

The Avinu – Tefillah Part 6

“One day Kepha and Yochannan were going up to the Temple at the time of prayer—at the ninth hour (three in the afternoon). ²Now a man crippled from birth was being carried to the Temple gate called Beautiful (Sha'ar Hatiferet), where he was put in front every day to beg from those going into the Temple Courts. ³When he saw Kepha and Yochannan about to enter, he asked them for money. ⁴ Kepha looked straight at him, as did Yochannan. Then Kepha said, "Look at us!" ⁵So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them. ⁶Then Kepha said, "Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Messiah YahShua HaNotzri (the Branch), walk." ⁷Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong. ⁸He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising Yahweh. ⁹When all the people saw him walking and praising Yahweh, ¹⁰they recognised him as the same man who used to sit begging at the Temple gate called Beautiful, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him. (Acts 3:1-10)”

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The opening passage of Acts 3 can be more accurately rendered, “One day Kepha and Yochannan were going up to the Temple at the time of the prayer... Which prayer? The only prayer that accompanies all the three daily prayers – The Amidah, the Standing Prayer.

The rabbis referred to the Amidah as ha-Tefillah – “The Prayer” The name Amidah came later.

In fact, in the first century, the Amidah had only between 12 to 14 benedictions. It wasn't until after the destruction of the 2nd Temple in 70 C.E. that it received additional petitions owing to the significant change that occurred to Jewish life after such a disaster.

Kepha's action was a fulfillment of Isaiah 35:6 which says, “Then will the lame leap like a deer...” In doing this he enabled a man, lame from birth, to אָמַד *amad* (to take his stand), which is the root of the word that describes the prayer that was prayed at that very hour!

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Okay, now let's talk about the Avinu, otherwise known as the Lord's prayer. The word Avinu means “Our Father” from the Hebrew word “Ab” or “Abba.” The name “The Lord's Prayer” didn't appear until 1540.

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Though the Lord's Prayer is the most venerated of all Christian prayers, it was not originally a Christian Prayer, but a Jewish one. Its entire construction is completely in line with hundreds of variants of Jewish prayer. If it wasn't for its association with Christianity, the recitation of it in its Hebrew form would cause it to be completely unremarkable from hundreds of other prayers constructed by Pharisees and rabbis throughout the centuries. Aaron Eby states that the Avinu, “is woven from the same raw material as all other Jewish prayer.” In fact, the entire prayer could be pieced together from pulling sections out of common Jewish liturgical

prayer. Its vocabulary is completely in sync with the standard formula of Jewish praise, petition and thanksgiving. Apart from the prayer's association with Christianity, there is nothing in it that an Orthodox Jew would object to. Not in the slightest.

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The Avinu is a surprisingly uncontroversial prayer. Unlike Yahshua, whose very name causes mayhem, the prayer he taught is surprisingly conservative.

Furthermore, it can almost be entirely pieced together from Scripture itself. The first part in

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(Click through each verse)

Isaiah 63:15–16 (“Look down from heaven and see, from your holy and beautiful habitation ... For you are our Father ...”) and Ezekiel 36:23 (“I will vindicate the holiness of my great name ...”) and Ezekiel 38:23 (“I will show my greatness and my holiness and make myself known in the eyes of many nations ...”), the second part in Obadiah 1:21 (“Saviours shall go up to Mount Zion to rule Mount Esau, and the kingdom shall be Yahweh’s”) and 1 Samuel 3:18 (“... It is Yahweh. Let him do what seems good to him”), the third part in Proverbs 30:8 (“... feed me with my apportioned bread”), the fourth part in Sirach 28:2 (“Forgive your neighbour the wrong he has done, and then your sins will be pardoned when you pray”). “Deliver us from evil” can be compared with Psalm 119:133 (“... let no iniquity get dominion over me.”).

Now, you might have noticed that there is no Scriptural support for the statement about temptation. Some Scholars assume that this has no premise in the Bible because Yahweh does not tempt people.

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The Greek word "πειρασμός", which is translated as "temptation", is more accurately translated as "test" or "trial", making evident the attitude of someone's heart. There are well known examples of Divine tests in Scripture. There is the test of Abraham in Genesis 22:1 and David's test following on the heels of his request to be tested in Psalm 26:2. Now David's problem was desire and his test came in the manner of the thing he dragged himself to do. But interestingly enough, Avraham's problem was kindness! Excessive kindness is a problem. If is a transgression to show when it is not appropriate, such as to a child that has done something wrong. This sends the wrong message. But unlike David, Avraham didn't ultimately have a problem with it by agreeing to offer up his son. This is why he passed his test and David failed his.

In addition to the various sources in Scripture that make up the Avinu, there is a sequence in 1 Chronicles 29 that carries many similar features. See if you can spot them.

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“So David blessed Yahweh in the sight of all the assembly; and David said, “Blessed are You, O Yahweh Elohim of Yisrael our father, forever and ever. Yours, O Yahweh, is the greatness

and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, indeed everything that is in the heavens and the earth; Yours is the dominion, O Yahweh, and You exalt Yourself as head over all. Both riches and honour come from You, and You rule over all, and in Your hand is power and might; and it lies in Your hand to make great and to strengthen everyone. Now therefore, our Elohim, we thank You, and praise Your glorious name. (1 Chronicles 29:10-13)

How the Avinu Came into Being and was it Meant to Replace the Amidah?

So, let's look at how the Avinu came about. One of the first things to note, is that the prayer came on the back of a request in Luke. Though Yahshua taught the Avinu as part of his Sermon on the Mount in Matthew, it would have certainly been after an occasion when one of his own talmidim asked him privately:

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"One day Yahshua was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his talmidim said to him, 'Adonai, teach us to daven, just as Yochannan taught his Talmidim. (Luke 11:1)'"

Yahshua's talmidim watched every move of their Messiah like hawks as all good Torah students were known to do. The key events in Yahshua's ministry that have come to us from the viewpoint of four of his students attests to this. We don't often remember, that some of Yahshua's most devoted followers feverishly observed and often recorded many of his activities. This is a common theme in Judaism. Rav Nachman of Breslav's students wrote many works documenting his teachings and wrote many of their own works expounding on them. In Luke 11:1 the talmid almost certainly had just observed his master praying, waiting to speak to Yahshua when he'd finished. The reference to Yochannan's prayer that he taught his followers also provides more context as to the type of prayer Yahshua's talmid was expecting to hear. He was expecting to hear a prayer that was unique to His Master's role. The extract that has survived of Yochannan's prayer speaks of having Moshiach revealed.

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"Avinu HaKodesh, consecrate me through your strength and make known the glory of your excellence and show me your son and fill me with your spirit which has received light through your knowledge."- Old Syriac Manuscript

Now, many scholars have gone on record saying that because of Yahshua's criticism of lengthy prayer, that the Avinu (Lord's Prayer) is an alternative to the Amidah.

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There is an interesting extract from Mishnah Berakhot 4:3, which carries the opinions of three Torah heavyweights, Gamaliel II, Joshua ben Hananiah, and Akiva. They are considered regarding the requirement to pray the Amidah. Gamaliel argued that the whole text of the then eighteen benedictions should be prayed, while Joshua said only an abstract of them is required. By abstract he meant a shortened prayer that contains the essence of the whole eighteen. Rabbi Akiva says, if the prayer is familiar to him, he should pray the full Shemoneh Esrei but if not, then he should pray a shorter version" (4:3).

In the Mishna and Talmudic writings we find a very simplified version of the Amidah by Eliezer ben Hyrcanus.

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May your will be done in the heavens above,
and grant the ease of spirit to those who fear you,
and do what is good in your eyes,
Blessed is he who listens to prayer.
-Tosefta Berakhot 3:7

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Mishnah (Berakhot 4: 4), compiled at the end of the second century, exonerates the Jew facing a crisis from reciting this lengthy prayer; advising him to substitute for it a far shorter prayer and one in which there is a greater sense of urgency: 'Rabbi Joshua said: if one is travelling in a dangerous place, he says the following short prayer: "Save, O Adonai, The people, the remnant of Israel: in every time of crisis may their needs be present to You. Blessed are You, O Adonai, who hears prayer."

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Rebbe Yahshua said: "And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. (Matthew 6:5-8)"

If we breakdown Rebbe Yahshua's teaching on prayer here we get:

- Do not pray in highly visible public places. Pray in secret. Don't make a fuse and say, 'Well everyone I'm going off to pray now!'
- Do not pray like foreigners (people outside the covenant). Here Rebbe Yahshua is warning against quantity over quality. He is not criticising many words per se, rather, he is criticising many words without meaning. He himself prayed all night! "One day soon afterward Yahshua went up on a mountain to pray, and he prayed to Elohim all night. (Luke 6:12)" Sha'ul (A.K.A) The Apostle Paul, wrote to pray without ceasing in 1 Thessalonians 5:16.

Yahshua taught to go above the letter of the law. He never taught in a way that provided shortcuts. Never ever. He was, however conscious of new converts, as was his half-brother Ya'akov HaTzadik, who wrote a document stating minimum requirements for eligibility to be taught the covenant. As it is the Amidah can be prayed in all of seven minutes. I can't imagine Yahshua having a problem with the Amidah's length. On the contrary, it's a work of genius, in its brevity and the myriad of things it contains. So too is the Avinu, it's even

shorter and contains arguably an even greater bulk of information in proportion to its size than the Amidah carries in proportion to its size! In a sense, those of you who are familiar with Doctor Who, these prayers are like a mini Tardis, on the outside they look small, but on the inside they are huge!

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So the answer is: The Avinu should be a supplemental prayer to those who are already familiar with the Amidah and an alternative to the Amidah to those who are not familiar. It should also be prayed in an emergency if time is not permitted to pray the Amidah.

The alternative option is only until a person able to sufficiently learn the Amidah.

Furthermore, Luke 11:1 is also the enactment of a tradition where rabbis taught a unique prayer to their followers that supplemented “The Prayer” (The Amidah). Rabbinical schools (Yeshivot) taught a prayer that was particular to the presiding rabbi that officiated at that school. Talmud preserves several examples of short prayers distinctive to a certain sage and his school of disciples. For example:

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“When Rabbi Eleazar concluded his recitation of prayer, he prayed, ‘May it be Your will, O Yahweh our Elohim, to cause love, brotherhood, peace, and friendship to swell in our midst, and may You set our portion in the Garden of Eden, and grant us good companionship and a good inclination in Your world, and may we rise early and obtain the desire of our heart—to fear Your Name, and may you be pleased to satisfy our desires.’”

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When Rabbi Yochanan concluded his recitation of prayer, he prayed, ‘May it be your will, O Yahweh our Elohim, to look upon our shame and behold our affliction and clothe Yourself in Your mercies and cover Yourself in Your strength and wrap Yourself in lovingkindness and gird Yourself in Your graciousness, and may Your attributes of kindness and mercy prevail.’” (b.Berachot 16b)

Rabbi Yizerah’s prayer was, “Let it be your will O Yahweh our Elohim, that we not sin and that we may not be Ashamed or humiliated before our fathers.”

Rabbi Chiaya’s prayer was, “Let it be your will Yahweh our Elohim, that your Torah will be our occupation. Do not let our hearts be pained or our eyes be darkened.”

Rav said, “Let it be your will O Yahweh our Elohim, that You grant us a long life, a life a peace, a life of goodness, a life of blessing, a life of livelihood, a life of bodily strength, a life in which there is fear of sin, a life in which there is no shame of humiliation, a life of wealth and honour, a life in which there is love of Torah and fear of heaven, a life in which You fulfill all of our hearts requests for good.”

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Rabbi Yahudah is said to have recited daily the following supplication on finishing the obligatory prayers (Ber. 6b; comp. Shab. 30b): "May it be Your will, my Elohim and the Elohim of my fathers, to protect me against the impudent and against impudence, from bad men and bad companions, from severe sentences and severe plaintiffs, whether a son of the covenant or not."

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The Avinu is also found in a document known as the "Didache," which is Latin for "The Teaching of the Twelve." This manuscript is believed to be the entire scroll as compiled by Ya'akov HaTzadik, which is briefly summarised in Acts 15:29.

The Didache constitutes the oldest surviving written catechism (summary or exposition of doctrine) of the Netzarim. It is divided into sections dealing with ethics, rituals such as immersion, attitudes towards new converts, and directions on appointing leaders and teachers. The Didache is considered the first example of a document containing formal orders and procedures to be adhered to by the growing Netzarim community.

CHAPTER 8

(CONCERNING FASTING AND PRAYER [THE LORD'S PRAYER])

1. And let not your fastings be with the hypocrites, for they fast on the second and the fifth day of the week; but do ye keep your fast on the fourth and on the preparation (the sixth) day.
2. Neither pray ye "as the hypocrites," but as the Messiah commanded in His Gospel, "thus pray ye: Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name; Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done, as in heaven, so also on earth; give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debt, as we also forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one;" for Thine is the power and the glory for ever and ever.
3. Three times in the day pray ye so (Sharcharis [Morning], Mincha [Noon], and Marris [Evening] Prayers).

In conclusion. All Jewish prayer, including Netzarim prayer, is comprised of praise, petition and thanksgiving. Many of the prayers devised by the Pharisees, rabbis and Sages were quite short prayers. In fact, the Avinu, is quite a long prayer in comparison to John's prayer and many other rabbinic prayers, which just consist of one or two lines. In fact, the siddur we use is knit together with many of these prayers that have been taught by great men over the centuries. Yahshua's arrival, teachings, crucifixion and ascension did not cancel out the Torah or anything taught by righteous individuals who came before him. The Torah is discovered as we journey through the generations and we have the opportunity to stand on the shoulders of Yahshua and every great man and woman who have come before or after him who have imitated his ways. One thing I've noticed, is that some people's focus is so fixated on Moshiach, that they see nothing else, but in actuality, if you are truly focused on Yahshua, you can see so him everywhere!

