a servant who requests a reward from his master;** during the **final** three blessings, one **is like a servant who** already **received a reward from his master and is taking his leave and departing.**

The first of the middle blessings in the Amidah (not the Shabbat Amidah) is a personal request for wisdom, *chochmah.* Why would this be the first of the middle blessings?

Pirke Avot teaches us…

Pirkei Avot 3:17

רַבִּי אֶלְעָזָר בֶּן עֲזַרְיָה אוֹמֵר, אִם אֵין תּוֹרָה, אֵין דֶּרֶךְ אֶרֶץ. אִם אֵין דֶּרֶךְ אֶרֶץ, אֵין תּוֹרָה. אִם אֵין חָכְמָה, אֵין יִרְאָה. אִם אֵין יִרְאָה, אֵין חָכְמָה. אִם אֵין בִּינָה, אֵין דַּעַת. אִם אֵין דַּעַת, אֵין בִּינָה. אִם אֵין קֶמַח, אֵין תּוֹרָה. אִם אֵין תּוֹרָה, אֵין קֶמַח. הוּא הָיָה אוֹמֵר, כָּל שֶׁחָכְמָתוֹ מְרֻבָּה מִמַּעֲשָׂיו, לְמָה הוּא דוֹמֶה, לְאִילָן שֶׁעֲנָפָיו מְרֻבִּין וְשָׁרָשָׁיו מֻעָטִין, וְהָרוּחַ בָּאָה וְעוֹקַרְתּוֹ וְהוֹפַכְתּוֹ עַל פָּנָיו, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (ירמיה יז) וְהָיָה כְּעַרְעָר בָּעֲרָבָה וְלֹא יִרְאֶה כִּי יָבוֹא טוֹב וְשָׁכַן חֲרֵרִים בַּמִּדְבָּר אֶרֶץ מְלֵחָה וְלֹא תֵשֵׁב. אֲבָל כָּל שֶׁמַּעֲשָׂיו מְרֻבִּין מֵחָכְמָתוֹ, לְמָה הוּא דוֹמֶה, לְאִילָן שֶׁעֲנָפָיו מֻעָטִין וְשָׁרָשָׁיו מְרֻבִּין, שֶׁאֲפִלּוּ כָּל הָרוּחוֹת שֶׁבָּעוֹלָם בָּאוֹת וְנוֹשְׁבוֹת בּוֹ אֵין מְזִיזִין אוֹתוֹ מִמְּקוֹמוֹ, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (שם) וְהָיָה כְּעֵץ שָׁתוּל עַל מַיִם וְעַל יוּבַל יְשַׁלַּח שָׁרָשָׁיו וְלֹא יִרְאֶה כִּי יָבֹא חֹם, וְהָיָה עָלֵהוּ רַעֲנָן, וּבִשְׁנַת בַּצֹּרֶת לֹא יִדְאָג, וְלֹא יָמִישׁ מֵעֲשׂוֹת פֶּרִי:

Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah said: Where there is no Torah, there is no right conduct; where there is no right conduct, there is no Torah. Where there is no wisdom,

there is no fear of God; where there is no fear of God, there is no wisdom. Where there is no understanding, there is no knowledge; where there is no knowledge, there is no understanding. Where there is no bread, there is no Torah; where there is no Torah, there is no bread. He used to say: one whose wisdom exceeds his deeds, to what may he be compared? To a tree whose branches are numerous but whose roots are few, so that when the wind comes, it uproots it and overturns it, as it is said, “He shall be like a bush in the desert, which does not sense the coming of good. It is set in the scorched places of the wilderness, in a barren land without inhabitant” (Jeremiah 17:6). But one whose deeds exceed his wisdom, to what may he be compared? To a tree whose branches are few, but roots are many, so that even if all the winds in the world come and blow upon it, they cannot move it out of its place, as it is said, “He shall be like a tree planted by waters, sending forth its roots by a stream. It does not sense the coming of heat, its leaves are ever fresh. It has no care in a year of drought; it does not cease to yield fruit” (Jer. 17:8).

- Why would the prayer for wisdom be the first of the middle blessings of the weekday Amidah, the section where we make requests?

- **Now let's return to *S'fatai Tiftach…Open up my lips…***

The following is from **Kimcha Davshuna on Pesach Haggadah, Magid, HaLachma Anya 3**[1] (Rabbi Mark Greenspan, 2007-2017):

One begins the reading of the Haggadah. The Rif wonders why one doesn't recite a blessing for the reading of the Haggadah just as one recites a blessing for the reading of the Megillah. Surely the telling of the story of Passover is a positive commandment as we learn: "You shall tell your child on that day etc." (Ex. 12:8) He explains that a blessing for telling the story is unnecessary since by saying in the Kiddush, "A remembrance for the exodus from Egypt," he fulfills his obligation of saying a special blessing. The Rashba offers another explanation for why a special blessing is not said for the telling of the Passover story. One does not need to say a blessing for a mitzvah for which there is no minimum in its performance. A simple statement ("God took us out of Egypt") would suffice in the telling of the story of the Exodus, though we do say "whoever tells the story at length is praiseworthy."
This text is called the Haggadah because of the verse, "You shall tell (v'higadita) your child on that day etc." (Exodus 12:8). Some say that the name comes from the Hebrew word for drawing the heart, or inspiring, and this seems correct to me, as in the verse, ***"O Lord, open up my lips; that my mouth may declare (yagid) your praise."*** (Ps. 51:17) **The sages interpreted yagid to mean, "my mouth shall draw your praise." That is, everything derives from the intention of the heart.** In human books, wonders and awesome acts arise from the natural order of the world, inspiring love, joy and spiritual pleasure. Yet who has heard such things as the Exodus without trembling? The author of the Kuzari[2] writes:

[1] Published in Bologna in 1540, the Kimcha D'avshuna commentary on the Haggadah was written by Rabbi Yochanan ben Yosef Treves. This commentary focuses on explaining the halakhic way to conduct a seder. Rabbi Treves answers questions of Jewish practice surrounding the seder which reflects the nature of the community of his time. Some of his questions include: What happens in a home if no one present knows how to conduct a seder? Can one person in the community go from house to house to recite the Haggadah for households unable to do it for themselves? How should that person act in each house? Does he say the berakhot over again? Does he eat? Composed: Bologna (c.1520 – c.1540 CE)

[2] The Kuzari was written by Judah Halevi (Spain, 1075–1141 CE). Originally written in Arabic, it describes how the king of the Khazars — an Asian tribe that converted to Judaism in the eighth century) — in an attempt to determine which is the true religion, invites representatives of each of the three major religions to come and explain his beliefs. The group includes a Muslim imam, a Christian priest, and a rabbi. The king is won over by the rabbi's arguments, and in the ensuing dialogue, the rabbi demonstrates the superiority of Judaism by bringing clear proof to the biblical account of the giving of the Torah at Sinai and explains the commandments in rational terms. Instead

"The facts are yet more startling! The Israelites lived in Egypt as slaves, 600,000 men above the age of twenty, the descendants of the twelve tribes. Not one of them had separated or emigrated to another country, nor was there a stranger among them. They looked forward to the promise given to their ancestors, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, that the land of Israel should be their inheritance. At that time it was in the power of seven mighty and prosperous nations, while the Israelites groaned in the depths of misery under the bondage of Pharaoh, who caused the Israelites to be put to death, lest they should increase in number. But God sent Moses and Aaron, two weak men, and they advanced before the mighty Pharaoh, with signs and miracles and changed the course of nature. Pharaoh did not get away from them, nor harm them, neither could he protect himself from the ten plagues which befell the Egyptians, affecting the streams, land, air, plants, animals, bodies and even their souls; for in one moment at midnight, died the most precious and most beloved members of their houses, the first-born males. There was no dwelling without dead, except the houses of the Israelites. All these plagues were preceded by warnings and menaces, and their cessation was signaled in the same manner, proving that they were ordained by God, who does what He wills and when He wills it, and they were not ordinary natural phenomena, nor were they wrought by constellations or accidents. The Israelites left the country of Pharaoh's bondage by the command of God, the same night at the same moment as the first born died…"
Whoever allows such matters to enter their heart with full intentionality will be inspired, not like someone who reads ordinary history books, which have no intention of bringing us closer to the Creator. This is the meaning of the word Haggadah, it is that which draws the heart of those who hear these matters to complete faith.

- What is your understanding of *“The sages interpreted yagid to mean, "my mouth shall <u>draw</u> your praise." That is, everything derives from the intention of the heart”?* – what does this mean?

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of using complicated philosophical ideas, he bases his arguments on history, tradition, and common sense. In the introduction, the author states that the purpose of his work is to reply to the attacks of those who wish to denigrate Judaism. The Kuzari is considered one of the most important works of Jewish religious apologetic and has been reprinted many times in several languages.

- When we stand for the Amidah/Tefillah, how do we open our hearts and minds to authentic prayer with the Holy One?

Rabbi Elliot Dorff, from My People's Prayerbook, The Amidah:

While we commonly think that prayer happens solely at the initiative of the person praying, this verse from Psalms 51:17, placed at the beginning of the Amidah, what the Rabbis call "The Prayer," strongly proclaims another message. We are, as it were, dumb when we want to address God. We need God's help in what we are about to do. Prayer, in other words, is not the utterances of the person praying, as subject, to God, as object. Prayer is, rather, the interaction of the person praying with God. For prayer to work, God has to want us to help us pray as much as we want to pray. (pg 52)

Kushner & Polen, from My People's Prayerbook, The Amidah:

It seems odd that as a prelude to the *Amidah*, a bouquet of prayers of praise, petition, and thanksgiving, the most intensely conversational script of the entire Siddur – someone thought to throw in Psalm 15:17: "God, open my lips so that my mouth may declare Your praise."

Wouldn't it make more sense to say something like, "Here I am God, ready to begin our conversation," or "Permit me to introduce myself," or "I know we haven't always seen eye to eye on certain things," something that would accentuate the dialogic nature of what will follow. For there to be a conversation, an intercession, there must be two discrete parties. It takes two to tango. In much (but not all) of the Hebrew Bible and the Siddur, God and people are separate, distinct, discrete, autonomous, independent and apart from one another. God says this, we say that. God does this, we do that. God's there, we're here. The energy of the whole thing comes precisely from our being separate from one another. So why begin our personal prayers with a denial of that mutual autonomy and free will?

The Psalm says, "God would you please open my mouth." Hey, who's working my mouth anyway, me or God? Who's praising God, me or God? What's going on here?

What's going on here is another spiritual paradigm, one in which God and people are not only *not* distinct from one another but are literally *within* one another. God is the ocean, and we are the waves. In the words of the Chasidic maxim, "*Alles ist Gott*, it's all God." My mouth is God's mouth. My praises are God's words. In the teaching of Rabbi Kalynomos Kalmish Shapira of Piesetzna (who perished in the Warsaw ghetto), "Not only does God hear our prayers, God prays them through us as well!"

The words of the *Amidah* that will follow may *sound* like they come from me but in truth they come from a higher source. Prayer may ultimately be an exercise for helping us let go of our egos, hopelessly anchored to this world where one person is discrete from another and from God, and soar to the heavens where we realize there is a holy One to all being and that we have been an expression of it all along. "God, open my lips so that my mouth may declare Your praise." (pgs 52, 55)

L. Hoffman, from My People's Prayerbook, The Amidah:

Despite the second century ruling against inserting anything at all between the prayer preceding the morning *Amidah* and the *Amidah* itself, it became customary to preface the *Amidah* from this quotation from Psalms. The innovation is Talmudic, and its apparent disregard for the earlier regulation led to considerable commentary through the centuries. This simple biblical line must contain a message so important that the Rabbis elected to include it.

Indeed, there is a message here, and it is astonishingly bold. The full citation from Psalms, of which this is but the beginning, is, "Adonai, open my lips that my mouth may declare Your praise; for you have no delight in sacrifice. If I were to give a burnt offering, You would not be please" (Ps. 51:17-18). It is well known that the Rabbis proclaimed the *Amidah* to be the equivalent of the defunct sacrificial cult. Here, by innuendo, the Rabbis go even farther: the *Amidah* is not just equal to the sacrificial system, that ceased with the Temple's destruction in 70 CE; it is even better. God would not accept a sacrifice even if we were to offer it, whereas the words of our mouth are always acceptable on high. According to Midrash, Israel said to God, "We are impoverished now that we cannot offer sacrifices." God answered, "I seek words from you now, as it is written, 'Take words with You when you return to God'" (Hosea 14:2).

So great is the power of words that Jewish philosophy customarily categorized human beings as *m'daber*, that is, the sole creation whose distinctive capacity is speech. As we open the *Amidah* with a prayer to use our speech wisely, so too we end it with lips from speaking deceit." With speech we may curse or bless, slander or praise, hurt or heal. The Rabbis have instructed us to bracket the Amidah with the wish that we use the power of words only for good. (pg 53, 56)

- Now let's read **II Samuel 12:13-16**:

וַיֹּ֤אמֶר דָּוִד֙ אֶל־נָתָ֔ן חָטָ֥אתִי לַיהוָ֖ה וַיֹּ֨אמֶר נָתָ֜ן אֶל־דָּוִ֗ד גַּם־יְהוָ֛ה הֶעֱבִ֥יר חַטָּאתְךָ֖ לֹ֣א תָמֽוּת׃

אֶ֗פֶס כִּֽי־נִאֵ֤ץ נִאַצְתָּ֙ אֶת־אֹיְבֵ֣י יְהוָ֔ה בַּדָּבָ֥ר הַזֶּ֖ה גַּם הַבֵּ֣ן הַיִּלּ֑וֹד לְךָ֖ מ֥וֹת יָמֽוּת׃

וַיֵּ֥לֶךְ נָתָ֖ן אֶל־בֵּיתֽוֹ וַיִּגֹּ֤ף יְהוָה֙ אֶת־הַיֶּ֔לֶד אֲשֶׁ֥ר יָלְדָ֖ה אֵ֣שֶׁת־אוּרִיָּ֑ה לְדָוִ֖ד וַיֵּאָנַֽשׁ׃

וַיְבַקֵּ֤שׁ דָּוִד֙ אֶת־הָאֱלֹהִ֔ים בְּעַ֖ד הַנָּ֑עַר וַיָּ֣צָם דָּוִ֗ד וַיָּבֹא֙ וְלָ֣ן וְשָׁכַ֔ב אָ֖רְצָה׃

David said to Nathan, "I stand guilty before GOD!" And Nathan replied to David, "GOD has remitted your sin; you shall not die.

However, since you have spurned the enemies of GOD by this deed, even the child about to be born to you shall die."

Nathan went home, and GOD afflicted the child that Uriah's wife had borne to David, and it became critically ill.

David entreated God for the boy; David fasted, and he went in and spent the night lying on the ground.

- Now let's read the **whole chapter of Psalm 51**:

לַמְנַצֵּ֥חַ מִזְמ֖וֹר לְדָוִֽד׃

For the leader. A psalm of David,

בְּבוֹא־אֵ֥לָיו נָתָ֗ן הַנָּבִ֫יא כַּאֲשֶׁר־בָּ֥א אֶל־בַּת־שָֽׁבַע׃

when Nathan the prophet came to him after he had come to Bathsheba.

חָנֵּ֣נִי אֱלֹהִ֣ים כְּחַסְדֶּ֑ךָ כְּרֹ֥ב רַ֝חֲמֶ֗יךָ מְחֵ֥ה פְשָׁעָֽי׃

Have mercy upon me, O God,
as befits Your faithfulness;
in keeping with Your abundant compassion,
blot out my transgressions.

(הרבה) [הֶרֶב] כַּבְּסֵנִי מֵעֲוֹנִי וּמֵחַטָּאתִי טַהֲרֵנִי׃

Wash me thoroughly of my iniquity,
and purify me of my sin;

כִּי־פִשָּׁעַי אֲנִי אֵדָע וְחַטָּאתִי נֶגְדִּי תָמִיד׃

for I recognize my transgressions,
and am ever conscious of my sin.

לְךָ לְבַדְּךָ l חָטָאתִי וְהָרַע בְּעֵינֶיךָ עָשִׂיתִי לֶמַעַן תִּצְדַּק בְּדָבְרֶךָ תִּזְכֶּה בְשָׁפְטֶךָ׃

Against You alone have I sinned,
and done what is evil in Your sight;
so You are just in Your sentence,
and right in Your judgment.

הֵן־בְּעָוֹן חוֹלָלְתִּי וּבְחֵטְא יֶחֱמַתְנִי אִמִּי׃

Indeed I was born with iniquity;
with sin my mother conceived me.

הֵן־אֱמֶת חָפַצְתָּ בַּטֻּחוֹת וּבְסָתֻם חָכְמָה תודיעֵנִי׃

Indeed You desire truth about that which is hidden;
teach me wisdom about secret things.

תְּחַטְּאֵנִי בְאֵזוֹב וְאֶטְהָר תְּכַבְּסֵנִי וּמִשֶּׁלֶג אַלְבִּין׃

Purge me with hyssop till I am pure;
wash me till I am whiter than snow.

תַּשְׁמִיעֵנִי שָׂשׂוֹן וְשִׂמְחָה תָּגֵלְנָה עֲצָמוֹת דִּכִּיתָ׃

Let me hear tidings of joy and gladness;
let the bones You have crushed exult.

הַסְתֵּר פָּנֶיךָ מֵחַטָּאָי וְכָל־עֲוֹנֹתַי מְחֵה׃

Hide Your face from my sins;
blot out all my iniquities.

לֵב טָהוֹר בְּרָא־לִי אֱלֹהִים וְרוּחַ נָכוֹן חַדֵּשׁ בְּקִרְבִּי׃

Fashion a pure heart for me, O God;
create in me a steadfast spirit.

אַל־תַּשְׁלִיכֵנִי מִלְּפָנֶיךָ וְרוּחַ קָדְשְׁךָ אַל־תִּקַּח מִמֶּנִּי׃

Do not cast me out of Your presence,
or take Your holy spirit away from me.

הָשִׁיבָה לִּי שְׂשׂוֹן יִשְׁעֶךָ וְרוּחַ נְדִיבָה תִסְמְכֵנִי׃

Let me again rejoice in Your help;
let a vigorous spirit sustain me.

אֲלַמְּדָה פֹשְׁעִים דְּרָכֶיךָ וְחַטָּאִים אֵלֶיךָ יָשׁוּבוּ׃

I will teach transgressors Your ways,
that sinners may return to You.

הַצִּילֵנִי מִדָּמִים | אֱלֹהִים אֱלֹהֵי תְשׁוּעָתִי תְּרַנֵּן לְשׁוֹנִי צִדְקָתֶךָ׃

Save me from bloodguilt,
O God, God, my deliverer,
that I may sing forth Your beneficence.

אֲדֹנָי שְׂפָתַי תִּפְתָּח וּפִי יַגִּיד תְּהִלָּתֶךָ׃

O Lord, open my lips,
and let my mouth declare Your praise.

כִּי | לֹא־תַחְפֹּץ זֶבַח וְאֶתֵּנָה עוֹלָה לֹא תִרְצֶה׃

You do not want me to bring sacrifices;
You do not desire burnt offerings;

זִבְחֵי אֱלֹהִים רוּחַ נִשְׁבָּרָה לֵב־נִשְׁבָּר וְנִדְכֶּה אֱלֹהִים לֹא תִבְזֶה׃

True sacrifice to God is a contrite spirit;
God, You will not despise
a contrite and crushed heart.

הֵיטִיבָה בִרְצוֹנְךָ אֶת־צִיּוֹן תִּבְנֶה חוֹמוֹת יְרוּשָׁלָ͏ִם׃

May it please You to make Zion prosper;
rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.

אָז תַּחְפֹּץ זִבְחֵי־צֶדֶק עוֹלָה וְכָלִיל אָז יַעֲלוּ עַל־מִזְבַּחֲךָ פָּרִים׃

Then You will want sacrifices offered in righteousness,
burnt and whole offerings;
then bulls will be offered on Your altar.

- How does reading the passage from II Samuel 12, and the whole chapter of Psalm 51, now understanding Psalm 51:17 in context, impact your connection with these words before the *Amidah:*
  "Adonai, s'fatai tiftach, ufi yagid t'chilatecha, O Lord, open my lips, and let my mouth declare Your praise"?

  - How could knowing this enhance (or detract) from our kavannah as we begin the *Amidah*?

  - Should this line from Psalms 51:17 be taken and the rest of the chapter Psalms 51 not be considered at all?

The words from Psalm 19:15 are a supplement to the final section of the Amidah:

Psalms 19:15

יִהְיוּ־לְרָצוֹן | אִמְרֵי־פִי וְהֶגְיוֹן לִבִּי לְפָנֶיךָ יְהוָה צוּרִי וְגֹאֲלִי׃

May the words of my mouth
and the prayer of my heart
be acceptable to You,
O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.

S'fatai and Y'hi-yu l'ratzon bracket the Amidah.

- Why bracket the Amidah with these two sets of words? (See Ps. 19:13-14!)

In Berachot 16 and 17, the Rabbis spoke about the prayers they would each say at the conclusion of the Amidah.

Berakhot 16b:18-17a:5

רַבִּי אֶלְעָזָר בָּתַר דִּמְסַיֵּים צְלוֹתֵיהּ אָמַר הָכִי: ״יְהִי רָצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ ה׳ אֱלֹהֵינוּ, שֶׁתְּשַׁכֵּן בְּפוּרֵינוּ אַהֲבָה וְאַחְוָה וְשָׁלוֹם וְרֵיעוּת. וְתַרְבֶּה גְּבוּלֵנוּ בְּתַלְמִידִים וְתַצְלִיחַ סוֹפֵנוּ אַחֲרִית וְתִקְוָה. וְתָשִׂים חֶלְקֵנוּ בְּגַן עֵדֶן, וְתַקְנֵנוּ בְּחָבֵר טוֹב וְיֵצֶר טוֹב בְּעוֹלָמֶךָ. וְנַשְׁכִּים וְנִמְצָא יְחוּל לְבָבֵנוּ לְיִרְאָה אֶת שְׁמֶךָ, וְתָבֹא לְפָנֶיךָ קוֹרַת נַפְשֵׁנוּ לְטוֹבָה״.

The Gemara describes how **after Rabbi Elazar concluded his prayer, he said the following** additional prayer:
May it be Your will, Lord our God,
to cause to dwell in our lot love and brotherhood, peace and friendship.
And may You make our borders rich in disciples
and cause us to ultimately succeed, that we will have a good **end and hope.**
And may You set our portion in the Garden of Eden,
and may You establish for us a good companion and a good inclination in Your world.
And may we rise early and find the aspiration of our hearts to fear Your name,
and may the satisfaction of our souls come before You, i.e., may You hear our prayers that we may have spiritual contentment in this world **for the best.**

רַבִּי יוֹחָנָן בָּתַר דִּמְסַיֵּים צְלוֹתֵיהּ אָמַר הָכִי: ״יְהִי רָצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ ה׳ אֱלֹהֵינוּ, שֶׁתָּצִיץ בְּבָשְׁתֵּנוּ, וְתַבִּיט בְּרָעָתֵנוּ, וְתִתְלַבֵּשׁ בְּרַחֲמֶיךָ, וְתִתְכַּסֶּה בְּעֻזֶּךָ, וְתִתְעַטֵּף בַּחֲסִידוּתֶךָ, וְתִתְאַזֵּר בַּחֲנִינוּתֶךָ, וְתָבֹא לְפָנֶיךָ מִדַּת טוּבְךָ וְעַנְוָתָנוּתֶךָ״.

Similarly, the Gemara recounts that **after Rabbi Yoḥanan concluded his prayer, he said the following** additional prayer:
May it be Your will, Lord our God,
that You look upon our shame and behold our plight,
that You clothe Yourself in Your mercy,
and cover Yourself with Your might,
that You wrap Yourself in Your loving-kindness,
and gird Yourself with Your grace,
and may Your attributes of goodness and humility come before You.

רַבִּי זֵירָא בָּתַר דִּמְסַיֵּים צְלוֹתֵיהּ אָמַר הָכִי: ״יְהִי רָצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ ה׳ אֱלֹהֵינוּ, שֶׁלֹּא נֶחֱטָא וְלֹא נֵבוֹשׁ וְלֹא נִכָּלֵם מֵאֲבוֹתֵינוּ״.

Similarly, **after Rabbi Zeira concluded his prayers he said the following** additional prayer:
May it be Your will, Lord our God,
that we not sin or shame ourselves,
and that we not disgrace ourselves before our forefathers,
in the sense that our actions should not disgrace the actions of our forefathers.

רַבִּי חִיָּיא בָּתַר דִּמְצַלֵּי אָמַר הָכִי: ״יְהִי רָצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ ה׳ אֱלֹהֵינוּ, שֶׁתְּהֵא תּוֹרָתְךָ אוּמָנוּתֵנוּ, וְאַל יִדְוֶה לִבֵּנוּ, וְאַל יֶחְשְׁכוּ עֵינֵינוּ״.

After Rabbi Ḥiyya prayed he said the following:
May it be Your will, Lord our God,
that Your Torah should be our vocation,
and may our heart not become faint nor our eyes dim.

רַב בָּתַר צְלוֹתֵיהּ אָמַר הָכִי: ״יְהִי רָצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ ה׳ אֱלֹהֵינוּ שֶׁתִּתֵּן לָנוּ חַיִּים אֲרוּכִּים, חַיִּים שֶׁל שָׁלוֹם, חַיִּים שֶׁל טוֹבָה, חַיִּים שֶׁל בְּרָכָה, חַיִּים שֶׁל פַּרְנָסָה, חַיִּים שֶׁל חִלּוּץ עֲצָמוֹת, חַיִּים שֶׁיֵּשׁ בָּהֶם יִרְאַת חֵטְא, חַיִּים שֶׁאֵין בָּהֶם בּוּשָׁה וּכְלִימָּה, חַיִּים שֶׁל עוֹשֶׁר וְכָבוֹד, חַיִּים שֶׁתְּהֵא בָּנוּ אַהֲבַת תּוֹרָה וְיִרְאַת שָׁמַיִם, חַיִּים שֶׁתְּמַלֵּא לָנוּ אֶת כָּל מִשְׁאֲלוֹת לִבֵּנוּ לְטוֹבָה״.

After his prayer, Rav said the following:
May it be Your will, Lord our God,
that You grant us long life, a life of peace,
a life of goodness, a life of blessing,
a life of sustenance, a life of freedom of movement from place to place, where we are not tied to one place,
a life of dread of sin, a life without shame and disgrace,
a life of wealth and honor,
a life in which we have love of Torah and reverence for Heaven,
a life in which You fulfill all the desires of our heart for good.

רַבִּי בָּתַר צְלוֹתֵיהּ אָמַר הָכִי: ״יְהִי רָצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ ה׳ אֱלֹהֵינוּ וֵאלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ, שֶׁתַּצִּילֵנוּ מֵעַזֵּי פָּנִים וּמֵעַזּוּת פָּנִים, מֵאָדָם רָע, וּמִפֶּגַע רָע, מִיֵּצֶר רָע, מֵחָבֵר רָע, מִשָּׂכֵן רָע, וּמִשָּׂטָן הַמַּשְׁחִית, וּמִדִּין קָשֶׁה וּמִבַּעַל דִּין קָשֶׁה, בֵּין שֶׁהוּא בֶּן בְּרִית בֵּין שֶׁאֵינוֹ בֶּן בְּרִית״.

After his prayer, Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi **said the following:**
May it be Your will, Lord our God, and God of our forefathers,
that You save us from the arrogant and from arrogance in general,
from a bad man, from a bad mishap,
from an evil instinct, from a bad companion,
from a bad neighbor, from the destructive Satan,
from a harsh trial and from a harsh opponent,
whether he is a member of the covenant, a Jew,
or whether he is not a member of the covenant.

וְאַף עַל גַּב דְּקָיְימִי קָצוֹצֵי עֲלֵיהּ דְּרַבִּי.

And the Gemara notes that Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi would recite this prayer every day **despite the fact that** royal **officers stood** watch **over Rabbi** Yehuda HaNasi for his protection; nevertheless, he prayed to avoid conflict or hindrance resulting from arrogance.

רַב סָפְרָא בָּתַר צְלוֹתֵיהּ אָמַר הָכִי: ״יְהִי רָצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ ה׳ אֱלֹהֵינוּ, שֶׁתָּשִׂים שָׁלוֹם בְּפָמַלְיָא שֶׁל מַעְלָה. וּבְפָמַלְיָא שֶׁל מַטָּה, וּבֵין הַתַּלְמִידִים הָעוֹסְקִים בְּתוֹרָתֶךָ בֵּין עוֹסְקִין לִשְׁמָהּ בֵּין עוֹסְקִין שֶׁלֹּא לִשְׁמָהּ. וְכָל הָעוֹסְקִין שֶׁלֹּא לִשְׁמָהּ יְהִי רָצוֹן שֶׁיִּהְיוּ עוֹסְקִין לִשְׁמָהּ״.

After his prayer, Rav Safra said the following:
May it be Your will, Lord our God, that You establish peace in the heavenly entourage [pamalia] of angels each of whom ministers to a specific nation (see Daniel 10), and whose infighting causes war on earth;
and in the earthly entourage, the Sages,
and among the disciples engaged in the study of **Your Torah,**
whether they engage in its study **for its own sake or not for its own sake.**
And all those engaged in Torah study **not for its own sake,**
may it be Your **will** that **they will come to engage** in its study **for its own sake.**

רַבִּי אָלֶכְסַנְדְּרִי בָּתַר צְלוֹתֵיהּ אָמַר הָכִי: ״יְהִי רָצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ ה׳ אֱלֹהֵינוּ, שֶׁתַּעֲמִידֵנוּ בְּקֶרֶן אוֹרָה, וְאַל תַּעֲמִידֵנוּ בְּקֶרֶן חֲשֵׁכָה, וְאַל יִדְוֶה לִבֵּנוּ, וְאַל יֶחְשְׁכוּ עֵינֵינוּ״. אִיכָּא דְּאָמְרִי, הָא רַב הַמְנוּנָא מְצַלֵּי לַהּ. וְרַבִּי אָלֶכְסַנְדְּרִי בָּתַר דִּמְצַלֵּי אָמַר הָכִי: ״רִבּוֹן הָעוֹלָמִים, גָּלוּי וְיָדוּעַ לְפָנֶיךָ שֶׁרְצוֹנֵנוּ לַעֲשׂוֹת רְצוֹנֶךָ, וּמִי מְעַכֵּב? — שְׂאוֹר שֶׁבָּעִיסָּה וְשִׁעְבּוּד מַלְכֻיּוֹת. יְהִי רָצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ שֶׁתַּצִּילֵנוּ מִיָּדָם, וְנָשׁוּב לַעֲשׂוֹת חוּקֵּי רְצוֹנְךָ בְּלֵבָב שָׁלֵם״.

After his prayer, Rabbi Alexandri said the following:
May it be Your will, Lord our God,
that You station us in a lighted corner and not in a darkened corner,
and do not let our hearts become faint nor our eyes dim.
Some say that this was the prayer that Rav Hamnuna would recite, and that after Rabbi Alexandri prayed, he would say the following:
Master of the Universe, it is revealed and known before You
that our will is to perform Your will, and what prevents us?
On the one hand, **the yeast in the dough,** the evil inclination that is within every person;
and the subjugation to the kingdoms on the other.
May it be Your will
that You will deliver us from their hands, of both the evil inclination and the foreign kingdoms,
so that **we may return to perform the edicts of Your will with a perfect heart.**

רָבָא בָּתַר צְלוֹתֵיהּ אָמַר הָכִי: ״אֱלֹהַי, עַד שֶׁלֹּא נוֹצַרְתִּי אֵינִי כְּדַאי, וְעַכְשָׁיו שֶׁנּוֹצַרְתִּי כְּאִלּוּ לֹא נוֹצַרְתִּי. עָפָר אֲנִי בְּחַיַּי, קַל וָחוֹמֶר בְּמִיתָתִי, הֲרֵי אֲנִי לְפָנֶיךָ כִּכְלִי מָלֵא בּוּשָׁה וּכְלִימָּה. יְהִי רָצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ ה׳ אֱלֹהַי, שֶׁלֹּא אֶחֱטָא

עוֹד, וּמַה שֶּׁחָטָאתִי לְפָנֶיךָ מָרֵק בְּרַחֲמֶיךָ הָרַבִּים, אֲבָל לֹא עַל יְדֵי יִסּוּרִין וְחֳלָאִים רָעִים״. וְהַיְינוּ וִידּוּי דְּרַב הַמְנוּנָא זוּטֵי בְּיוֹמָא דְּכִפּוּרֵי.

After his prayer, Rava said the following:
My God, before I was created I was worthless,
and now that I have been created it is as if I had not been created, I am no more significant.
I am dust in life, all the more so in my death.
I am before You as a vessel filled with shame and humiliation.
Therefore, **may it be Your will, Lord my God, that I will sin no more,**
and that those transgressions **that I have committed,**
cleanse in Your abundant mercy;
but may this cleansing **not** be **by means of suffering and serious illness,** but rather in a manner I will be able to easily endure.
And this is the confession of Rav Hamnuna Zuti on Yom Kippur.

מָר בְּרֵיהּ דְּרָבִינָא כִּי הֲוָה מְסַיֵּים צְלוֹתֵיהּ אָמַר הָכִי: ״אֱלֹהַי, נְצוֹר לְשׁוֹנִי מֵרָע וְשִׂפְתוֹתַי מִדַּבֵּר מִרְמָה, וְלִמְקַלְלַי נַפְשִׁי תִּדּוֹם, וְנַפְשִׁי כֶּעָפָר לַכֹּל תִּהְיֶה. פְּתַח לִבִּי בְּתוֹרָתֶךָ, וּבְמִצְוֹתֶיךָ תִּרְדּוֹף נַפְשִׁי. וְתַצִּילֵנִי מִפֶּגַע רָע, מִיֵּצֶר הָרָע, וּמֵאִשָּׁה רָעָה, וּמִכָּל רָעוֹת הַמִּתְרַגְּשׁוֹת לָבֹא בָּעוֹלָם. וְכָל הַחוֹשְׁבִים עָלַי רָעָה מְהֵרָה הָפֵר עֲצָתָם וְקַלְקֵל מַחְשְׁבוֹתָם. יִהְיוּ לְרָצוֹן אִמְרֵי פִי וְהֶגְיוֹן לִבִּי לְפָנֶיךָ ה׳ צוּרִי וְגוֹאֲלִי״.

When Mar, son of Ravina, would conclude his prayer, he said the following:
My God, guard my tongue from evil and my lips from speaking deceit.
To those who curse me let my soul be silent
and may my soul be like dust to all.
Open my heart to Your Torah,
and may my soul pursue your mitzvot.
And save me from a bad mishap, from the evil inclination,
from a bad woman, and from all evils that suddenly come upon the world.
And all who plan evil against me,
swiftly thwart their counsel, and frustrate their plans.
May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart find favor before You,
Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.

רַב שֵׁשֶׁת כִּי הֲוָה יָתֵיב בְּתַעֲנִיתָא, בָּתַר דִּמְצַלֵּי אָמַר הָכִי: ״רִבּוֹן הָעוֹלָמִים, גָּלוּי לְפָנֶיךָ בִּזְמַן שֶׁבֵּית הַמִּקְדָּשׁ קַיָּים, אָדָם חוֹטֵא — וּמַקְרִיב קָרְבָּן. וְאֵין מַקְרִיבִין מִמֶּנּוּ, אֶלָּא חֶלְבּוֹ וְדָמוֹ, וּמִתְכַּפֵּר לוֹ. וְעַכְשָׁיו יָשַׁבְתִּי בְּתַעֲנִית וְנִתְמַעֵט חֶלְבִּי וְדָמִי, יְהִי רָצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ שֶׁיְּהֵא חֶלְבִּי וְדָמִי שֶׁנִּתְמַעֵט כְּאִילּוּ הִקְרַבְתִּיו לְפָנֶיךָ עַל גַּבֵּי הַמִּזְבֵּחַ, וְתִרְצֵנִי״.

The Gemara recounts that **when Rav Sheshet would sit in** observance of **a fast, after he prayed he said as follows:**
Master of the Universe, it is revealed before You
that **when the Temple is standing, one sins and offers a sacrifice.**
And although **only its fat and blood were offered from** that sacrifice on the altar, his transgression **is atoned for him.**
And now, I sat in observance of **a fast and my fat and blood diminished.**
May it be Your will that my fat and blood that diminished be considered as if **I offered** a sacrifice **before You on the altar,**
and may I find favor in Your eyes.

- Which of the above prayers resonate with you?
- Which do you recognize from our prayer book?

Modern Interpretation/Response

Poem by Stacey Zisook Robinson

I find God in my doubt,
In the struggle to
Be
The absolute best of me,
And in my fear
That I find only my
Worst.
I wrestle,
and am restless
and I wander, rootless,
exiled.
barricaded by silence.
God of Hosts
and Light
and Mercy--
God of the desert
and unseen edges--
God of my devotion
and my rebellion:
Open my lips
That I may declare your praise.

As a true *Bat Yisrael*, daughter of Israel, I find that I am never far from wrestling with my beliefs and with God. However, as much as I wrestle with my Judaism, I still feel a sense of wonder and joy and devotion. I still feel, as the Psalmist once cried out, in his doubt and his brokenness (Psalm 51:17), "*Adonia s'fatai tiftach, ufi yagid tehillatecha*: Adonai, open my lips, that my mouth may declare your praise." This poem reflects those words and feelings.

Stacey Zisook Robinson, z"l, who died on March 8, 2021, was a member of Congregation Hakafa in Glencoe, IL. She blogged at Stumbling Towards Meaning and authored a collection of poems and essays, *Dancing in the Palm of God's Hand*.

Brokenhearted

הָרֹפֵא לִשְׁבוּרֵי לֵב וּמְחַבֵּשׁ לְעַצְּבוֹתָם:
Ha·ro·fei lish·vu·rei lev Um·cha·besh le·'atz·vo·tam.
מוֹנֶה מִסְפָּר לַכּוֹכָבִים לְכֻלָּם שֵׁמוֹת יִקְרָא:
Mo·neh mis·par la·ko·cha·vim Le·chu·lam she·mot yik·ra
Healer of the broken-hearted
Binder of our wounds
Counter of uncountable stars
You know where we are
הַלְלוּ יָהּ
Halelluyah
אָנָּא אֵל נָא רְפָא נָא לָהּ
Ana El na r'fa na lahh
הַלְלוּ יָהּ
Ha·le·lu YAH Ha·le·lu YAH
Shir Yaakov
A Prayer for Prayer
O My God
My soul's companion
My heart's precious friend
I turn to You.
I need to close out the noise
To rise above the noise
The noise that interrupts -
The noise that separates -
The noise that isolates.
I need to hear You again.
In the silence of my innermost being,
In the fragments of my yearned-for wholeness,
I hear whispers of Your presence -
Echoes of the past when You were with me
When I felt Your nearness
When together we walked -
When You held me close, embraced me in Your
love, laughed with me in my joy.
I yearn to hear You again.
In your oneness, I find healing.
In the promise of Your love, I am soothed.
In Your wholeness, I too can become whole again.
Please listen to my call-
help me find the words
help me find the strength within
help me shape my mouth, my voice, my heart
so that I can direct my spirit and find You in prayer
In words only my heart can speak
In songs only my soul can sing
Lifting my eyes and heart to You.
Adonai S'fatai Tiftach -open my lips, precious God,
so that I can speak with You again.

By Rabbi Sheldon Zimmerman