

Opening and Closing the *Amidah*

Questions regarding Concluding Blessings, *G'ulot, T'filot, and Tachanunim*

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In Hebrew School we were taught that the *Amidah* ([the prayer said while] “Standing”) is called also the *Sh'moneh Esrei* (“The Eighteen Benedictions”—to which one had been added) and the *T'filah* (“The Prayer” par excellence). We were told that its structure is the very straightforward order of Hebrew prayers, dating back to the Psalms—namely, starting off with praise of God’s divine power (*Shevah*), continuing with Petitions (*Bakashot*), and ending with Acknowledgment (*Hodaah*) of God, that is, respectful leave-taking.¹

While teaching the *siddur* several times in a typical year—both to individuals and to groups, to children and to adults—and encountering the prayers three times a day in my own devotions, it has occurred to me that the *Amidah* prayer has more than one ending, and that one of the endings—the *Hodaah Modim* blessing—is more of an invocation than an ending. I have been reinforced in this impression by the formidable work of twentieth-century liturgical scholars.

To pose questions regarding the development of the *Amidah* is to heighten our appreciation of the prayers and our pedagogical skills at engaging congregants—including, where appropriate, children and youth—in the joys of putting ourselves in between the lines of the prayers. It is at once intriguing and inspiring to know that just as the prayers uplift and instruct us, so do they have a life and history of their own, providing a window into the dynamism of Jewish tradition.

In order to understand the development and vocabulary of the *Amidah*, we might consider the possibility that, in different stages of

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its development, the *Amidah*/*T'filah* had different concluding and beginning benedictions. Our sages would observe that the *Amidah* ends with a prayer for peace, because all the important sections of the service must end with such a prayer.² But is the benediction for peace the original ending of the *Amidah*?

Parting with a Bow?

Reuven Kimelman suggests that the *Amidah*/*T'filah* may have originally concluded with bowing, as one bows at its beginning. He, therefore, posits that the eighteenth benediction, *Modim* (the *Hodaah* blessing), "We give (grateful) acknowledgment to You, for You are the Lord our God and the God of our ancestors forever and ever," is the original conclusion of the *Amidah*.³ One must ask, however, at what stage in the development of the *Amidah*/*T'filah* was the bowing introduced? Could the bowing at the end—and at the beginning, for that matter—have been inaugurated to consolidate earlier changes in the endings (and beginnings)?⁴ Long after the prayers were fixed, the rabbis of the Gemara argued that bowing was permitted only at the end of the first and eighteenth benedictions.⁵ Could it be that the reasons and the cues for bowing and/or kneeling had been forgotten and were being debated anew?

It is possible that the *Hodaah* prayer might have been pushed to the end of the *Amidah*. An old talmudic tradition links the *Hodaah* to the *Havdalah* petition for discernment, which we now associate with the early benedictions of the *Amidah*.⁶ It would seem also that the *Avot* blessings, which we now regard as the opening benedictions of the *Amidah*, may be regarded as a form of *Hodaah*, for, as Joseph Heinemann has shown, the Dead Sea Scrolls used the form *od'cha* ("I shall acknowledge You") for *baruch atah* ("Blessed are You"), e.g., *Hodu l'magein Avraham* ("Give *hodaah* to the Shield of Abraham").⁷

The opening and closing prayers of the *Amidah*, as we have them, all laud God as Savior. Why the use of that term? Is it a polemic against Christianity, as some might suggest?⁸ Or is it a statement of political hope that the people will return to their Land, if not remain in it? Or, by the time this prayer was formulated, had the terms *y'shua* ("salvation") and *y'shuateinu* ("our salvation") become associated with acknowledgment of the God of our ancestors, the themes of both the *Avot* and *Hodaah* (*Modim*) benedictions?

A familiar talmudic dictum about the order of the blessings in the *Amidah* may veil a liturgical revolution:

Rabbi Judah said: "A man should never petition for his requirements either in the first three or in the last three benedictions, but in the middle ones. For Rabbi Hanina said: 'In the first ones he resembles a servant who is requesting a largesse from his master, in the intermediate blessings he is like a servant who requests a favor from his master, in the last ones he resembles a servant who has received a largesse from his master and takes his leave.'"⁹

Could this saying attempt to place the opening and closing benedictions on a par, but also, respectively, as entrance and leave-taking prayers in order to bar, once and for all, an interchangeability as openers and closers? The talmudic rabbis were aware of traditions praising the early sages for conjoining the *G'ulah* and *T'filah* (the blessing after the *Sh'ma* and the beginning of the *Amidah*).¹⁰ Was there a time when the talmudic sages had to separate the *Hodaah* from the *G'ulah*, thus pushing it to the end of the *Amidah*? The goal was to give the *Amidah* a clear beginning and end. This was further achieved by the talmudic sages with the placing of the verses, "O Lord, open my lips" (Ps 51:17) and "May the words of my mouth" (Ps 19:15), respectively, at the beginning and end of the *Amidah*.¹¹

Another Concluding Prayer?

If the *Hodaah* was not originally a concluding prayer, then what other benediction could have served this purpose at an earlier stage?

The most likely candidate is the sixteenth benediction, *Sh'ma koleinu*: "Hear our voice, O Lord our God...for You listen to prayers [*t'filot*] and supplications [*tachanunim*]...Praised are You, O Lord, who listens to prayer." Are the terms *t'filot* and *tachanunim* synonymous or do they designate different kinds of petitions? And if they do have different meanings, are those disparate sorts of blessings represented in groupings of the *Amidah*? Why at the end of the sixteenth benediction are all the blessings denoted—and generically—as *t'filot* ("prayers")? Does this, indeed, establish it as a concluding prayer? Interestingly, Louis Finkelstein reconstructs the possibility that this sixteenth blessing (*Shomeia t'filah*), a logical concluding benediction, was once conjoined with the blessings that became the opening benedictions of the *Amidah*.¹² Could this cluster of blessings have been, at one time, the concluding prayers?

Terms such as *g'ulah*, *tachanun*, and *t'filah*, are extremely significant and highly charged, though the meanings of these words and other key concepts were fluid even as the *Amidah* was taking its clas-

sical form. I suspect that in order to understand this process, we must look also at the concluding blessing of the part of the service that immediately precedes the *Amidah*, the blessing after the *Sh'ma*.

G'ulah and Kaddish

The blessing after the *Sh'ma*, in the morning and evening services, is known as the *G'ulah* or Redemption prayer.

The association of the *Sh'ma* with God's *G'ulah*, redemption, is a very ancient one. The Talmud tells us that, in the fourth century, Rava observed that the blessing following the *Sh'ma* is *Gaal Yisrael* ("He who redeemed Israel").¹³ Ismar Elbogen reminds us that, in third-century Palestine, Rabbi Joshua ben Levi formulated the wording as *Tzur Yisrael v'goal* ("Rock of Israel and its Redeemer").¹⁴

In considering the *G'ulah* blessing after the *Sh'ma*, we cannot help thinking of the *Kaddish* prayer, which, first in its one-line form: *Y'hei sh'mei rabah m'vorach* ("May God's Great Name be praised") and then in longer form: *Yitgadal v'yitkadash* ("Magnified and sanctified be the Great Name"), was recited after reading Scripture. There is no *Kaddish* prayer after the recitation of the *Sh'ma* in the morning service, although there is one in the evening service. Instead, in the morning service there is an extended *G'ulah* prayer, *Emet v'yatziv*, which stretches to the first benediction of the *Amidah*, culminating in the *Tzur Yisrael* formula.

Could it be that the *G'ulah* performs the same task as the *Kaddish*, namely, praising God after reading Sacred Scriptures (in the *Sh'ma*) and expressing the hope and prayer that such Torah study in the liturgy will promote God's kingdom on earth? As if to confirm this possibility, Elbogen offers a stunning version of the *G'ulah*, which he attributes to "fragments from Oriental countries" (undated, unfortunately):

O Lord our King, King and God living and eternal, Your Name is upon us. O God, our Creator, O God, save us; spare us and have mercy on us in Your great love....The Lord our God is eternally over us. His kingdom and His glory, His greatness and His Splendor, His sanctity, and the sanctity of His great Name—He, the Lord our God, will have mercy upon us...and redeem us with a perfect redemption, and rule over us speedily and forever. Blessed are You, O Lord, Rock of Israel and its Redeemer. Amen.¹⁵

The above prayer appears to combine the *Kaddish* and *G'ulah* blessings. But in the evening service we have both the *G'ulah* and the *Chatzi Kaddish*. Is that not redundant? Why in the evening service is another blessing, *Hashkiveinu* ("Cause us to lie down [unto peace]")—the prayer for God's protection at night and in the new day, added?

Could there have been a question as to which was the real ending prayer for the *Sh'ma*? Was it the *G'ulah* or the *Kaddish*, or possibly the *Hashkiveinu*, the second blessing, in between? Perhaps the introduction of the *Chatzi Kaddish* with the *G'ulah* blessing into the evening service was a conscious effort on the part of the framers of the liturgy to separate the *Amidah* from the blessing following the *Sh'ma*. But in the morning service the *Amidah* flows out of that blessing. Why?

We need to consider the wording of the morning blessing, which is far more developed than that of the counterpart prayer for the evening service. The morning prayer begins with the words:

Emet v'yatziv—True and firm, established and enduring, right and faithful, desirable and pleasant, revered and mighty, well-ordered and acceptable, good and beautiful is Your word given unto us forever and ever. It is true, the God of the universe is our King, the Rock of Jacob, the Shield of our salvation: throughout all generations He endures and His Name endures....¹⁶

This wording brings to mind the familiar phrasing of the *Modim* or *Hodaah* ("Acknowledgment") benediction of the *Amidah*:

We give (grateful) acknowledgment to You, for You are the Lord our God and the God of our ancestors forever and ever; You are the Rock of our lives, the Shield of our salvation through every generation.

Which prayer is paraphrasing which? If the post-*Sh'ma G'ulah* blessing is the most recent prayer, then it is preceded chronologically by the *Hodaah* in the *Amidah* (*Modim*) and, of course, by the earliest forms of the *Kaddish*. It is the wrap-up prayer for the *Sh'ma* and the harbinger of the *Amidah*. We know that the post-*Sh'ma G'ulah* blessing, *Emet v'yatziv*, is mentioned in talmudic literature,¹⁷ but we cannot be sure as to its exact form at that time. We know that it was a fluid and expanded prayer, subject to accretions, so much so that its final forms led to debate well into medieval times as to its exact meaning.¹⁸

The middle part of this *G'ulah* blessing, as we have it today, speaks volumes:

You have been the help of our fathers from of old, a Shield and Savior to their children after them in every generation. In the heights of the universe is Your habitation, and Your judgment and righteousness reach to the furthest ends of the earth. Happy is the man who hearkens unto Your commandments, and lays up the Torah and Your word in his heart. True it is that You are indeed the Lord of Your people, and a mighty King to plead their cause. True it is that You are indeed the first and the last, and beside You we have no King, Redeemer and Savior.

Note that the phrasing and order parallels those of the opening benedictions of the weekday *Amidah*: God, who is faithful to the *Avot*, the Patriarchs (also the general theme of the *Modim* or *Hodaah* prayer); God's *k'dushah*, holiness (though the word is not used here), represented by the attributes justice and righteousness, long associated with holiness, especially in the High Holy Day liturgy; a paean to the person who lives by Torah, paralleling the benedictions that highlight God's gracious gift of knowledge, Torah, and affirm the Divine willingness to forgive and to facilitate repentance; invocation of God as advocate, who argues and pleads the cause of His people (as in the seventh benediction of the *Amidah*); and, last, a general, overriding combination of petitions for God's help as King, Redeemer, and Savior (whether with agriculture, the ingathering of the exiles, the re-establishment of the judges, Jerusalem and the Davidic kingdom, as in most of benedictions nine through fifteen).

Indeed, we have here a summary of the first seven benedictions of the *Amidah/T'filah* as we have them still today. But why? Could it be that, by early medieval times, this *G'ulah* prayer was intended to establish, once and for all, the order that sages and teachers had promulgated?¹⁹

Culmination of the *G'ulah*

Whether in the morning (the far more detailed) prayer or in the evening service, the post-*Sh'ma G'ulah* culminates in Acknowledgment (*Hodaah*) of God as the act of accepting God's sovereignty. In both versions, the concepts of acknowledging (that is, praising and thanking) God and proclaiming Divine sovereignty are linked. In the morning service we are told that "all" the people "acknowl-

edged" and confirmed God's sovereignty (*hodu v'himlichu*) with a "new song" (*shirah chadashah*). In the evening service, we are told that they praised and gave acknowledgment or thanks (*shib'chu v'hodu*) to His Name, and "received upon themselves" His kingdom (*malchuto*). Here is the thematic climax of the acceptance of God's kingdom by reciting the *Sh'ma*.²⁰ But could it also echo an earlier *Amidah* that was originally introduced by the *Hodaah* prayer, an early version of the *Modim*? Is it possible that, after chanting the *Mi chamocha* "Who Is Like Thee?" (Exod 15:11) from the Song at the Sea, and "The Lord Shall Reign Forever" (Exod 15:18) from the same biblical song, the congregation once stood up and recited some form of the *Hodaah* (*Modim*), perhaps, as Kaufmann Kohler envisions it, in preparation for kneeling?²¹

We know that the blessing after the *Sh'ma* is the *G'ulah*. Could the *G'ulah* have been expanded with public and personal prayers, as we know happened later with the *Amidah*? That would explain the *Hashkiveinu* prayer in the evening service, which may have grown from the post-*Sh'ma* *G'ulah* blessing. Could it be that the *Amidah* opened as a *Hodaah* formula to close the post-*Sh'ma* *G'ulah* blessing (now *Emet v'yatziv*)?²²

After all, the blessings before and after the *Sh'ma* are likely to have been the last of the rabbinic formulations of the prayers. Clearly, they are intended to foreshadow, to summarize, and to explain the *Sh'ma* and the *Amidah* as they were finally cast. These prayers are, therefore, our best sources regarding not only the flow of the service, but the development of the liturgy itself.²³

If, indeed, the *Avot* and *Hodaah* benedictions were once interchangeable, then one would expect in the talmudic literature mention of the *Sh'ma* together with the *Hodaah*. This does, in fact, occur when the sages discuss their concerns about (Zoroastrian? Gnostic?) heretical ploys that might mar these two prayers.²⁴ Only these prayers are mentioned. Had the *Avot* benedictions always been first, why would the congregation have waited for the *Modim* benediction in order to elicit possible heresy on the part of those leading the service, unless the *Hodaah* followed quickly after the *Sh'ma* as a fail-safe method to confirm heresy? Both Elbogen and Finkelstein attest to the antiquity of the *Hodaah*, as does the language of the *Modim* formulation, which, as Idelsohn points out, is a citation of a biblical verse (1 Chron 29:13).²⁵

Elbogen and Finkelstein posit, and convincingly so, that the *Avodah* (seventeenth benediction) is one of the most ancient parts of

the *Amidah* and underwent many changes, both during and after the sacrificial cult.²⁶ Did the service once begin with the *Avodah*, a prayer that God might receive our prayers (originally, sacrifices)? Was this prayer an invocation to the *Sh'ma*, *G'ulah*, and *Hodaah* in the days long before Rabbi Gamaliel II (turn of the first century C.E.), when the *Amidah* was in flux? Some later talmudic sages reconstruct the order as the *Sh'ma* (and its three sections), the post-*Sh'ma* *G'ulah* blessing *Emet v'yatziv*, the *Avodah*, and the Priestly Benediction.²⁷ But these sages were already quite distant in time from the earliest practice. Did the *Avodah* (seventeenth benediction) continue to hold sway as *the* prayer that Israel's prayers be accepted, because of its connection with the sacrifices and the Temple, the restoration of which, along with Jerusalem and Zion, was keenly anticipated by those who prayed? Why, then, was this prayer that God receive prayer (and sacrifice) *followed* by the *Hodaah*, which would appear to have been an invocation? It is conceivable that the *Hodaah* was pushed back, even out of sequence, in order to establish the pre-eminence of the *Avot* benediction as *the* invocation.

Kinds of Petitions, Blessings, and *G'ulah* Prayers

Yet another concluding prayer edged its way into the *Amidah*/*T'filah*. Such a benediction was necessitated by a string of petitions inserted into the mix. That benediction, as noted above, is the sixteenth, *Sh'ma koleinu*. But for which petitions could it have been a closer? Are all the petitions of the same genre? Were they annexed to the prayer individually or in groups, and over what time span? Why does *Emet v'yatziv* mention only the prayers for knowledge, for repentance, for forgiveness, and for God to (see our affliction and) plead our cause?

We noted above the talmudic citation of Rabbi Judah that one must not petition for one's own needs (*yish'al tzorchav*) during the first three or the last three blessings, but only during the middle ones.²⁸ Did these "middle ones" (*Emtza'ot*) push the *Hodaah* (*Modim*) back to the "later blessings" (*Acharonot*)? And whence the first three blessings we now know as the "opening" (*Rishonot*) benedictions of the *Amidah*?

One cannot answer such questions with certainty. But they lead to further questions and suggestions that I offer with the hope that they will inspire *iyun* (concentration) and *kavanah* (devotion), both

as inwardness in prayer and as scrutiny of the vocabulary, themes, and historical development of prayer.

(1) *Why is there a G'ulah prayer in the Amidah, in addition to the post-Sh'ma G'ulah blessing?*

As we have seen, the post-*Sh'ma G'ulah* blessing has a rival in the *Kaddish* as a closing prayer for biblical passages.²⁹ The "other" *G'ulah*, namely, the seventh benediction of the *Amidah*, is general and vague:

Look upon our affliction and plead our cause, and redeem us speedily for Your Name's sake, for You are a mighty Redeemer. Blessed are You, O Lord, the Redeemer of Israel.

Why this additional prayer about God as Redeemer? Is it another version of the post-*Sh'ma G'ulah* blessing? To what afflictions is it referring? Reuven Kimelman summarizes a debate among scholars, ancient and modern, as to whether the benediction refers to national struggle in the face of adversity or to personal struggle in the face of sin.³⁰ Louis Finkelstein regards it as part of a triad on the theme of restoration of Jewish independence (along with benedictions ten and eleven: *Hashiva shofteinu* and *Teka b'shofar*).³¹ Elbogen regards it as a holdover from fast day liturgy, becoming a regular prayer once national sufferings worsened on a daily basis.³² A quaint talmudic dictum speculated that the *G'ulah* in the *Amidah* was made the seventh benediction "to teach you that Israel will be redeemed only in the seventh year of the Messiah's advent."³³

One cannot gainsay the seventh benediction's appearance of being a closing prayer of sorts. Could it have been a closer for the *Hodaah* that completed the theme of *G'ulah*? Was this the original form of the *Amidah*—a literal standing in acceptance of God's sovereignty (*Hodaah*) followed by one final affirmation of God as Redeemer? Or was the *Amidah* originally the "standing up" that preceded prostration in adoration?³⁴ Could the seventh benediction have been introduced as one of the "forgotten" prayers formulated by Simeon the Pakulite?³⁵ Perhaps, because of its general wording, it became a hinge blessing between more personal benedictions and more nationalistic benedictions.³⁶

(2) *What, if anything, is the difference among bakashot (petitions), tachanunim (prayers for Divine mercy), and t'filot (prayers)?*

Max Kadushin reminds us:

A baraita rules that a person may “say words” after the Tefillah [Amidah], these “words” being, as Lieberman points out, thanksgivings and supplications. . . . But another baraita states that a man may insert a petition for his own needs in “Who hearkenest unto prayer,” the Sixteenth Berakah, and the Amoraim, while acknowledging this statement, nevertheless go further and say that he may insert a petition for a particular need toward the close of any relevant berakah.³⁷

The prayer most likely to be regarded as a concluding blessing is *Sh'ma koleinu*, the sixteenth benediction of the *Amidah*, the blessing to which Kadushin refers (“Who hearkenest unto prayer”). Should we assume that most of the prayers that precede *Sh'ma koleinu* are *tachanunim* (prayers for grace)? Indeed, the expression “*tachanunim*” was used for petitionary prayers, and the fourth through the fifteenth of the benedictions are requests, either personal or on behalf of the Jewish People. The fourth benediction is a request for knowledge, ostensibly to serve God, extolled as holy (third benediction), with the discernment to choose the way of the *mitzvot* and of good over sin and evil (see benedictions five and six).³⁸ That this benediction was cast as the first of the *tachanunim*, “petitions,” is revealed in the wording itself. The opening phrase *atah chonein* . . . “You graciously give knowledge to people” may well describe God as both gracious and as the Responder to prayers for grace.³⁹ Toward the end of the benediction, the theme of grace reappears: *chaneinu* “graciously give us”—or, I would suggest, “graciously respond to our prayer for grace” by giving us—knowledge, discrimination, and discernment.

Perhaps a *tachanun* was, at least initially, a very specialized prayer for direction either after sin or in the face of temptation (based upon the concept of grace as Divine forgiveness or favor in the Golden Calf narrative of Exodus 34). If so, it would have been logical to reposition the *G'ulah* benediction in the *Amidah* after what became benedictions four, five, and six, in order to accentuate their common theme of yearning for the knowledge and wisdom to overcome sin and to repent. After all, the *ch-n-n* root is, as we have seen,

used in the fourth and sixth benedictions, as if to bracket them together.

If prayers were moved back for *tachanunim*, they could have been repositioned for other reasons. Louis Finkelstein posits that the *Sh'ma koleinu* benediction was the conclusion of the *Amidah*, which consisted, originally, only of the *Avot*.⁴⁰ It could, however, have just as easily been a conclusion to a yet earlier opening benediction. The *Hodaah* has consisted, in its variant forms, of different kinds of *tachanunim*—personal or on behalf of the Jewish People—motifs that began with private talmudic prayers and continued throughout medieval times.⁴¹ Here is further circumstantial evidence that the *Hodaah* might have been the original opening prayer.

3. *If the sixteenth benediction (Sh'ma koleinu...shomeia t'filah) is the concluding prayer of the tachanunim and other private and public supplications, then what are benedictions four through fifteen?*

Some clue to the appropriate title of these intermediary benedictions may be provided in a prayer composed by Rabbi Eliezar ben Zadok for a person in danger, and cited by Louis Finkelstein.⁴² "*Sh'ma kol zaakat amcha Yisrael*—Listen to the voice of the cry of Your people Israel, and fulfill quickly their *bakashah*, their request [or petition]." After the initial *tachanunim*, or prayers for Divine mercy and guidance in the face of sin, the *G'ulah* ("Behold our affliction") benediction is inserted as a prayer for protection from general dangers and tribulations. The ensuing benedictions may then be, technically speaking, *bakashot*, that is, interventions against looming perils—disease, pestilence or drought, leaderlessness, treachery, loss of face and faith, exile from Jerusalem and the Temple, deprivation of Davidic continuity in the face of the messianic promise.⁴³

4. *If the fourth through the fifteenth (or sixteenth?) benedictions are tachanunim and/or bakashot, then what are the first three? Are they the t'filot, the prayers? If t'filot are prayers in general, then what genre of prayer are the opening three benedictions of the Amidah? Are they all prayers of the same kind?*

Clearly, each opening benediction has a strong and clear theme. The first benediction affirms God's promise to redeem the descendants of the Patriarchs (*Avot*) and their descendants, a reciprocation of the *chasadim tovim*, or acts of loving fidelity, showed by our ancestors.⁴⁴ The second benediction invokes God's mighty deeds (*G'vurot*), including everyday acts of salvation and help—such as

healing the sick, straightening those bowed over, and sending rain and dew in their seasons. These acts are seen as portents of God's ultimate resurrection of the dead. God's holiness is affirmed in the third benediction, which, when repeated in the congregation, affirms on Shabbat morning and *Musaf* God's power and promise to resurrect the nation of Israel and to restore Jerusalem.⁴⁵

The *Modim* and the *Modim de-rabbanan* prayers contain similar themes, but with less dogmatic detail: God is the Lord of our Patriarchs, but the Messiah is not mentioned. Our souls are in God's keep, but resurrection and the other details of salvation are not invoked. The hope for the ingathering of Israel is expressed, along with the reference to God's holiness, as represented in the "holy precincts." Again, could these *Modim* prayers hark back to a simpler *Hodaah* formulation that once began the *Amidah*? Could it be that "standing" for prayer (*Amidah*) was emphatically linked to *t'filah* (as the *Amidah* / *T'filah* prayer, par excellence) and to Abraham in order to establish once and for all the *Avot*, *G'vurot*, and *Kedushah* benedictions as the opening blessings?⁴⁶ Why were *these* blessings ultimately placed first? Finkelstein believes they were placed first in a surge of "intense patriotism."⁴⁷ Liber agrees, but adds that the link to the Patriarchs and the Exodus was an old association, rooted in Scripture and expanded upon in the *M'chilta*, and that the redemption motif takes its cue from the last paragraph of the *Sh'ma* (Num 15:37–41).⁴⁸

The first benediction (*Avot*) is an effective invocation of the God of the Covenant to be faithful to the promise of redemption. The second benediction (*G'vurot*) cries out to be regarded as an outline, added later, of the themes of the petitions that developed in the weekday *Amidah*. God is affirmed as *someich noflim*, upholder of those bowed in sin (by bestowing discernment, repentance, and forgiveness, as in benedictions four through six), and as *rofeih cholim*, healer of personal and national maladies and sufferings, as in benedictions seven through nine. The four-phrase affirmation continues by referring to God as *matir asurim*, releaser of the bound, that is, the one who frees, restores, and protects the Jewish nation (benedictions ten through twelve), and as *m'kayeim emunato lisheinei afar*, namely, keeper of faithfulness to the pious and just, to Jerusalem, to the Davidic line (benedictions thirteen through fifteen), and to the dead in need of resurrection.⁴⁹

5. *Why were the Hodaah and peace themes placed at the end of the Amidah?*

Perhaps the post-*Sh'ma G'ulah* blessing provides a clue, for it does, after all, refer to God as *goeil u'moshia*, Redeemer and Savior. The *Avot* and *G'vurot* benedictions and the seventh benediction (with everything in between) in the *Amidah* became the "*G'ulah*" portion. The first benediction even emphasized that God will send a *goeil* ("redeemer" with a lowercase "r") to ready the world for the One Divine Redeemer. The *Modim* prayer became the *Hodaah*, par excellence, at the end of the *Amidah*, perhaps extending, with variant themes of national and world redemption, the "*Long G'ulah*" paradigm for the blessings after the *Sh'ma*. The Priestly Blessing, with its theme of peace, had always been a recessional benediction. In the structure of rabbinic prayer, it found paraphrase and niche in the *Sim shalom/Shalom rav* peace prayer, when established as the final benediction of the *Amidah*.

When Historic Sources Are Limited

The best sources for our understanding of the development of the *Amidah*, the talmudic references, are after the fact—probably long, long after the fact. Yet, the most telling testimony to the *Amidah's* story is found in the words of the *Amidah/T'filah* themselves. We need to keep investigating that story in order to pray with deeper and higher levels of *kavanah* and meditation on the words of the *Amidah/T'filah*. But, as liturgical scholar M. Liber pointed out decades ago, it is ill-advised to seek out "oldest versions" of the prayers in the absence of ancient texts.⁵⁰

Given these strictures in resources and methodology, I reiterate my suggestion that we might begin any attempt to probe the history of the *Amidah/T'filah* by taking our cue from the transitional prayers (albeit later in time) that introduce it. We might start with the proposition that the daily *Amidah* is one long *Hodaah* that had to incorporate various sorts of *tachanunim* and *t'filot*. We might regard these genres as having coalesced under the overriding theme of redemption (*g'ulah*), long regarded as the appropriate conclusion of the recitation of the *Sh'ma*. While this, like other, reconstructions of the prayers cannot, in the absence of a twenty-first-century genizah discovery, be proven one way or another, the questions here raised will, I believe, be helpful in investigating the story and in appreciating the underlying affirmations of the *Amidah*.

Notes

1. B. Berachot 32a and 34a.
2. Midrash Rabbah on *Tzav* (end).
3. Reuven Kimelman, "The Literary Structure of the Amidah and the Rhetoric of Redemption," *The Echoes of Many Texts: Reflections on Jewish and Christian Traditions—Essays in Honor of Lou H. Silberman*, William G. Dever and J. Edward Wright, eds. (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997), p. 213.
4. Joseph Heinemann regards this crystallization process as having taken place in the century before 70 C.E., and noted that the exact content and order had been far from uniform (Joseph Heinemann, *Prayer in the Talmud*, Richard Sarason, trans. [Berlin, N.Y.: Walter de Gruyter, 1977], especially p. 224.)
5. B. B'rachot 34a-b.
6. Ibid. 29a.
7. Heinemann, op. cit., pp. 40, 80.
8. I remember that Professor Moshe Zucker would explain certain liturgical passages, such as the interpretation of the *K'dushah* in *Uva L'tzion*, as polemics against Christianity.
9. B B'rachot 34a.
10. Ibid. 9b.
11. Ibid.
12. Louis Finkelstein, "The Development of the Amidah," *Jewish Quarterly Review* n.s. 16 (1925–26), reprinted in Jakob J. Petuchowski, *Contributions to the Scientific Study of Jewish Liturgy* (New York: Ktav, 1970), p. 35.
13. B. Pesach 117b.
14. Ismar Elbogen, *Jewish Liturgy: A Comprehensive History*, Raymond P. Scheindlin, trans. (Philadelphia and New York: Jewish Publication Society and Jewish Theological Seminary, 1993), p. 22. See also Schechter, "Geniza Specimens," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 10 (1899), p. 655 (reprinted in Petuchowski).
15. Elbogen, loc. cit., p. 22.
16. I prefer here, with slight changes, the old *Authorised Daily Prayerbook* translation.
17. The sages regarded the morning and evening *G'ulah* prayers after the *Sh'ma* as fundamental. "Raba ben Hinena the Elder said in the name of Rab: If one omits to say 'True and firm' in the morning and 'True and trustworthy' in the evening, he has not performed his obligation; for it is said, 'To declare Thy lovingkindness in the morning and Thy faithfulness at night'" (b. B'rachot 12a, Ps 92:3). This statement likely grew out of an effort to enforce and canonize these prayers.
18. Stefan C. Reif, "The Early Liturgy of the Synagogue," *The Cambridge History of Judaism*, vol. 3 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 350.

19. The sages understood the importance of transitional prayers in structuring the *Amidah* and reviewing (in the morning version) the order of the first seven benedictions. It is noteworthy that the Shabbat and Festival prayers also emphasize the wisdom of following God's laws (of observing the Shabbat or Festival and regarding it as blessing, joy, purification, sanctification) and invoke the Deity to plead Israel's cause in the senses of accepting their rest and, in the *K'dushot*, of redeeming them in the sight of the nations.
20. Reuven Kimelman, "The S[h]ema and Its Blessings: The Realization of God's Kingship," *The Synagogue in Late Antiquity*, Lee I. Levine, ed. (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1987).
21. Kaufmann Kohler, "The Origin and Composition of the Eighteen Benedictions with a Translation of the Corresponding Essene Prayers in the Apostolic Constitution," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 1 (1924), pp. 71–72 (reprinted in Petuchowski).
22. Elbogen, op. cit., p. 245.
23. Mishnah Tamid 5:1 (see also 5:2) refers to *Emet v'yatziv* as a "blessing" following the *Sh'ma*, which forms a set with the *Avodah* and the *Birkat Cohanim*. Knowing the antiquity of the *Hodaah*, can we assume that *Emet v'yatziv* was composed to incorporate the *Hodaah* into the *G'ulah* as follow-up to the *Sh'ma*? Finkelstein regards the talmudic reference to *Emet v'yatziv* as a "later interpolation" or "accretion" ("Development of the *Amidah*," note 86 and "La Kedoucha et Les Benedictions du Schema," *Revue des Etudes Juives* 93 [1932], p. 23). He regards the *Hodaah* as having originally been combined with the *Avodah* (*R'tzei*), since the *Hodaah* follows the *Avodah* in the mishnaic description of the Yom Kippur service (Yoma 7:1). Yet Louis Ginzberg wisely admonished Finkelstein in a parallel context that one cannot presume the antiquity and accuracy of all *mishnayot* ("Notes Sur La Kedoucha et les Benedictions du Chema," *Revue des Etudes Juives* 97 [1934], p. 22). Also, the position of the *Hodaah* during the special liturgy of Yom Kippur in no way confirms its similar usage on a weekday. Interestingly, the talmudic literature itself argues on various grounds the merits of *not* duplicating the Temple service in the synagogue (see, for example, b. B'rachot 12b, where *minim*, heretics, are the immediate concern).
 To Finkelstein, *Emet v'yatziv* is a free and discursive prayer added to underscore nationalistic ties to God ("La Kesdouscha et Les Benedictions du Shema," p. 23). Yet its unmistakable liturgical purpose is to connect the *Sh'ma* and the *Amidah* into a specific framework.
24. B. B'rachot 33b.
25. A. Z. Idelsohn, *Jewish Liturgy and Its Development* (New York: Henry Holt, 1932), p. 106. It should be noted that this *Modim* prayer in I Chronicles also follows invocation of the Patriarchs (see 29:10). See also Elbogen, op. cit., p. 51, and Finkelstein ("The Development of the *Amidah*"), op. cit., p. 8.
26. Finkelstein, op. cit., p. 26.

27. B. B'rachot 12a.
28. Ibid. 34a.
29. Tzvee Zahavy convincingly describes the rabbinic blessings before and after the recitation of the *Sh'ma* as serving "to frame the recitation of these phrases from the Torah and [to] transform the act from mere speech or study into liturgy" (*Studies in Jewish Prayer* [Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1990], p. 39).
30. For Kimelman's summary of different theories of the order of the nineteen benedictions, see "The Literary Structure of the Amidah," pp. 180ff.
31. Finkelstein, op. cit., p. 15.
32. Elbogen, op. cit., p. 30. See also Maurice Liber, "Structure and History of the Tefilah," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 40 (1949/50), p. 347.
33. B. M'gillah 17b, and Ephraim E. Urbach, *The Sages* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1975), p. 655.
34. See above, note 21.
35. B. M'gillah 18a.
36. See above, note 30.
37. Max Kadushin, *Worship and Ethics* (New York: Bloch, 1963), p. 120.
38. See Kimelman on Fleischer, op. cit., p. 183 and note 47 on that page. The fourth benediction's connection with the *Havdalah* blessing is so depicted in b. B'rachot 33a, where discerning both the holy and the profane, and the clean and the unclean, is described by Rabbi Yosef as a form of wisdom (*chochmah*). Other authorities (see Rabbi Obadiah mi'Bartenura on Mishnah B'rachot 5:2) regard the placement of the prayer as an effort to insert the *Havdalah* as early in the recitation of the *Amidah*—that is, as early in the *chol* or weekday prayers—as possible.
39. Kohler notes the connection of *ch-n-n* to Torah wisdom in Psalm 119:29 (op. cit., p. 63), and attributes the blessing, originally, to the "learned who began the week day's work as judges called upon to decide questions of the Law." Still, the wording was deliberately chosen by the liturgists. Elbogen all too hastily dismisses *Atah chonein*, "You [graciously] bestow," as a "superfluous hymnic introduction" (p. 41).
40. Finkelstein, op. cit., p. 35. Finkelstein points to a cryptic description of a (short?) version of the *Amidah* in *Sifre D'varim* (#343), which would seem to combine what are now the first and the *Hodaah* benedictions. The text refers to a form of the *Amidah* that begins with the now familiar formula "the great, the mighty, the awesome God," then continues with wording now limited to the Days of Awe, "Holy are You and awesome is Your Name," followed by "Who redeems the captives" and "Who heals the sick," and concludes with "and *Modim*." (See Louis Finkelstein, *New Light from the Prophets* [New York: Basic Books, 1969], pp. 38 and 126, notes 18 and 21.) As Finkelstein notes, some regard "and *Modim*" as a reference to prostration, to a ritual act, rather than to a liturgical text. But depending on the antiquity of the passage (which is uncertain), we may have a shorter version of the final form of the

Amidah or an old tradition preserving an invocation that prefaced the *Hodaah/Modim* portion with wording later joined to a replacement first benediction.

41. Heinemann argues that the prayer now known as the *Modim de-rabbanan* was one among several private prayers of thanksgiving (op. cit., p. 162). Were these inspired by a general original *Hodaah* that might once have begun the liturgy? Finkelstein shows that, in the Tosefta, the *Sh'makoleinu* benediction already had various versions that focused on the Jewish People or on God's creatures in general (see the citations from Rabbi Eliezer ben Zadok and Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanos in "Development," p. 4). Obviously, rabbinic prayers could be either personal or national, on behalf of one's fellow Jews or all humanity. On the powerful influence of rabbinic prayers on the post-*Amidah tachanun*, see Solomon B. Freehoff, "The Origin of the Tahanun," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 2 (1923), p. 347.
42. See Finkelstein, op. cit., p. 4.
43. Heinemann poses the possible scenarios of a lawcourt and an adoring servant in which address of the judge/master is followed by the master's attributes or an account of distress and justification. Benedictions four to six, dealing with God as Forgiver, are thus followed by a demand for justice (203–5).
44. Liber (p. 337) says that *chesed* as described here is shown by both the human and the Divine partners in the Covenant.
45. On the resurrection of the nation, see Reuven Kimelman, "The Literary Structure of the Amidah."
46. See the cryptic observation in b. B'rachot 6b: *Ein amidah ela t'filah* "Standing [or, "the Amidah"] denotes nothing else but prayer [or, "the T'filah"]," and the discussion just before this statement.
47. See Finkelstein, op. cit., pp. 106–7.
48. See Liber, op. cit., pp. 336, 338, 342.
49. All these phrases of Divine attributes can best be appreciated with regard to their biblical connotations. *N-f-l* can have the connotation of falling in sin (as in Isa 3:8 and Jer 8:12). *R-f-a* denotes not only the physical healing of the sick, but, among other things, relief from sin and personal distress (Ps 41:5, context of Jer 17:14) and neutralization of one's enemies (Ps 6:11; 30:3). *Asurim* can denote both prisoners of exile, as in Isaiah 49:9; 61:1, and those unjustly imprisoned (Ps 146:7). "Those who lie in the dust" (*sheinei afar*) are both those in the humiliation of exile (Isa 52:2) and those who, dead and buried, await eternal life (Dan 12:2). Note that all these terms refer to Divine help of individuals as well as of the nation.
50. Liber, op. cit., pp. 332, 353.