

בעת אישן ואעירה-על תפילות שבין יום ובין לילה

WHEN I SLEEP AND WHEN I WAKE: ON PRAYERS BETWEEN DUSK AND DAWN

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English Translation Of The Introduction To The Book

If you would like to learn about the Jews – open their prayer books; if you want to feel the heartbeat of their generations – listen to the sounds of their supplications. It is true that the *Tanakh* is the Book of Books of the Jewish People and the *Talmud* is the Jewish text that received the most scholarly attention throughout the centuries, but the prayer book remained the Jewish book that provided the Jewish People its underlying foundation. It was a book that Jews encountered regularly through the centuries even if they did not always understand its language and were not always interested in delving into its profound theological questions and literary content. The text of the *Siddur*, its style, the illusions hidden within it, the feel of its pages, the cover that was regularly kissed and the special places where it was kept – represent the ways in which Jews maintained close and constant contact through the generations and it was in the pages of the prayer books that the Jewish People stored its tears and hid its innermost hopes.

The inspiration for this book came from a tiny booklet of Psalms that my father, Michael Marx, ז"ל, brought back with him when he returned from serving as a soldier in the Yom Kippur War. My father was not a religious man and the booklet, covered in green plastic, dedicated by the then Chief Rabbi to “our courageous soldiers”, moved around my house over the years, from drawer to drawer and from shelf to shelf. One day, my mother, Yael Marx, searching for a way to cheer me up after a particularly upsetting day at elementary school, retrieved the booklet from its resting place. She passed it on to me with the message that in the pages of the booklet I might find consolation and strength. Over time my cautious leafing through its pages grew into a regular bed time routine. The contents of its pages captured my interest but what became dearest to me were the words of the bedtime *Sh'ma*, printed in very small font on the last page of the booklet. The words of the bedtime *Sh'ma* and the personal prayer that I added during a Pesach girl scout outing in sixth grade which I continue to recite until today and which I have recited with my own children so many times that I lost count as to the number, with the children of my husband, and by myself over the years, became my own individual language, an expression of my innermost feelings. That prayer gave birth to this book.

In my book, *B'Eit Ishan V'Aira: Al Tefilot Bain Yom U'Vain Laiy'la* (“When I Sleep and When I Wake: On Prayers between Dusk and Dawn”), I review two sections of the Jewish Prayerbook: the bedtime *Sh'ma* and the Morning Blessings. These two sections share the fact that they are considered marginally important in the world of *Halacha*. But because they are said when only a fine line divides day from night, the words accompany some of the most significant minutes of the day - when one retires and when one arises - moments which bring forth in many people feelings of anxiety and trepidation. For that reason, those two parts of the day represent important elements in the human experience, full of soulful, emotional, mental and culturally rich dimensions. It is paradoxical that their positioning, on the periphery of the liturgy, gave past generations the opportunity to expand upon the two prayers and to add additional material that imbued the prayers with added significance. I plan to suggest in this book multiple interpretations of these prayers, using traditional methods, a critical approach and an examination from a literary and intellectual standpoint.

A comparison can be drawn between Jewish prayer and an enchanted garden where one can find private corners and hidden spots of beauty. The garden may forever remain the same but to paraphrase a saying of the Greek philosopher Heraclitus, one's experience while in the garden never repeats itself. On some occasions, the garden is bright and airy; while other times it is flooded by rain; sometimes cold, sometimes warm and oftentimes empty. Its benches may be covered with falling leaves while at other times, noisy groups of children jump between its flower beds. Just as the condition of the garden is constantly changing, so too your experience in reciting the same prayers is never repeated a second time. The text may be the same, but I who am reading it am different each time.

Different people view the garden differently: botanists look to distinguish between its plants; zoologists search for types of insects and reptiles; landscape designers analyze its botanical character; social workers contemplate how the garden can heal hurting souls; lovers look for its private corners; parents check for what may endanger their young children; older children search for equipment that will entertain them, etc., etc. Do any one of them fully absorb the experience of being in the garden? Is it possible for any one person to comprehend the entire constitution and richness of the garden? Each of the visitors evaluates the garden based on his/her own needs. They are blind to the other dimensions tied to it. Even if one attempted in one sitting to grasp all that the garden offered, one would not be able to appreciate all of its aspects. The garden is much bigger than the sum of its parts.

So too is Jewish prayer. Each person who passes through its gates views it, at any given moment, in his/her particular way, a way that cannot be duplicated. That is why I am attempting to approach and to analyze Jewish prayer in a multi-faceted manner, and as much as possible, without limitations, while at the same time recognizing that it is not possible to capture all of its dimensions. I allow for those who walk in the garden to discover paths that I have not yet walked and streets that I have not yet traversed.

I am not quite finished developing my comparisons between *Tefilla* and the garden. The shade that the garden provides, its beauty, its fruit, the refuge it brings are gifts for those who pause there. Yet on some days the garden does not offer a warm welcome, like on rainy days, when the ground is muddy or and on days when the heat of the sun is unbearable. The liturgy also represents a place of comfort and delight while being also a place where one faces regret, doubts, and on occasion, resentment. A visit to the garden is not reserved just for recreational purposes. It is also a place to experience the world and at that moment to marvel over it. Similarly, *Tefilla* offers a means of understanding reality, of tackling questions of faith, of integrating into the community, of coming together and of being alone, of feeling close to G-d and of experiencing alienation from Him.

Studying *Tefilla* is not an exercise in theology, per se. However, just as those who walk in the garden may ask who owns the garden and who built it, so too those who walk through the pages of *Tefilla* may have questions about faith and holiness. The study of *Tefilla* does not involve studying *Halachic* opinions per se but just as those who walk in the garden must familiarize themselves with the garden's rules of conduct, such as the hours of operation and where one may step, so too those who want to understand *Tefilla* must tackle questions of *Halacha* and *Minhag* that are tied to *Tefilla*. The study of *Tefilla* is not solely a literary exercise, however just as alert travelers pay attention to the beauty of the flowers, the appearance of sprouts and the smell of the flowers, so too those who walk through the pages of *Tefilla* should notice its poetic quality, the complexity of its language and its literary value. The study of *Tefilla* is not philology nor the study of history alone, but just as those who pass through the garden try to understand the structure of the garden, its divisions into flower beds, the need for proper watering and the use of nutritious soil, so too those interested in *Tefilla* must necessarily seek to understand the development of *Tefilla*, its variations, its wording and its structure.

What fascinates me about the field of Jewish Liturgy is the great number of surfaces that it presents. Delving into the field of *Tefilla* means dipping into a number of varied fields of knowledge: theology, *Halacha*, literature, sociology, art, psychology, linguistics, philosophy,

drama, etc., etc. *Tefilla* speaks in so many voices and reaches diverse groups in a variety of ways. Different people are attracted to different aspects of *Tefilla*, and yet the same people can suddenly switch to a different aspect of *Tefilla* in a matter of minutes.

Tefilla is a unique text among the holy texts in that the proper handling of it requires that it be accompanied by a physical act. We can be impressed by ancient liturgical texts from the East, but without lips mouthing the prayers and without people remembering them, the prayers have no life. Prayer requires partners, the mind with the heart, faith and understanding, the body and the soul, the mouth that speaks and the heart that feels. *Tefilla* is both a religious and a human act, a compelling deed that combines faith, an expression of the soul and of group identification.

My book is based in part on the research I did in writing my PhD dissertation under the supervision of my mentor, Professor Avigdor Shinan. It was not a simple task to convert an academic work (in which more than half of each page was taken up by footnotes) into a readable text that is appropriate to readers who are not researchers in the field of *Tefilla*. Therefore, when necessary, I translated Rabbinic texts from Aramaic to Hebrew and greatly limited the number of notes that concern side issues. For those readers who wish to delve deeper into any one issue, I added a bibliography with additional sources.

My approach to examining the Morning Blessings and the bedtime *Sh'ma* can be compared to the way we look at a diamond. Just as you cannot capture all its facets in a single look and must rotate it and hold it in different kinds of light to capture all its angles, our quest to understand the prayers in their entirety requires a patient and systematic examination of their multitude of dimensions. In my book, I return again and again to the same texts, seeking to understand them and to shed new light on their meaning through the lens of many disciplines. I believe that an accumulation of all the possible readings of the liturgy, those offered in this book and those provided by its readers, will enhance our appreciation and understanding of these cultural and spiritual treasures.

In the first section I provide a guide to the bedtime *Sh'ma* and the Morning Blessings. I survey the wording of each, their sources, their themes and characteristics. There, I highlight different versions of each prayer, as during the course of our People's history, many versions of the prayers were composed - to be accurate, it is not proper to speak of "a" *Siddur*. Instead we should speak of many *Siddurim* reflecting the different liturgical rites.

In the second section, I sketch the often undisclosed early history of the two liturgical rubrics, starting with the form they took when they first appeared in Rabbinic literature and continuing until I demonstrate how they appear in contemporary *Siddurim*. Since neither the Morning Blessings nor the bedtime *Sh'ma* were included as part of the definition of the fixed and obligatory prayers, it is not surprising that through the years the two rubrics underwent numerous and various liturgical changes. The multiple versions differed in their

components, in their order and how they were used (and in some ways, the situation has remained the same in contemporary *Siddurim*) offering us a multi-faced view of the prayers. These changes occurred despite the relative stability of other sections of the prayer book, most notably, the *Amidah*. Variations were made not only in the wording of the *Brachot*. Sometimes it was in the number of *Brachot* and sometimes it was in the order of the *Brachot*. Despite the fact that the Morning Blessings and the bedtime *Sh'ma* were subject to change and tended to be varied, their underlying themes remained rather fixed. The variations we find were in the details, the order and in the religious environment.

In the third section, I provide a detailed look at the wording of the two liturgical rubrics and examine them from a literary point of view. Perhaps because the two rubrics bore relatively little *Halachic* significance, whole worlds of meaning fell into them, creating fascinating narratives. I will try to show, for example, that among the many narratives that appeared in the Morning Blessings was one that recounted the story of Creation; one that dealt with the rebirth of daily praying and a third theme that looked towards the future days, etc., etc.

In the fourth section, I deal with the prayers as rituals; religious acts that embody many social and cultural angles. In that section, I examine whether theories of sociology or theories of anthropology, particularly those that deal with Rites of passage, can explain the origin of the Morning Blessings. I will demonstrate that these *Brachot* raise existential, human and Jewish questions and also attempt to answer human anxieties concerning each of them.

In the fifth section, I involve myself in issues that derive from these rubrics - the Morning Blessings have been the subject of much controversy in the last few decades, even among groups who do not regularly pray, particularly as to the *Brachot* that serve to distinguish between groups (i.e. that I was not created as a gentile, a woman and a slave). I will attempt to reveal the theme that underlies all of the Morning Blessings and to suggest a feminist interpretation of them. In Israel, Hebrew poetry has grown into a prime area of Jewish creativity, written often by poets who view themselves as secular Jews. I therefore dedicate a chapter to reviewing modern compositions by Israeli poets who drew from the text and from the concepts contained in the Morning Blessings and by those who composed new texts to be recited as part of this section of the *Tefilla*.

The relationship between the Jewish People and *Tefilla* can be best described as paradoxical. On the one hand, the *Siddur* was the most popular Jewish book among our People and the book that experienced the most regular use. A simple Jew in general did not study the *Talmud* but he certainly was familiar in no small part with the words of the *Siddur*. Yet, the study of *Tefilla* never merited becoming a regular course of study, not in religious circles and not in academic circles. It was not taught as an independent course in *Yeshivot* and at times many modern academic scholars appear hesitant to study it. Even today, research into *Tefilla* has not garnered a central place in the halls of academic Jewish study. As I write

these words, a sword is being pointed at the budget of the only academic department devoted to the study of *Tefilla*, at an Israeli University. *Tefilla* has always been an activity in which many participated on a daily basis but few felt comfortable discussing. I hope that this book will produce a modest dividend of encouraging by encouraging individuals to enter the complex and personal study of *Tefilla*; a subject that cannot be understood without being examined through multiple approaches. Our understanding of *Tefilla* will be enhanced when, for example, researchers apply theories of sociology to the study of *Tefilla*, or if anthropologists and sociologists delve into the field. It is my hope that new and deep understandings of *Tefilla* will sprout from these encounters.

I entered the study of *Tefilla* both as a researcher and as one who prays regularly. At times I try to speak with the authority of an academic but more often I feel like the hunter, a member of a tribe whose land was being confiscated by the Canadian government and travelled to Montreal to testify before a court of law in connection with the disposition of the land, who when asked to swear that his testimony would be truthful replied: I am not sure that it is within my power to tell the truth, I can only tell you what I know.”

I wish to approach *Tefilla* in a humble manner like someone who gingerly enters a garden which constantly changes and whose rules of conduct regularly vary as well. My involvement in *Tefilla* is as a researcher but at the same time, it is for me a religious act, as one who prays, who teaches liturgy and as a Rabbi within the Reform Movement. *Tefilla* represents a language that I wish to study, to teach, to maintain and to participate in.

This book was primarily written to Jewish readers -to those who regularly pray and to those who do not; to those who have abandoned prayer and to those who are not yet praying, to those who cannot live without prayer playing a large role in their lives every day, to those who feel lost in the recesses of its pages and to those who see the words of the *Siddur* representing the tongue of the Jewish People; the pages in which Jews deposited their despair, their yearnings and their hopes.

To those for whom the *Siddur* has represented a garden that was off limits, I offer a key to open the gate that surrounds the garden so that they too can benefit from the shade of its trees and from the scent of its beauty. For those who regularly travel over the paths of the garden, sometimes slowly and sometimes quickly, on occasion without appreciating its treasures and its ever changing character, each day and each hour of each day, I extend an invitation to join me in a slow walk through the garden.

Translated by Abe Katz, Executive Director of the Beurei Hatefila Institute, after review by the author. Published and distributed with the permission of the author and the publisher.