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*Understanding Liturgy Better*

**VAY'HEE BEENSOAH HAAHRONE and AYTZ CHAYEEM HE**

What is Liturgy?

*Liturgy is the customary public ritual of worship performed by a religious group. As a religious phenomenon, liturgy represents a communal response to and participation in the sacred through activities reflecting praise, thanksgiving, remembrance, supplication, or repentance. It forms a basis for establishing a relationship with God or the divine. Technically speaking, liturgy forms a subset of ritual. The word liturgy, sometimes equated in English as "service", refers to a formal ritual enacted by those who understand themselves to be participating in an action with the divine.*

*Judaism has a broad range of liturgy: Worship in formal prayer in a synagogue at one of the appointed times with a quorum of at least ten adults (a minyan) is only one kind of Jewish liturgical expression, and it is not even the most common. The most common liturgical moments are the occasional blessings that a person recites upon performing certain commandments, or mitzvot (Birkot Mitzvah), or on eating, or on experiencing some wondrous aspect of nature (Birkot haNehenin). Rituals such as [wedding ceremonies](#), the [Passover seder](#), [ritual circumcisions](#), and [putting up a mezuzah](#) (the box containing selections from the Torah) on a doorpost of a new home, are all liturgical activities that have their own choreography and texts.*

*The basic challenge of liturgy is that, on the one hand, we expect conversation with God to be intimate and real and spontaneous, as one might speak with a parent; on the other hand, we approach God with the images of royalty, and royalty has a defined protocol. Jewish law defines a requirement of three daily prayers with set liturgies, and it is very difficult to be spontaneous on a schedule with a familiar text. Through our history, Jewish liturgy has swung back and forth between these poles of the spontaneous and occasional (kavvanah, or true intention) versus the fixed and routinized (keva, or fixed and established). On the side of keva are the established texts that have been used for centuries: the for daily prayer, the machzor for prayer on the High Holidays, the haggadah for the ritual of the Passover (the ritual meal on the first night or nights of Passover). On the kavvanah side are the new [siddurim](#), [machzorim](#), and haggadot (as they are known in their plural forms) that are continually published, along with the new commentaries, poetry, and melodies that are designed to accompany them, and the entire area of private, personal prayer.*

<https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/jewish-liturgy/>

There is this challenge for today, we are in a fast paced world with blink attention spans. Many religions are trying to be relative, up to date, modern. Yet the concept of liturgy is ancient and consistent.

Rabbinic Judaism is greatly challenged today...

*How does one make an ancient liturgical text "new and relevant"? Until modern times, each generation would supplement the traditional text; occasionally, materials would drop out, but the overall works grew. In modern times, editors subtract, add, and substitute, sometimes creating new*

*materials and sometimes restoring materials “lost” to tradition. Prayer texts have changed as a result of differing theological concerns, especially as regards the relationship of the Jewish people to other peoples. The use of gender-specific language, both for God and for referring to people, is an issue that has informed the editing of some contemporary siddurim. Finally, new liturgical texts have been published that include modern commentaries or different aesthetic changes that make the texts more user-friendly.*

I am reminded of God's relevancy that doesn't change with time...

**Num 23:19** "God is not a human who lies or a mortal who changes his mind. When he says something, he will do it; when he makes a promise, he will fulfill it.

**Heb 13:8** Yeshua the Messiah is the same yesterday, today and forever.

In looking at two that I believe are intended as acts of worship when coming together are...

**VAY'HEE BEENSOAH HAAHRONE**

Vayehi Binso'a Ha'aron is a prayer chanted at the start of the [Torah service](#). As the ark that contains the scroll is opened, the congregation stands and recites these words:

***Va-y'he been-so-a ha-a-rone va-yo-mer Mo-sheh.***

***Ku-ma Adonai v'ya-fu-tzu oy-veh-cha,***

***v'ya-nu-su m'san-eh-cha me-pa-neh-cha.***

***Key me-tzee-ohn tay-tzay Torah (2x),***

***u-d'var Adonai me-ru-sha-la-yeem.***

***Ba-ruch sheh-na-tahn Torah Torah (2x),***

***I'a-mo Yisrael beek-du-sha-toe.***

The prayer is composed of two verses — one from Numbers and one from Isaiah — that jointly convey two important aspects of the Torah.

**Num 10:35** When the ark moved forward, Moshe said, "Arise, Adonai! May your enemies be scattered! Let those who hate you flee before you!"

The Ark would be the first thing to move after the people had broken down the camp in the wilderness and the cloud by day and fire by night would go forth.

**Isa 2:3** Many peoples will go and say, "Come, let's go up to the mountain of Adonai, to the house of the God of Ya`akov! He will teach us about his ways, and we will walk in his paths." **For out of Tziyon will go forth Torah, the word of Adonai from Yerushalayim.**

Speaking of a future promise that His Word, the Word of Adonai will go forth to all the world, all the nations. This would take form with the translation of the Tanakh into Greek, known as the Septuagint.

The word *ha'aron* means "the ark" (and in modern Hebrew, "the closet"), and it refers in this context to the Ark of the Covenant, the container that carried the tablets of the Ten Commandments as the Israelites wandered for 40 years in the desert before entering the land of Israel. The ark in contemporary synagogues that holds the Torah scrolls is a kind of reconstruction of this original Ark. The verse in Numbers refers to the moving of the Ark as the Israelites moved from camp to camp, with the Ark leading the way. But it may have been selected for this prayer for another reason as well.

In the Torah, this verse quite literally stands out. It is framed at beginning and end by the Hebrew letter nun, rendered backwards or upside down. In Hebrew, this is known as a *nun hafucha*, literally a "flipped nun." These nuns do not function as letters, but as symbols. The rabbis of the Talmud and the later medieval commentators had various ideas as to what these symbols signified.

One suggestion is that the verse is marked in this way because it's in the wrong place. The nuns are meant to indicate that verse should be placed elsewhere in the text in future rewrites. Another suggestion is that the symbols function as bookends, indicating that the verse should actually stand alone as an entire book of Torah. Because the verse is in the middle of Numbers, this would split Numbers up into three books, making a total of seven books of the Torah instead of five. The rabbis derive this radical idea not from the content of the verses, but from the symbols, which do not appear anywhere else in the Torah.

While the verse from Numbers recalls the time when the Torah was first given to the Jewish people, the second verse, from Isaiah, is notably in the future tense. In the Bible, the verses comes in the midst of a prophecy of a time when all the peoples of the earth will recognize God's sovereignty, when swords will be beat into plowshares and peace will reign. It speaks of a world that has yet to come, of a Torah that will yet emerge.

Taken together, these verses represent two aspects of Torah. The first reflects how Torah functioned as a guide for the newly free Israelites, accompanying them as they physically transitioned from camp to camp in the wilderness and as they emerged into peoplehood. The second reflects the idea that Torah was not only revealed at a singular moment in time, but is part of an ongoing process of revelation. This idea is further reflected in the blessings we recite as the Torah is read, which bless God as the one who "gives Torah" — not (solely) in the past, but in the present as well.

Torah literally means "teaching" or "instruction" and, in the broadest sense, this teaching is always evolving. Just as the verse from Numbers is bracketed in the Torah scroll, *Vayehi Binso'a Ha'aron* brackets the Torah in time — as a teaching both rooted in the Jewish past but also evolving into the future. *Vayehi Binso'a Ha'aron* serves as a reminder that as we prepare to see the scroll and hear its ancient words, its application and understanding is always changing.

AYTZ CHAYEEM HE

**Aytz cha-yeem he la-ma-cha-zee-keem ba, v'tome-cheh-ha m'u-shar.**

**D'ra-cheh-ha dar-chay no-ahm, v'chol n'tee-vo-teh-ha shalom.**

**Ha-she-vay-nu Adonai, ay-leh-cha v'na-shu-va, cha-daish, cha-daish ya-may-nu, cha-daish ya-may-nu k'keh-dem.**

**It is a tree of life, to those who take hold of it, and those who support it are blessed.**

**It's ways are ways of pleasantness, and all of it's paths are peace.**

**Bring us back to You Lord and we shall return, renew, renew our days, renew our days  
as of old.**

**Genesis 2:9**

- **Context:** Refers to the Tree of Life in the Garden of Eden.
- **Verse:** "And out of the ground made the LORD God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden..."

**Proverbs 3:18**

- **Context:** Describes wisdom as a tree of life.
- **Verse:** "She is a tree of life to those who grasp her, and whoever holds on to her is happy."

Where does all wisdom come from but God.

**Proverbs 11:30**

- **Context:** Relates the fruit of a righteous person to the tree of life.
- **Verse:** "The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life..."

**Proverbs 13:12**

- **Context:** Connects fulfilled desire to the tree of life.
- **Verse:** "Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a desire fulfilled is a tree of life."

**Proverbs 15:4**

- **Context:** Compares a healing tongue to a tree of life.

- **Verse:** "A healing tongue is a tree of life, but a devious one makes for a broken spirit."

These verses illustrate the significance of "Etz Chaim" in Jewish tradition, symbolizing wisdom, righteousness, and healing.

The source comes from Genesis 2:9...

**Gen 2:9** Out of the ground Adonai, God, caused to grow every tree pleasing in appearance and good for food, including the tree of life in the middle of the garden and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

The **Tree of Life (Etz Hachayim)** first appears in the **Bible** in the story of **Adam and Eve** when they were in the **Garden of Eden**. They had just eaten from the **Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil**, which brought mortality to the world and caused them to become ashamed of their nakedness. Then:

The term "Etz Chaim" (Tree of Life) in Jewish liturgy originates from the metaphorical association of the Torah with a tree that provides life and wisdom, as found in the Book of Proverbs. This concept is celebrated in various prayers and hymns, particularly during the return of the Torah scroll to the ark, emphasizing its significance in Jewish tradition.

In the book of Mishlei (Proverbs), we read a long poem devoted to the greatness of the wisdom of Torah, including the line, "It is a tree of life (*etz chayim*) for those who grasp it, and those who support it are fortunate.

The tree of life bearing the wisdom of God, as seen through Proverbs 3...

**Pro 3:1** My son, don't forget my teaching, keep my commands in your heart;

**Pro 3:2** for they will add to you many days, years of life and peace.

**Pro 3:3** Do not let grace and truth leave you—bind them around your neck; write them on the tablet of your heart.

**Pro 3:4** Then you will win favor and esteem in the sight of God and of people.

**Pro 3:5** Trust in Adonai with all your heart; do not rely on your own understanding.

**Pro 3:6** In all your ways acknowledge him; then he will level your paths.

**Pro 3:7** Don't be conceited about your own wisdom; but fear Adonai, and turn from evil.

Pro 3:8 This will bring health to your body and give strength to your bones.

Pro 3:9 Honor Adonai with your wealth and with the firstfruits of all your income.

Pro 3:10 Then your granaries will be filled and your vats overflow with new wine.

Pro 3:11 My son, don't despise Adonai's discipline or resent his reproof;

Pro 3:12 for Adonai corrects those he loves like a father who delights in his son.

### **Blessed Is the One Who Finds Wisdom – When you find Wisdom...**

#### **You find God**

Pro 3:13 Happy the person who finds wisdom, the person who acquires understanding;

Pro 3:14 for her profit exceeds that of silver, gaining her is better than gold,

Pro 3:15 she is more precious than pearls—nothing you want can compare with her.

Pro 3:16 Long life is in her right hand, riches and honor in her left.

Pro 3:17 Her ways are pleasant ways, and all her paths are peace.

Pro 3:18 She is a tree of life to those who grasp her; whoever holds fast to her will be made happy.

Pro 3:19 Adonai by wisdom founded the earth, by understanding he established the heavens,

Pro 3:20 by his knowledge the deep [*springs*] burst open and the dew condenses from the sky.

Pro 3:21 My son, don't let these slip from your sight; preserve common sense and discretion;

Pro 3:22 they will be life for your being and grace for your neck.

Pro 3:23 Then you will walk your way securely, without hurting your foot.

Pro 3:24 When you lie down, you will not be afraid; when you lie down, your sleep will be sweet.

Pro 3:25 Don't be afraid of sudden terror or destruction caused by the wicked, when it comes;

Pro 3:26 for you can rely on Adonai; he will keep your foot from being caught in a trap.

Pro 3:27 Don't withhold good from someone entitled to it when you have in hand the power to do it.

Pro 3:28 Don't tell your neighbor, "Go away! Come another time; I'll give it to you tomorrow," when you have it now.

Pro 3:29 Don't plan harm against your neighbor who lives beside you trustingly.

Pro 3:30 Don't quarrel with someone for no reason, if he has done you no harm.

Pro 3:31 Don't envy a man of violence, don't choose any of his ways;

Pro 3:32 for the perverse is an abomination to Adonai, but he shares his secret counsel with the upright.

Pro 3:33 Adonai's curse is in the house of the wicked, but he blesses the home of the righteous.

Pro 3:34 The scornful he scorns, but gives grace to the humble.

Pro 3:35 The wise win honor, but fools win shame.

This chapter provides a blue print with how we are to live our lives, embedding the precepts of the 10 commandments and the promise of the Ruach Ha Kodesh as the one who will guide and teach us...

Joh 14:25 "I have told you these things while I am still with you.

Joh 14:26 But the Counselor, the Ruach HaKodesh, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything; that is, he will remind you of everything I have said to you.

Joh 14:27 "What I am leaving with you is shalom—I am giving you my shalom. I don't give the way the world gives. Don't let yourselves be upset or frightened.