

Hannah and Prayer

Source Sheet by Rabbi Gayle Pomerantz

I Samuel 1:1-2:10

(1) There was a man from Ramathaim of the Zuphites, in the hill country of Ephraim, whose name was Elkanah son of Jeroham son of Elihu son of Tohu son of Zuph, an Ephraimite. (2) He had two wives, one named Hannah and the other Peninnah; Peninnah had children, but Hannah was childless. (3) This man used to go up from his town every year to worship and to offer sacrifice to the LORD of Hosts at Shiloh.—Hophni and Phinehas, the two sons of Eli, were priests of the LORD there. (4) One such day, Elkanah offered a sacrifice. He used to give portions to his wife Peninnah and to all her sons and daughters; (5) but to Hannah he would give one portion only—though Hannah was his favorite—for the LORD had closed her womb. (6) Moreover, her rival, to make her miserable, would taunt her that the LORD had closed her womb. (7) This happened year after year: Every time she went up to the House of the LORD, the other would taunt her, so that she wept

שמואל א א'א'ב'י

(א) וַיְהִי אִישׁ אֶחָד מִן־הַרְמַתִּים
צוֹפִים מֵהָר אֶפְרַיִם וְשֵׁמוֹ אֶלְקָנָה
בֶּן־יִרְחָם בֶּן־אֵלִיהוּא בֶּן־תָּחוּ
בֶּן־צוּף אֶפְרַתִּי: (ב) וְלוֹ שְׁתֵּי
נָשִׁים שֵׁם אַחַת חַנָּה וְשֵׁם הַשֵּׁנִית
פְּנִינָה וַיְהִי לְפְנִינָה יְלָדִים וּלְחַנָּה
אֵין יְלָדִים: (ג) וְעַלֶּה הָאִישׁ הַהוּא
מַעִירוֹ מִיָּמִים | יְמִימָה לְהַשְׁתַּחֲוֹת
וּלְזַבַּח לַיהוָה צְבָאוֹת בְּשִׁלָּה וְשֵׁם
שְׁנֵי בָנֵי־עֲלִי חֹפְנִי וּפְנִחָס כֹּהֲנִים
לַיהוָה: (ד) וַיְהִי הַיּוֹם וַיִּזְבַּח
אֶלְקָנָה וַנְּתַן לְפְנִינָה אֲשֶׁת׃
וּלְכָל־בָּנֶיהָ וּבָנוֹתֶיהָ מְנוֹת: (ה)
וּלְחַנָּה יָתַן מְנָה אַחַת אֶפְיִם כִּי
אֶת־חַנָּה אָהֵב וַיְהוֶה סָגֹר רַחֲמָה:
(ו) וְכַעֲסָתָה צָרָתָה גַם־כַּעַס
בַּעֲבוּר הַרְעָמָה כִּי־סָגֹר יְהוֶה בַּעַד
רַחֲמָה: (ז) וְכֵן יַעֲשֶׂה שָׁנָה
בְּשָׁנָה מְדֵי עֲלֹתָהּ בְּבֵית יְהוָה כִּן
תִּכְעָסֶנָּה וּתְבַכֶּה וְלֹא תֹאכַל: (ח)
וַיֹּאמֶר לָהּ אֶלְקָנָה אִישׁ הֲחַנָּה
לָמָּה תְבַכִּי וְלָמָּה לֹא תֹאכְלִי
וְלָמָּה יָרַע לְבַבְךָ הַלּוֹא אָנֹכִי טוֹב

and would not eat. (8) Her husband Elkanah said to her, “Hannah, why are you crying and why aren’t you eating? Why are you so sad? Am I not more devoted to you than ten sons?” (9) After they had eaten and drunk at Shiloh, Hannah rose.—The priest Eli was sitting on the seat near the doorpost of the temple of the LORD.— (10) In her wretchedness, she prayed to the LORD, weeping all the while. (11) And she made this vow: “O LORD of Hosts, if You will look upon the suffering of Your maidservant and will remember me and not forget Your maidservant, and if You will grant Your maidservant a male child, I will dedicate him to the LORD for all the days of his life; and no razor shall ever touch his head.” (12) As she kept on praying before the LORD, Eli watched her mouth. (13) Now Hannah was praying in her heart; only her lips moved, but her voice could not be heard. So Eli thought she was drunk. (14) Eli said to her, “How long will you make a drunken spectacle of yourself? Sober up!” (15) And Hannah replied, “Oh no, my lord! I am a very unhappy woman. I have drunk no wine or other strong drink, but I have been pouring out my heart to the LORD. (16) Do not take your maidservant

לְךָ מֵעֲשָׂרָה בָּנִים: (ט) וַתִּקֶּם חַנָּה
אֲחֵרֵי אֲכָלָהּ בְּשִׁלָּה וְאַחֲרֵי שָׁתָה
וַעֲלִי הִכְהִין יֹשֵׁב עַל־הַכֹּסֶא
עַל־מְזוֹזֹת הַיְכָל יְהוָה: (י) וְהִיא
מַרְתַּנְפֶּשׂ וַתִּתְפַּלֵּל עַל־יְהוָה
וּבְכָה תְּבַכֶּה: (יא) וַתִּדְרֹךְ נֶדֶךְ
וַתֹּאמֶר יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת אִם־רָאָה
תְּרָאָה אֲנִי בְּעֵינַי אִמְתִּיךָ וַזְכַּרְתִּנִּי
וְלֹא־תִשְׁכַּח אֶת־אִמְתְּךָ וְנִתְּתָה
לְאִמְתְּךָ זָרַע אֲנָשִׁים וְנִתְּתִיו
לְיְהוָה כָּל־יְמֵי חַיָּיו וּמִזְרָה
לֹא־יַעֲלֶה עַל־רֹאשׁוֹ: (יב) וְהָיָה כִּי
הִרְבִּיתָה לְהִתְפַּלֵּל לְפָנַי יְהוָה וַעֲלִי
שָׁמַר אֶת־פִּיָּהּ: (יג) וְחַנָּה הִיא
מִדְּבַרְתָּ עַל־לִבָּהּ רַק שִׁפְתֶיהָ
נִעוֹת וְקוֹלָהּ לֹא יִשְׁמַע וַיַּחֲשֹׁבָהּ
עָלֶיהָ לְשִׁכְרָה: (יד) וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלֶיהָ
עָלֶיךָ עַד־מָתַי תִּשְׁתַּכְּרִין הַסִּירִי
אֶת־יַיִןךָ מֵעַלְיָךְ: (טו) וַתַּעַן חַנָּה
וַתֹּאמֶר לֹא אֲדֹנָי אִשָּׁה קִשְׁת־רוּחַ
אֲנֹכִי וַיַּיִן וְשִׁכָר לֹא שָׁתִיתִי וְאַשְׁפֹךְ
אֶת־נַפְשִׁי לְפָנַי יְהוָה: (טז)
אַל־תִּתֵּן אֶת־אִמְתְּךָ לְפָנַי
בַּת־בְּלִיעַל כִּי־מֵרֵב שִׁיחִי וְכַעֲסִי
דִּבַּרְתִּי עַד־הַנְּהָה: (יז) וַיַּעַן עָלֶיהָ
וַיֹּאמֶר לָכִי לְשָׁלוֹם וְאַל־הִי יִשְׂרָאֵל
יִתֵּן אֶת־שְׁלֹתְךָ אֲשֶׁר שָׁאַלְתָּ
מֵעַמּוֹ: (יח) וַתֹּאמֶר תִּמְצָא
שִׁפְחָתְךָ חֵן בְּעֵינַיִךְ וַתִּלְךְ הָאִשָּׁה

for a worthless woman; I have only been speaking all this time out of my great anguish and distress.” (17) “Then go in peace,” said Eli, “and may the God of Israel grant you what you have asked of Him.” (18) She answered, “You are most kind to your handmaid.” So the woman left, and she ate, and was no longer downcast. (19) Early next morning they bowed low before the LORD, and they went back home to Ramah. Elkanah knew his wife Hannah and the LORD remembered her. (20) Hannah conceived, and at the turn of the year bore a son. She named him Samuel, meaning, “I asked the LORD for him.” (21) And when the man Elkanah and all his household were going up to offer to the LORD the annual sacrifice and his votive sacrifice, (22) Hannah did not go up. She said to her husband, “When the child is weaned, I will bring him. For when he has appeared before the LORD, he must remain there for good.” (23) Her husband Elkanah said to her, “Do as you think best. Stay home until you have weaned him. May the LORD fulfill His word.” So the woman stayed home and nursed her son until she weaned him. (24) When she had weaned him, she took him up with her, along with three bulls, one ephah of flour, and a jar of

לְדַרְכָּהּ וּתְאָכַל וּפְנִיָּהּ לֹא־הָיְתָה לָּהּ
עוֹד: (יט) וַיִּשְׁכְּמוּ בְּבֹקֶר
וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ לִפְנֵי יְהוָה וַיֵּשְׁבוּ וַיָּבֹאוּ
אֶל־בֵּיתָם הַרְמַתָּה וַיִּדַע אֶלְקָנָה
אֶת־חַנָּה אִשְׁתּוֹ וַיִּזְכְּרָה יְהוָה: (כ)
וַיְהִי לְתַקְפּוֹת הַיָּמִים וַתֵּהָר חַנָּה
וַתֵּלֶד בֶּן וַתִּקְרָא אֶת־שְׁמוֹ שְׁמוּאֵל
כִּי מִיְהוָה שְׁאַלְתִּיו: (כא) וַיַּעַל
הָאִישׁ אֶלְקָנָה וְכָל־בֵּיתוֹ לְזִבְח־
לַיהוָה אֶת־זִבְחַת הַיָּמִים וְאֶת־נִדְרוֹ:
(כב) וְחַנָּה לֹא עָלְתָה כִּי־אָמְרָה
לְאִישׁוֹ עַד יִגְמַל הַנְּעָר
וַהֲבֵאתִי וַיִּבְרָא אֶת־פְּנֵי יְהוָה
וַיֵּשֶׁב שָׁם עַד־עוֹלָם: (כג) וַיֹּאמֶר
לָּהּ אֶלְקָנָה אִשְׁתֵּךְ עָשִׂי הַטּוֹב
בְּעֵינַיִךְ שְׁבִי עַד־גְּמֻלְךָ אִתּוֹ אַךְ
יָקִים יְהוָה אֶת־דְּבָרֹךְ וַתֵּשֶׁב הָאִשָּׁה
וַתִּינַק אֶת־בְּנָהּ עַד־גְּמֻלָּהּ אִתּוֹ:
(כד) וַתַּעֲלֶהּ עִמָּה כַּאֲשֶׁר
גְּמַלְתָּ וְתוֹ בְּפָרִים שְׁלֹשָׁה וְאִפָּה
אֶחָת קֶמַח וְנֹבֵל יַיִן וַתִּבְאֶה
בֵּית־יְהוָה שְׁלוֹ וְהַנְּעָר נָעַר: (כה)
וַיִּשְׁחֹטוּ אֶת־הַפָּר וַיָּבִיאוּ
אֶת־הַנְּעָר אֶל־עֲלִי: (כו) וַתֹּאמֶר
כִּי אֲדָנִי חַי נִפְשֶׁךָ אֲדָנִי אֲנִי
הָאִשָּׁה הַנִּצְבֶּת עִמָּכָה בְּזָה
לְהַתְּפִלֵּל אֶל־יְהוָה: (כז)
אֶל־הַנְּעָר הַזֶּה הַתְּפִלְלֵתִי וַיִּתֵּן
יְהוָה לִי אֶת־שְׁאַלְתִּי אֲשֶׁר שְׁאַלְתִּי

wine. And though the boy was still very young, she brought him to the House of the LORD at Shiloh. (25) After slaughtering the bull, they brought the boy to Eli. (26) She said, "Please, my lord! As you live, my lord, I am the woman who stood here beside you and prayed to the LORD. (27) It was this boy I prayed for; and the LORD has granted me what I asked of Him. (28) I, in turn, hereby lend him to the LORD. For as long as he lives he is lent to the LORD." And they bowed low there before the LORD. (1) And Hannah prayed: My heart exults in the LORD; I have triumphed through the LORD. I gloat over my enemies; I rejoice in Your deliverance. (2) There is no holy one like the LORD, Truly, there is none beside You; There is no rock like our God. (3) Talk no more with lofty pride, Let no arrogance cross your lips! For the LORD is an all-knowing God; By Him actions are measured. (4) The bows of the mighty are broken, And the faltering are girded with strength. (5) Men once sated must hire out for bread; Men once hungry hunger no more. While the barren woman bears seven, The mother of many is forlorn. (6) The LORD deals death and gives life, Casts down into Sheol and raises up. (7) The LORD

מַעֲמֹו: (כח) וְגַם אָנֹכִי הַשְּׂאֵלְתָהּוּ
 לַיהוָה כָּל־הַיָּמִים אֲשֶׁר הָיָה הוּא
 שָׂאֹל לַיהוָה וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוֶה שָׁם לַיהוָה:
 (פ) (א) וַתִּתְפַּלֵּל חַנָּה וַתֹּאמֶר
 עֲלֹץ לִבִּי בַיהוָה רַמָּה קִרְנֵי בַיהוָה
 רָחַב פִּי עַל־אֹיְבֵי כִי שָׁמַחְתִּי
 בִּישׁוּעֶתְךָ: (ב) אֵין־קָדוֹשׁ כִּיהוָה
 כִּי אֵין בְּלִתְךָ וְאֵין צוּר כְּאַלְהֵינוּ:
 (ג) אַל־תִּרְבּוּ תִדְבְּרוּ גְבוּהָה
 גְבוּהָה יֵצֵא עֲתַק מִפִּיכֶם כִּי אֵל
 דְּעוֹת יְהוָה וְלֹא [וְלוֹ] נִתְכַּנּוּ
 עֲלֵלוֹת: (ד) קִשְׁת גְּבָרִים חֲתָיִם
 וְנִכְשָׁלִים אָזְרוּ חֵיל: (ה) שְׂבִיעִים
 בַּלָּחֶם נִשְׁכְּרוּ וּרְעִבִים חָדְלוּ
 עַד־עֲקָרָה יִלְדָה שְׂבִיעָה וְרַבַּת
 בָּנִים אֲמַלְלָה: (ו) יְהוָה מִמִּית
 וּמַחֲיָה מוֹרִיד שָׂאֹל וַיַּעַל: (ז)
 יְהוָה מוֹרִישׁ וּמַעֲשִׂיר מִשְׁפִּיל
 אֶף־מְרוֹמָם: (ח) מִקֵּים מַעֲפָר
 דָּל מְאֻשְׁפֶּת יָרִים אֲבִיוֹן לְהוֹשִׁיב
 עַם־נְדִיבִים וְכֹסֵא כְבוֹד יִנְחַלֵּם כִּי
 לַיהוָה מִצְקֵי אָרֶץ וַיִּשֶׁת עֲלֵיהֶם
 יִתְבַּל: (ט) רַגְלֵי חֲסִידוֹ [חֲסִידִיו]
 יִשְׁמַר וּרְשָׁעִים בַּחֲשֶׁךְ יִדְמוּ כִּי־לֹא
 בָּלַח יִגְבֵּר־אִישׁ: (י) יְהוָה יַחַתּוּ
 מַרִּיבוּ [מְרִיבֵי־יו] עֵלוּ [עֲלִיוֹ]
 בַּשָּׁמַיִם יִרְעֵם יְהוָה יַדִּין
 אֶפְסֵי־אָרֶץ וַיִּתֵּן־עַז לְמַלְכוֹ וַיָּרֶם
 קֶרֶן מְשִׁיחוֹ: (פ)

makes poor and makes rich; He casts down, He also lifts high. (8) He raises the poor from the dust, Lifts up the needy from the dunghill, Setting them with nobles, Granting them seats of honor. For the pillars of the earth are the LORD's; He has set the world upon them. (9) He guards the steps of His faithful, But the wicked perish in darkness— For not by strength shall man prevail. (10) The foes of the LORD shall be shattered; He will thunder against them in the heavens. The LORD will judge the ends of the earth. He will give power to His king, And triumph to His anointed one.

Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity (essays edited by Susannah Heschel), *Abraham Joshua Heschel* at 111: "There is a specific difficulty with Jewish prayer. There are laws: fixed texts. On the other hand, prayer is worship of the heart, the outpouring of the soul, a matter of devotion. Thus, Jewish prayer is guided by two opposite principles: order and outburst, regularity and spontaneity, uniformity and individuality, law and freedom. These principles are the two poles about which Jewish prayer revolves. Since each of the two moves in the opposite direction, equilibrium can be maintained only if both are of equal force. However, the pole of regularity usually proves to be stronger than the pole of spontaneity, and as a result, there is a perpetual danger of prayer becoming a mere habit, a mechanical performance, an exercise in repetitiousness. The fixed pattern and regularity of our services tends to stifle the spontaneity of devotion. Our great problem, therefore, is how not to let the principle of regularity impair the power of devotion. It is a problem that concerns not only prayer but the whole sphere

of Jewish observance. He who is not aware of this central difficulty is a simpleton; he who offers a simple solution is a quack."

Discussion of קבע, fixity in prayer, in Rabbinic Literature

Mishnah Berakhot 4:3

(3) Rabban Gamliel says: Every day a person must pray eighteen [blessings of *Shemoneh Esrei*]. Rabbi Yehoshua says: [One may say] an abbreviated [form of the] eighteen [blessings]. Rabbi Akiva says: If his prayer is fluent in his mouth, he must say eighteen; and if it is not -- an abbreviated eighteen.

משנה ברכות ד'ג'

(ג) רבן גמליאל אומר, בכל יום מתפלל אדם שמנה עשרה. רבי יהושע אומר, מעין שמנה עשרה. רבי עקיבא אומר, אם שגורה תפלתו בפיו, יתפלל שמנה עשרה. ואם לאו, מעין שמנה עשרה:

Mishnah Berakhot 4:4

(4) Rabbi Eliezer says: One who makes his prayer perfunctory, his prayer does not constitute supplications for grace. Rabbi Yehoshua says: One who is traveling in a dangerous place should offer a brief prayer [and] say: Save, God, Your people, the remnant of Israel; at every period of transition let their needs be before You. You are the Source of all blessing, God, Who heeds prayer.

משנה ברכות ד'ד'

(ד) רבי אליעזר אומר העושה תפלתו קבע אין תפלתו תחנונים. רבי יהושע אומר המהלך במקום סכנה מתפלל תפלה קצרה. אומר: הושע השם את עמך את שארית ישראל, בכל פרשת העבור יהיו צרכיהם לפניך. ברוך אתה ה' שומע תפלה.

Berakhot 29b:7

We learned in the mishna that **Rabbi Eliezer says: One whose prayer is fixed, his prayer is not supplication.** The Gemara asks: **What is the meaning of fixed** in this context? **Rabbi Ya'akov bar Idi said** that **Rabbi Oshaya said:** It means **anyone for whom his prayer is like a burden upon him,** from which he seeks to be quickly unburdened. **The Rabbis say:** This refers to **anyone who does not recite prayer in the language of supplication,** but as a standardized recitation without emotion. **Rabba and Rav Yosef both said:** It refers to **anyone unable to introduce a novel element,** i.e., something personal reflecting his personal needs, to his prayer, and only recites the standard formula.

ברכות כ"ט ב:ז'

רבי אליעזר אומר כל העושה תפלתו **קבע** וכו': מאי **קבע** אמר רבי יעקב בר אידי אמר רבי אושעיא כל שתפלתו דומה עליו כמשוי ורבנן אמרי כל מי שאינו אומרה בלשון תחנונים רבה ורב יוסף דאמרי תרוייהו כל שאינו יכול לחדש בה דבר

C. Restatement of the Law of Prayer: Rambam's Summary

Mishneh Torah, Prayer and the Priestly Blessing 4:15

(15) Concentration of the mind—how is this condition [to be fulfilled?] Any prayer uttered

משנה תורה, הלכות תפילה

וברכת כהנים ד':ט"ו

(טו) **כְּוֹנֵת** הַלֵּב כִּי־צִד. כָּל תְּפִלָּה

without mental concentration is not prayer. If a service has been recited without such concentration, it must be recited again devoutly. A person finds that his thoughts are confused and his mind is distracted: He may not pray till he has recovered his mental composure. Hence, on returning from a journey or if one is weary or distressed, it is forbidden to pray till his mind is composed. The sages said that he should wait three days till he is rested and his mind is calm, and then he recites the prayers.

שְׂאִינָה בְּכֹנֶה אֵינָה תְּפִלָּה. וְאִם
הִתְפַּלֵּל בְּלֹא כֹנֶה חוּזֵר וּמִתְפַּלֵּל
בְּכֹנֶה. מִצָּא דַעְתּוֹ מְשֻׁבָּשֶׁת וְלִבּוֹ
טְרוּד אָסוּר לוֹ לְהִתְפַּלֵּל עַד
שֶׁתִּיֵּשֵׁב דַּעְתּוֹ. לְפִיכֶךָ הִבָּא מִן
הַדֶּרֶךְ וְהוּא עֵיף אוֹ מִצֵּר אָסוּר לוֹ
לְהִתְפַּלֵּל עַד שֶׁתִּיֵּשֵׁב דַּעְתּוֹ.
אָמְרוּ חֲכָמִים יִשְׁהֶה שְׁלֹשָׁה יָמִים
עַד שֶׁיִּנּוּחַ וְתִתְקַרֵּר דַּעְתּוֹ וְאַחַר
כֵּן יִתְפַּלֵּל:

Mishneh Torah, Prayer and the Priestly Blessing 4:16

(16) What is to be understood by concentration of the mind? The mind should be freed from all extraneous thoughts and the one who prays should realize that he is standing before the Divine Presence. He should therefore sit awhile before beginning his prayers, so as to concentrate his mind, and then pray in gentle tones, beseechingly, and not regard the service as a burden which he is carrying and which he will cast off and proceed on his way. He should, accordingly, also sit awhile, after concluding the prayers, and then

משנה תורה, הלכות תפילה

וברכת כהנים ד':ט"ז

(טז) כִּי צִד הִיא הַכֹּנֶה. שִׁיפְנָה
אֶת לְבוֹ מִכָּל הַמַּחְשְׁבוֹת וְיִרְאֶה
עַצְמוֹ כְּאִלוֹ הוּא עוֹמֵד לְפָנַי
הַשְּׂכִינָה. לְפִיכֶךָ צָרִיךְ לֵישֵׁב מְעַט
קֹדֶם הִתְפַּלָּה כְּדִי לִכְנֹס אֶת לְבוֹ
וְאַחַר כֵּן יִתְפַּלֵּל בְּנִחָת
וּבְתַחֲנוּנִים וְלֹא יַעֲשֶׂה תְּפִלָּתוֹ כְּמִי
שֶׁהָיָה נוֹשֵׂא מַשְׂאוֹי וּמִשְׁלִיכוֹ
וְהוֹלֵךְ לוֹ. לְפִיכֶךָ צָרִיךְ לֵישֵׁב מְעַט
אַחַר הִתְפַּלָּה וְאַחַר כֵּן יִפְטֹר.
חֲסִידִים הָרְאוּשׁוּנִים הָיוּ שׁוֹהֵין
שָׁעָה אַחַת קֹדֶם תְּפִלָּה וְשָׁעָה

leave. The ancient saints were wont
to pause and meditate one hour
before the service, one hour after
the service and take one hour in its
recital.

אַחַת לְאַחַר תְּפִלָּה וּמְאֲרִיכִין
בְּתִפְלָה שְׁעָה:

Zivat Ha-Rivash (Baal Shem Tov and Maggid of Mezritch:
There are times when you are not at prayer
but nevertheless you can feel close to God.
Your mind can ascend even above the heavens.

And there are also times,
in the very midst of prayer,
when you find yourself unable to ascend.
At such times stand where you are
and serve with love.

*Source Sheet created on Sefaria by Gayle Pomerantz
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