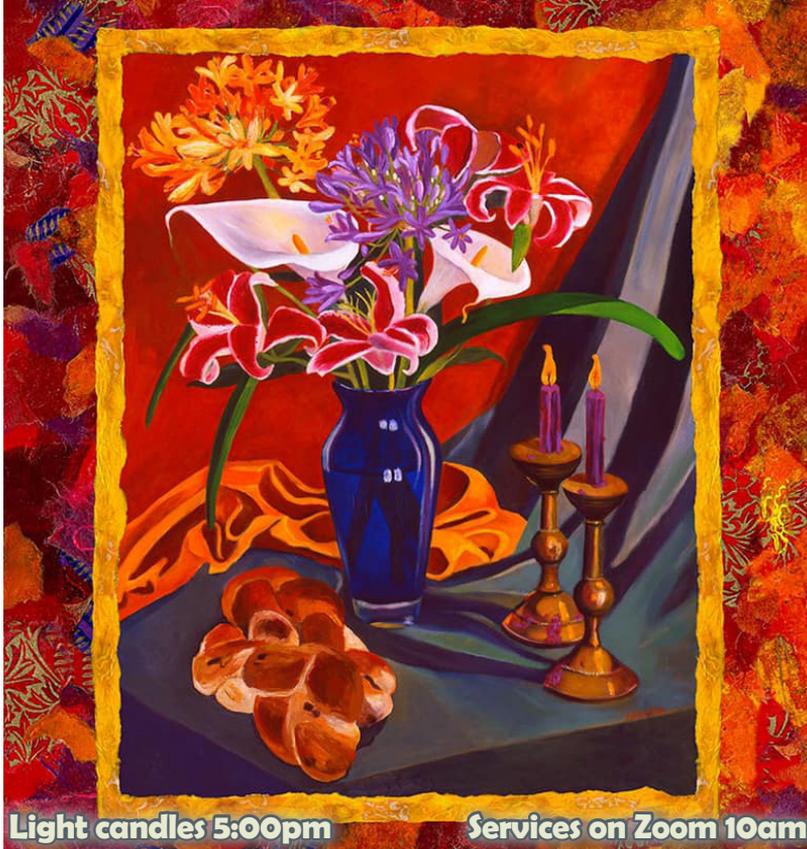




Carnegie Shul Chatter

January 14, 2021



Light candles 5:00pm

Services on Zoom 10am

Zoom in for Services

We invite you to join in our abbreviated Shabbos service, beginning at 10 am and lasting for approximately an hour, by clicking this link:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89999518524?pwd=aEo0UHZuZ2Z3WVVVQ0lLQ215TU1TZz09>

Find the Birnbaum siddur at: <https://opensiddur.org/compilations/liturgical/siddurim/kol-bo/hasiddur-hashalem-by-paltiel-birnbaum-1949/>

Comforting Words

There are times in all of our lives that we feel the need to offer prayers to God for someone who is sick, or if we are sick. We can do this in a variety of ways. After all, God hears our prayers whether we recite them in English or in Hebrew, in a synagogue or at home, and whether we use a traditional formal prayer or not.

In shul, on Shabbos, we say a *mi sheberach* for the sick. But, as mentioned in our main article today, the *Shemoneh Esreh* gives us a wonderful opportunity to pray for the sick to be healed. "During the eighth blessing, for healing, many *siddurim* (prayer books) include a prayer that asks God to heal a specific person and has a place to insert the name of anyone who is sick. This is done by saying the person's Hebrew name, then "ben" (son of) or "bat" (daughter of), and

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Va'eira in a Nutshell

Exodus 6:2-9:35

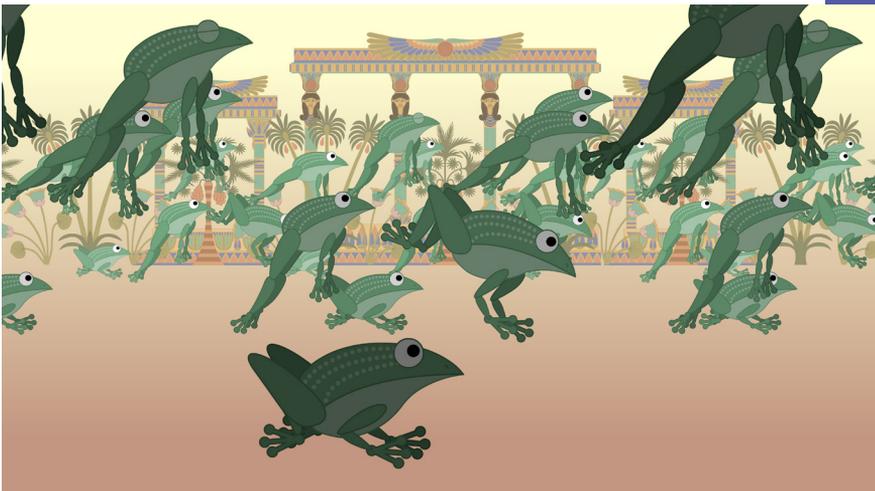
Below is this week's Parshah in a Nutshell from chabad.org.

G-d reveals Himself to Moses. Employing the "four expressions of redemption," He promises to take out the Children of Israel from Egypt, deliver them from their enslavement, redeem them and acquire them as His own chosen people at Mount Sinai; He will then bring them to the Land He promised to the Patriarchs as their eternal heritage.



Moses and Aaron repeatedly come before Pharaoh to demand in the name of G-d, "Let My people go, so that they may serve Me in the wilderness." Pharaoh repeatedly refuses. Aaron's staff turns into a snake and swallows the magic sticks of the Egyptian sorcerers. G-d then sends a series of plagues upon the Egyptians.

The waters of the Nile turn to blood; swarms of frogs overrun the land; lice infest all men and beasts. Hordes of wild animals invade the cities, a pestilence kills the domestic animals, painful boils afflict the Egyptians. For the seventh plague, fire and ice combine to descend from the skies as a devastating hail. Still, "the heart of Pharaoh was hardened and he would not let the children of Israel go; as G-d had said to Moses."



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then his or her mother's name (for example, Joseph ben Sarah or Miriam bat Sarah). Personal requests may be made during any of the blessings, but in the sixteenth blessing specifically, which asks God to hear our prayers, it is appropriate to insert one's own requests. "

In times such as these, with many of us knowing someone who has suffered from Covid, the *Shemoneh Esreh* gives us the opportunity to ask for healing. I find these words of the *Shemoneh Esreh* to be very comforting, "Heal us, O Lord, and we shall be healed; save us and we shall be saved; for thou art our praise. Grant a perfect healing to all our wounds; for thou art a faithful and merciful God, King and Healer. Blessed art thou, O Lord, who healest the sick among thy people Israel."

Important Prayers

What is the most important prayer in Judaism? Is it the *Shema*, the prayer in which we proclaim God's oneness, the central concept of Judaism? Or is it the *Shemonah Esreh* or *Amidah*, which we recite while standing in silent devotion at each of the three daily services?

Or is any prayer more important than another?

Some say that each of the Ten Commandments is of equal importance, and it is also said that none of the 613 mitzvot is more important than any other.

Yes, all prayers are important, all commandments are important, and all mitzvot are important. But, as Philip Birnbaum says of the *Shemonah Esreh* in the introduction to our Siddur, it "is the central element of the three daily services."

So today we will look more closely at this very important prayer.

Here is what Birnbaum writes in the Siddur introduction:

Maimonides writes that when the Jewish people were exiled in the days of the First Temple, they mixed with Persians, Greeks, and other nationalities. The language of their children became confused, a mixture of many dialects, and they were unable to express themselves adequately and accurately in any one language. Their Hebrew vocabulary was too limited to express their needs. "When Ezra and



his council took notice of this, they instituted the Shemoneh Esreh, the Eighteen Benedictions, in their present order; the first three contain praise to God; the last three, thanksgiving; the intermediate benedictions contain petitions for the most essential needs of the individual and the community. They were to be set on everyone's lips and learned, so that persons of inarticulate speech might offer prayer as those who spoke an eloquent Hebrew. For this reason they instituted the other blessings which are arrayed on the lips of all Israel, to make each blessing readily available to one who isn't familiar with the language."



The Shemoneh Esreh, referred to above, is the essential element of the three daily services – Shacharith, Minhah, and Ma'ariv. It is spoken of as Tefillah, Prayer par excellence, on account of its antiquity and importance. A number of reasons are suggested by the Talmud to explain the fact that it was formulated with eighteen benedictions. The name of God is mentioned eighteen times in Psalm 29, as well as in the Shema, the affirmation of the Jewish faith; the three patriarchs of the Jewish people, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, are mentioned together eighteen times in the Bible,

the number eighteen corresponds to the eighteen essential vertebrae of the spinal column (Berakoth 28b). The addition of a nineteenth benediction, referring to slanderers and enemies of the people, was made toward the end of the first century at the direction of Rabban Gamliel, head of the Sanhedrin at Yavneh.

The Shemoneh Esreh is also known as the Amidah – the prayer recited while standing. Amidah is also the correct name for this silent prayer on Sabbaths and festivals, when it consists of only seven benedictions. While the first three and last three benedictions are the same in all forms of the Amidah, the thirteen petitions of the weekday Shemoneh Esreh are eliminated on Sabbaths and festivals on the grounds that no personal requests may be made on these occasions. When reciting these thirteen petitions, a person is likely to be reminded of his failings and troubles, and on these days of rest one ought to be cheerful and not saddened by such worries.

These thirteen weekday petitions plead for wisdom, repentance, forgiveness, deliverance, healing, prosperity, ingathering of the dispersed, restoration of justice, suppression of tyranny, protection of the upright, rebuilding of Jerusalem, the messianic era, and the acceptance of prayer. All these petitions are made on behalf of the entire community. Petitions for personal needs, however, may be inserted in their appropriate place, as when one reaches the eighth benediction, which begins: “Heal us, O Lord, and we shall be healed; save us, and we shall be saved.”

The readers’ repetition of the Amidah is designed for the benefit of those who cannot read the Admidah for themselves. It is not repeated by the reader during the Ma’ariv service, because the sages of the Talmud held that the evening service was optional and not obligatory.

There are also various laws and customs that should be followed when reciting the Shemoneh Esreh. Below is an excerpt from jewishvirtuallibrary.org that describes them.

Laws and Customs

One should stand with one's feet together while reciting the Amidah as a show of respect for God. The rabbis add that this pose mirrors the vision of angels that Ezekiel had in which the feet of the angels appeared as one (Ezekiel 1:7). The custom is to face the direction of Israel, and if one is in Israel, to turn to Jerusalem and the Temple Mount. This shows respect



for the Temples, which were central to Jewish life, and reminds one that the synagogue was established to try to fill the gap in Jewish life left by the Temples' destruction. In many synagogues in the west, the ark is on the eastern wall of the synagogue for this reason.

The Amidah is a person's opportunity to approach God in private prayer, and should therefore be said quietly. The words must be audible to oneself, but one should be careful to pray softly enough not to disturb others. If one is alone, it is permissible to raise one's voice slightly if it helps concentration. It is forbidden to interrupt the Amidah even to greet an important person. One should not even acknowledge a greeting. Only a grave emergency justifies interrupting the Amidah, since it is considered a conversation with God.



There are several interesting customs relating to one's physical position while saying the Amidah. Before one begins the Amidah, it is customary to take three small steps forward as if one is approaching a king. Some say this was derived from Abraham who "came forward" to pray for the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 18:23). Where there is not much space, it has

become the practice to take several tiny steps back before taking the three symbolic steps forward. To humble oneself before God, one bends the knees and bows at both the beginning and the end of the first blessing while saying "Barukh atah" (Blessed are you). One should stand erect in time to say God's name, "Adonai." In the sixth blessing, for forgiveness, when one says the words "hatanu" (we have sinned) and "pashanu" (we have transgressed), it is customary to lightly beat once upon the chest with one's right hand. This symbolizes that the heart is the source of the temptation to sin. One bows again during the eighteenth blessing, for thanksgiving, both at the beginning, during the words "Modim anahnu lakh" (We thank you) and at the end with the words "Baruch atah." At the end of the Amidah, in the meditation after the last blessing, before reciting the line, "Oseh shalom bimromav," (He who makes peace in his heights) one takes three steps backwards, mirroring the three steps forward taken at the beginning. While saying that line, it is customary to bow three times: toward the left, toward the right, and then forward. This is again symbolic of a subject leaving a king.

The Amidah affords the opportunity to insert one's private prayers. During the eighth blessing, for healing, many siddurim (prayer books) include a prayer that asks God to heal a specific person and has a place to insert the name of anyone who is sick. This is done by saying the person's Hebrew name, then "ben" (son of) or "bat" (daughter of), and then his or her mother's name (for example, Joseph ben Sarah or Miriam bat Sarah). Personal requests may be made during any of the blessings, but in the sixteenth blessing specifically, which asks God to hear our prayers, it is appropriate to insert one's own requests. The appropriate place in this blessing is after the words "raykam al teshivanu" (do not turn us away empty). These additional prayers can be said in any language for any need.

At every service except for Ma'ariv, the chazzan (cantor) repeats the Amidah after the congregation has recited the prayer privately. This repetition is called hazarat ha-shatz. It was instituted originally for the benefit of those who were not able to recite the Amidah properly on their own. By listening and answering "Amen" at the end of each blessing, these worshipers fulfilled their obligation of prayer. The reason the Amidah is not repeated at Ma'ariv is because the Talmud treats Ma'ariv as originally having been optional, meaning that it does not have the same level of obligation.

During his repetition, the chazzan adds a prayer called Kedushah (holiness), which proclaims the holiness of God in the language that the angels are said to have used. Kedushah is said only with a minyan (quorum of ten), and may not be interrupted for conversation. Like the Amidah itself, it should be said while standing with one's feet together. Even if one happens to be present, and not praying, while the Kedushah is recited, one must stop what he is doing and join in. It is customary to raise oneself slightly on one's toes three times when saying Kadosh, Kadosh, Kadosh (holy, holy, holy) to symbolize the movement of the angels and to reach towards God with one's whole body. There are some minor differences between the Sephardi and Ashkenazi texts of Kedushah. One other change in hazarat ha-shatz is that when the chazzan reaches the blessing of thanksgiving (modim), he recites the standard blessing while the congregation recites silently the "Thanksgiving Prayer of the Rabbis" (modim d'rabbanan), which is a composite of short thanksgiving prayers said by various Talmudic sages.