

# The Duty, Opportunity and Challenge of Praying for the Government

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## I. The Imperative to Pray

### Jeremiah 29:4-7

Thus says the God of Israel to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. ... bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. **And seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.**

ירמיה כט:ד-ז  
כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה יְקוּק צְבָאוֹת, אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל: לְכֹל-הַגּוֹלָה--אֲשֶׁר-הִגְלִיתִי מִירוּשָׁלַם, בְּבָבֶלָה. בְּנֵי-בָתַיִם, וְשָׁבוּ; וְנָטְעוּ גִבּוֹת, וְאָכְלוּ אֶת-פְּרִיָן. וְקָחוּ נָשִׁים, וְהוֹלִידוּ בָנִים וּבָנוֹת, וְקָחוּ לְבָנֵיכֶם נָשִׁים וְאֶת-בָּנוֹתֵיכֶם תִּנּוּ לְאִנָּשִׁים, וְתִלְדְּנָה בָנִים וּבָנוֹת; וְרַבּוּ-שָׁם, וְאַל-תִּמְעָטוּ. וְדַרְשׁוּ אֶת-שְׁלוֹם הָעִיר, אֲשֶׁר הִגְלִיתִי אֶתְכֶם שָׁמָּה, וְהִתְפַּלְלוּ בְעַדָּהּ, אֶל-יְהוָה: כִּי בְשְׁלוֹמָהּ, יְהִי לָכֶם שְׁלוֹם.

### Book of Baruch (Apocrypha) 1:11:

... and pray for the life of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and for the life of Belshazzar his son, that their days on earth may be like the days of heaven.

### Ezra 6:10

“Pray for the life of the king and his sons!”

משנה אבות ג:ב  
רבי חנניה סגן הכהנים אומר, הוי מתפלל בשלומה של מלכות שאלמלא מוראה, איש את ריעהו חיים בלעו.

### Mishnah Avot 3:2

Rabbi Hananiah, assistant to the Priests, said “Pray for the welfare of the ruling regime -- for were it not for the fear of it, men would swallow one another alive.”

## **An early 11th century prayer to bless the Fatimid Caliph and ruler of Egypt, al-Ḥ ākim bi-Amr Allāh, the 16th Imam of the Ismaili branch of Shia Islam:**

*In Your Name, o Merciful, And we pray for the life of our lord, the great king, the prince of the sons of Kedar, our master and lord, the Imam, the Commander of the Faithful, and for his sons, the royal family, and all persons of his entourage who serve the king out of love and wage war for him against his enemies. May God -- may He be praised -- help them and help us; may he subdue their foes and ours; and may he fill their hearts with kindness towards us and towards all his people, the house of Israel, and let us say; Amen.*

## II. Ambivalence: Expressed in Code

### 15th Century Prayer for the Government: "The One Who Grants Victory to Kings"

תפלת "הנותן תשועה למלכים"

May the **One who grants victory to kings<sup>1</sup>** and dominion to princes, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, **who delivers His servant David from the evil sword<sup>1</sup>**, who makes a way through the sea and a path through the mighty waters<sup>2</sup>, bless and protect, guard and help, exalt, magnify and uplift ---

הנותן תשועה למלכים<sup>1</sup> וממשלה לנסיכים מלכותו מלכות כל-עולמים הפוצה את דוד עבדו מחרב רעה<sup>1</sup> הנותן בים דרך ובמים עזים נתיבה<sup>2</sup> הוא יברך וישמור וינצור ויעזור וירומם ויגדל וינשא למעלה

Our Sovereign Lady QUEEN VICTORIA, ALBERT EDWARD, Prince of Wales, the PRINCESS of WALES, and the entire ROYAL FAMILY

מלך מלכי המלכים ברחמינו יחיה וישמרה ומכל צרה ויגון ונזק יצילה וידבר עמים תחת רגליה ויפיל שונאיה לפניה ובכל אשר תפנה תצליח

May the supreme King of kings in His mercy grant them life, and protect them, and save them from every trouble, woe and injury. May nations submit under their feet, may their enemies fall before them, and may they succeed in all their endeavors.

מלך מלכי המלכים ברחמינו יתן בלבה ובלב כל יועציה ושריה רחמנות לעשות טובה עמנו ועם כל ישראל בימיה ובימינו תושע יהודה וישראל ישכון לבטח<sup>3</sup> זבא לציון גואל<sup>4</sup> וכן יהי רצון ונאמר אמן:

May the supreme King of kings in His mercy put into their hearts and the hearts of all their counselors and officials, to deal kindly with us and all Israel. **In their days and in ours, may Judah be saved and Israel live in safety<sup>3</sup>, and may the Redeemer come to Zion<sup>4</sup>**. May this be His will, and let us say: Amen.

#### 1. Ps 144:10-11

**The One who gives victory to kings, who rescues his servant David from the deadly sword.** Rescue me, save me from the hand of foreigners, whose mouths speak lies, and whose oaths are false.

1. תהלים קמד:י-יא  
הנותן תשועה למלכים הפוצה את־דוד עבדו מחרב רעה: פצני והצילני מיד בני־לְבַר אֲשֶׁר פִּיהֶם דְּבַר־שָׁוֵא וְיַמִּינָם יִמִּין שָׁקֵר:

#### 2. Isa 43:15-17

I am the Lord, your Holy One, Your King, the Creator of Israel. Thus says the Lord, **who made a way through the sea, and a path through mighty waters**, who destroyed chariot and horses, and all the mighty host -- They lay down to rise no more. They were extinguished, quenched like a wick.

2. ישעיה מג:טו-יז  
אֲנִי יְהוָה קְדוֹשְׁכֶם בּוֹרֵא יִשְׂרָאֵל מְלַכְכֶם: כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה הַנּוֹתֵן בַּיָּם דֶּרֶךְ וּבַמַּיִם עֲזִים נְתִיבָה: הַמוֹצִיא רֶכֶב־וּסוּסִים חַיִל וְעִזָּז יַחַד וְיִשְׁכְּבוּ בַל־יִקְוּמוּ דַעְבוּ כַפְשֵׁתָהּ כָּבוּ:

3. ירמיה כג:א-ו

3. Jeremiah 23:5-6

*The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will raise up a true branch of David's line. He shall reign as king and shall prosper, and he shall do what is just and right in the land. In his days Judah shall be delivered and Israel shall dwell secure.*

הִנֵּה יָמִים בָּאִים נְאֻם־יְהוָה וְהִקְמַתִּי לְדָוִד צֶמַח צְדִיק וּמֶלֶךְ מֶלֶךְ וְהַשְׁכִּיל וְעָשָׂה מִשְׁפָּט וְצְדָקָה בְּאֶרֶץ: בְּיָמָיו תִּשְׁעַע יְהוּדָה וְיִשְׂרָאֵל יִשְׁכֹּן לְבֵטַח ...:

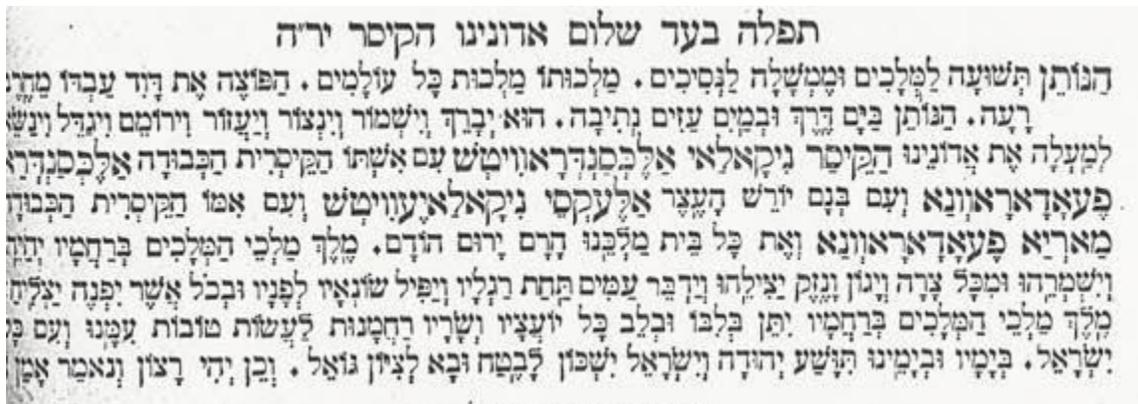
4. ישעיה נט:יח-כ

4. Isaiah 59:18-20

According to what they deserve he shall pay back fully to His foes; He shall pay back his enemies, pay back those in the distant lands. Those in the west shall fear the name of the Lord, and those in the east, his glory; for he shall come like a pent-up stream which the wind of the Lord drives on. **And he shall come as a Redeemer to Zion**, to those in Jacob who turn back from sin, says the Lord.

וַיִּרְאוּ מִמַּעַרְבֹת אֶת־נְשָׁם יְהוָה וּמִמְזָרְחֹת שָׁמַשׁ אֶת־בְּבוּדוֹ כִּי־יָבֹא כְנֶהֱלַץ רֹחַ יְהוָה לְנִסְסָהּ בּוֹ: וְבָא לְצִיּוֹן גּוֹאֵל וּלְשִׁבְיָ פָּשַׁע בְּיַעֲקֹב נְאֻם יְהוָה:

Is there a blessing for the Czar? Of course!



(Mahzor Kol-Bo, Vilna 1914)

*May the One who grants salvation to kings and dominion to rulers, Whose kingdom is a kingdom spanning all eternity, Who releases David, his servant, from the evil sword, Who places a road in the sea and a path in the mighty waters – May He bless, protect, guard, assist, elevate, exalt, and lift upwards*

*Our master CZAR NIKOLAI ALEXANDROVICH,*

*With his wife, the honorable CZARINA ALEXANDRA FEODOROVNA*

*Their son, the crown prince ALEXI NIKOLAI OVICH*

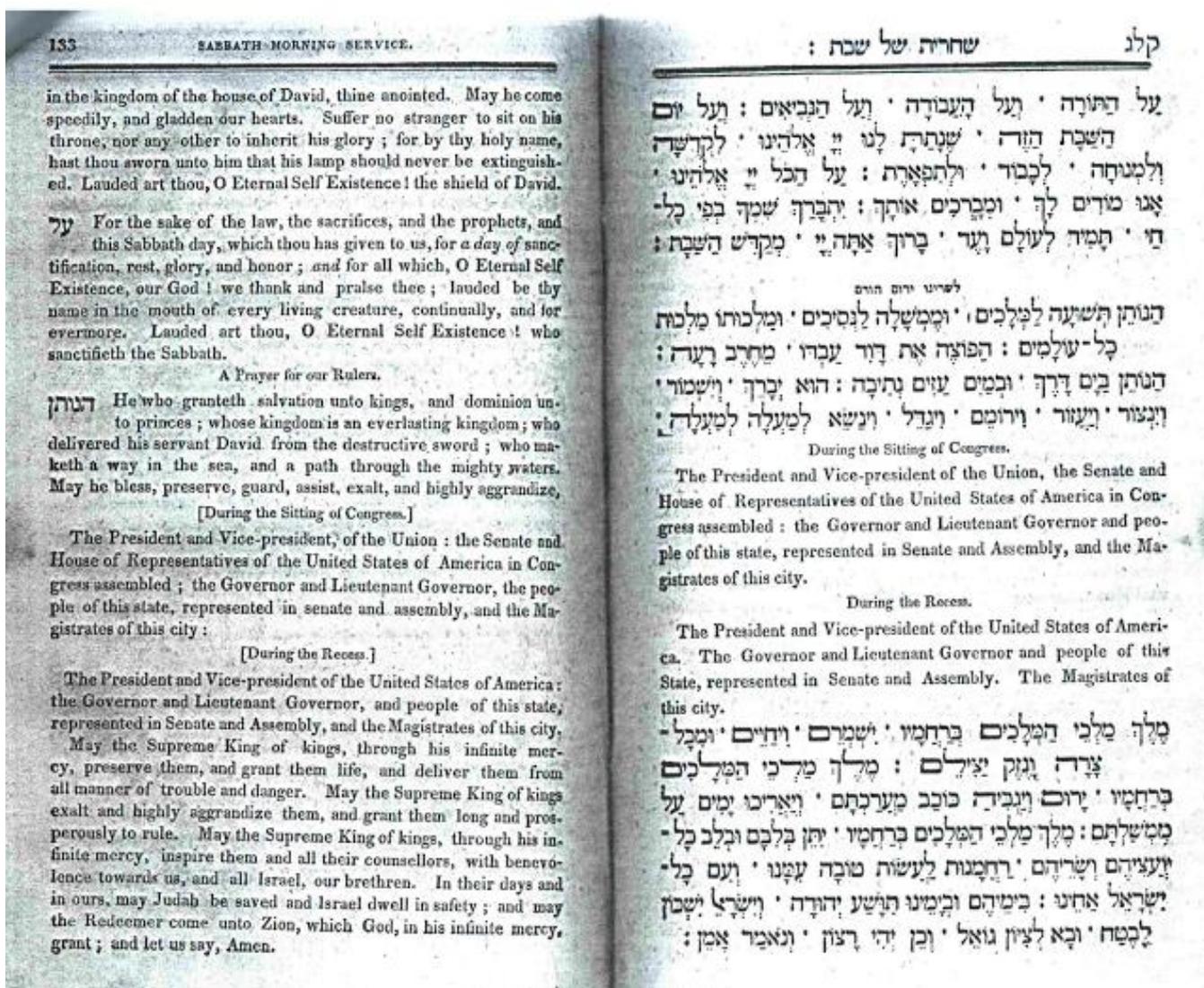
*And his mother, the honorable CZARINA MARIA FEODORAVNA*

*and the entire household of our king, may their glory be exalted. May the King of kings in His mercy give him life, and protect him, And save him from every trouble, woe and injury.*

*May nations submit under his feet, and may his enemies fall before him, And may he succeed in whatever he endeavors. May the King of kings, in His mercy, grant compassion in his heart and the heart of all his advisors, to do favors for us and for all Israel, our brethren.*

*In his days and in ours, may Judah be saved, and may Israel dwell securely, And may the Redeemer come to Zion. So may it be His will – and let us say: Amen.”*

**III. A Change of Language and of Tone in The New World**



**A 19th Century American Prayer by Rabbi Max Lilienthal, English Translation by Dr. Jonathan Sarna**

Master of the Universe, Lord of all Works. Who extends peace like a river, and like a rapid stream the glory of nations (Isaiah 66:12). Look down from Your holy dwelling (Deuteronomy 26:15) and **bless this land, the United States of America, whereon we dwell**. Let not violence be heard in their land, wasting and destruction within their boundaries, but You shall call its walls "Salvation" and its gates "Praise" (Isaiah 60:18). Grant ... **peace, goodness and a blessing on all the inhabitants of the land**, that they may lie down with none to make them afraid (Leviticus 26:6). And among the nations shall their seed be known, and their offspring in the midst of the people: all that see them shall acknowledge them, for You hath blessed them (Isaiah 61:9). Amen.

**Pour down the bounty of Your goodness upon the President, and the Vice President of the United States, ...** Great shall be their honor; through Your help and in your strength they will greatly exult (Psalm 21:2,6). Amen .... **Teach them the good way wherein they should walk (1 Kings 8:36) so as to judge the entire people rightly, the entire nation justly (Psalm 72:2), and all will see it and delight themselves from the abundance of peace (Psalm 37:11). Amen.**

... Our good Father, **also answer us Your people the house of Israel at a favorable time**, and be of assistance each and every day. Guide us continually in your great goodness and satisfy our soul in times of famine. And we shall be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters do not fail (Isaiah 58:11), and go from strength to strength (Psalm 84:8) until the redeemer shall come unto Zion. O that this may be His will, and let us say, Amen.

**IV. Praying for a Jewish Vision of America**

**A Prayer for the Government - Rabbi Louis Ginzberg, 1927**

**(See Siddur Sim Shalom for a revised version of this.)**

***Darkhei Noam Prayer For the Government***

God who commanded all humanity to create just governments, may you preserve and protect our democracy. Bless the elected and appointed officials of the governments of the United States to carry out their duties consistent with the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. Place in their hearts devotion to justice, truth and equality for all who live in our great nation. Let their actions reflect compassion for the poor, the defenseless, and the needy among us. Inspire them with the courage to use the might of the United States for good throughout the

world. Bless and protect the members of the Armed Forces who defend our country in pursuit of justice and peace. May this be your will, and let us say, Amen.

**A Prayer for the Government, 2017  
(Congregation Sherith Israel, Nashville, TN;  
courtesy of Dr. Shaul Kelner)**

***Ribon kol ha-olamim*, Sovereign of all worlds, Who delivers David from the evil sword and makes a way in the sea and a path through the mighty waters, Who has commanded all humanity to create courts of justice:**

**Preserve and protect America's democracy and bless us, the people of the United States, who have ordained and established the Constitution and laws of this great land.**

**Shed Your spirit on all its inhabitants.**

**Plant love, fellowship, peace and friendship among us, and uproot all hate, envy, and strife from our hearts.**

**May You, Who grants each person understanding, give us the wisdom faithfully to place in all our gates leaders who revere truth and despise corruption.**

**Enable us and our chosen representatives to act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with You, our God.**

**Grant that we proclaim liberty throughout the land, to all the inhabitants thereof.**

**Let abundance flow from the work of our hands and wisdom grow among all the people of this land.**

**Strengthen the hands of those who guard America's freedoms and fill them with Your spirit, so that our country may ever be a light unto nations.**

**May Judah be saved and Israel dwell securely, and may the Redeemer come to Zion, speedily in our days.**

**May this be God's will, and let us say: Amen.**