

**Tefillah B'Tzibbur**

Etan Soclof

In light of the recent closing and reopening of shuls, I would like to explore the significance of *tefillah b'tzibbur*, davening with a *minyan*. The Gemara in Brachos (8a), in elucidation of the virtues of *tefillah b'tzibbur*, cites Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai's statement that the *tzibbur's* prayer creates an עת רצון – time of favor – and the opinion of Rabbi Nosson that Hashem is never repulsed by *tefillah b'tzibbur*. The Rambam (Hilchos Tefillah 8:1) adds that *tefillas hatzibbur* is always listened to, even if there are sinners amongst the *tzibbur*.<sup>1</sup>

What characteristic of *tefillah b'tzibbur* endows it with these unique qualities?

Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik develops an idea regarding the *se'ir hamishtalei'ach*, the goat sent off to Azazel on Yom Kippur, that sheds light on the special status of the *tzibbur*.<sup>2</sup> The Rambam (Hilchos Teshuvah 1:2) writes that the *se'ir hamishtalei'ach* atones for less egregious sins even if the violator fails to do *teshuvah* for those sins. This is surprising considering the Rambam's emphatic ruling just one halacha earlier that none of the sources of atonement prescribed by the Torah – not the sin offerings, lashes, nor the death penalty – will provide atonement if the sinner did not perform proper *teshuvah*. This is in line with the concept of זבח רשעים תועבה (the *korban* of the wicked is an abomination), noted by the Gemara in a number of places.<sup>3</sup> What makes the *se'ir hamishtalei'ach* an exception to this rule?

The answer lies in the status of the *se'ir hamishtalei'ach* as a *korban tzibbur* – a communal sacrifice. Technically, a *korban tzibbur* is one that is funded by all members of *Klal Yisrael* via each individual's donation of a *machatzis hashekel*. However, the Rav suggests this does not mean that each individual member of *Klal Yisrael* has a direct stake in the *korban*, that the *korban* is owned by millions of distinct contributors. Rather, it means there is one owner: an independent entity called "*Knesses Yisrael*."

"Neither 'Reuven' nor 'Shimon' nor 'Levi,' not all of them together, nor all of those who contributed a half-shekel toward the purchase of the offering, are regarded as members of the 'communal sacrifice.' It is *Knesset Israel* as an independent body in its own right and not as the cumulative total of such and so many individuals." (*On Repentance*, pg. 108)

It is true, continues the Rav, that the *korban* of an individual who has not performed *teshuvah* constitutes "זבח רשעים," a sacrifice of the wicked. However, a *korban tzibbur* is owned not by an

individual nor a collection of individuals, but by *Knesses Yisrael*. *Knesses Yisrael*, by definition, can never be considered so corrupt as to render its *korban* זבח רשעים. Therefore, when a *korban tzibbur* is brought, Hashem grants *Knesses Yisrael* complete forgiveness. Then, by extension, each individual who associates himself with *Knesses Yisrael*, regardless of whether he has performed *teshuvah*, achieves atonement.

Perhaps a similar idea can be applied to understanding public prayer. The Gemara in Berachos (21b) says that *devarim sheb'kedusha* – Kaddish, Kedusha, and Borchu – may be recited only in the presence of ten men. This halacha is derived via a two-step *gezerah shavah*, rooted in the *pasuk* "ונקדשתי בתוך בני ישראל" – I will be sanctified amongst the children of Israel" (Vayikra 22:32). The Gemara first connects the phrase "amongst (תוך) the children of Israel" with the word "תוך" in another *pasuk*, "הבדלו מתוך העדה הזאת" – separate from amongst this congregation" (Bamidbar 16:21) to determine that "תוך" implies an "עדה" (congregation). "I will be sanctified בתוך" therefore requires the presence of an עדה – and in the second step, the Gemara defines "עדה" as ten men. I believe the essence of this halacha is that the recital of *devarim sheb'kedusha* must be in the presence of an "עדה," a unit that represents כלל ישראל. The requirement of ten is a technical detail required to achieve the status of עדה.

If this is correct, then perhaps we can understand the unique status of *tefillah b'tzibbur*. When a group of individuals approaches *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*, each individual is evaluated independently. A *tzibbur*, however, does not approach Him as a group of individuals; rather, as an עדה בתוך ישראל, which is an independent body in its own right, representing the entirety of *Klal Yisrael*, and not just the cumulative total of ten individuals. Just as a *korban tzibbur* is owned by the single entity called "*Knesses Yisrael*" and is therefore guaranteed acceptance, so too the *tefillah* of a *minyan* is offered by an independent unit representing *Klal Yisrael* – עדה בתוך ישראל.<sup>4</sup> Hashem never rejects *Knesses Yisrael* outright and always considers its pleas.

<sup>1</sup> Kuzari 3:19 adds several technical advantages of davening in a *tzibbur*.

<sup>2</sup> *Al HaTeshuvah*, "*Bein Yachid V'Hatzipbur*." I recommend learning the piece in full, as I do not do it justice here.

<sup>3</sup> For example, Zevachim 7b and Shevuos 12b.

<sup>4</sup> The Rav alludes to this idea in *Al HaTeshuvah*. See also *Divrei HaGut V'Ha'aracha*, *Beit HaKnesset - Mosad V'Ra'ayon*, Ot 11 (my thanks to Rabbi Yaacov Sasson, author of *Shiurei HaRav* on Sanhedrin, for the source), where the Rav discusses *tefillah b'tzibbur* directly with an analysis similar to that suggested here.

## An Introduction to Musar

Alan Goldman

With thanks to Rabbi Shimon Brand for helping elucidate some of the material here, during our chavruta learning Or Yisrael.

The 'Musar Movement,' as it is often called, was one of the key modern developments in the Orthodox world. It aimed to reinvigorate the religious community, and it succeeded, to a large extent, in making its principles part of our vocabulary. The challenges identified by its founder and his followers remain just as relevant today, so familiarity with its goals and methods is in order.

The movement began with R' Yisrael Salanter (1808-83), who saw two significant challenges facing the traditional European Jewish world at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Jews felt continuous pressure – whether external, internal, or both – to respond to the attractions presented by the broader culture. Some chose complete secularization; others sought to adapt Jewish schooling by introducing secular knowledge. At the same time, the yeshiva system was producing many individuals who knew Torah and followed halacha but who had not developed sufficient “*yirat Hashem*” (fear/awe/respect toward G-d).

The gap between Torah and fear of Hashem is a long-standing issue; R' Salanter's disciple R' Yitzchak Blazer (1837-1907), in his book *Or Yisrael*,<sup>1</sup> quotes a statement from the Gemara that addresses it:

Rabba b. Rav Huna said: A person who has Torah but does not have fear of Heaven is like a treasurer who was given the inner keys [to the treasury] but was not given the outer keys. How will he then get in? (Shabbat 31a-b)

However, R' Blazer believed that *yirat Hashem* was especially critical in his generation. “[Nowadays] there is wind and noise...reaching the house of Hashem and the tents of Jacob. Torah and observance are shaken from their places, their foundations have begun to fall apart...and therefore how awesome is the necessity to study musar.” (*Shaare Or*, ch. 6). That is, the standard curriculum of Gemara and *poskim* was not, by itself, enough to develop a lasting commitment to Judaism. Musar was needed to provide people with a psychological and emotional connection to G-d that could withstand competition from other ideologies.

R' Salanter's program involved regular study of classic musar texts, including works such as *Hovot HaLevavot* by R' Bahya and *Mesilat Yesharim* by R' Moshe Chaim Luzzato. Such study was to be done with concentration and with emotion, so that readers would internalize the ideas and integrate them into their lives. The musar student was additionally asked to undertake a daily *cheshbon hanefesh*, an inventory of the soul, examining his or her recent

behavior.<sup>2</sup> The ultimate goal is to transform the person's religious personality:

There are three levels in serving G-d...the first is...[developing one's] sensitivity, by studying the statements of Chazal and the musar works of our Sages, and reviewing them multiple times, until he becomes affected by them, and feels what is missing in his soul. From this he will come to the second level, which is conquering one's inclinations. And the third is correcting one's inclinations, so that the person will feel joy in serving G-d. (*Shaarei Or*, letter #30)

Musar was understood by the movement's leaders not merely as a protection against assimilation or a method to help Jews observe Torah meaningfully – as critical as these goals were. It was also seen as a process for refining and perfecting people. It is grounded in a sophisticated understanding of human psychology, which views failure as part of our natures and takes pride in our capacity to overcome negative tendencies.

The issues that R' Salanter and others saw 120 years ago are still with us. For most of the world's Jews, it is easier than ever to live an observant life. Yet it is equally easy to leave that life, or to inhabit it in body but not in spirit. As much as we need to know the halachic niceties that guide our daily living, we need to develop our understanding of why we do what we do, and what these behaviors means to us.

In the coming weeks, we will enter the '*teshuva* season' (or, more accurately, the season during which we hear more about *teshuva*). The Rambam writes that changing our psychological traits is more difficult than repenting for specific *aveirot* (Hilchot Teshuva 7:3). These traits are so embedded in our makeup that we often don't realize they can be modified. To re-make ourselves as Jews at least once a year, during Elul and the Yamim Noraim, calls for such an examination, and the works of musar – whether classic, 20<sup>th</sup> century, or contemporary – are a place to begin.

<sup>1</sup> This *sefer*, published in 1899, collected a series of letters by R' Salanter and contains other sections written by R' Blazer. It is divided into four parts, each with its own name: *Shaare Or*, *Iggeret HaMusar*, *Netivot Or*, and *Kochvei Or*. The Gemara cited here is brought in *Shaare Or*, ch. 3. The entire *sefer* is available at [www.sefaria.org/Ohr\\_Yisrael](http://www.sefaria.org/Ohr_Yisrael). All translations are mine.

<sup>2</sup> For a detailed discussion of these practices, see Moshe J. Gerstel, *The Musar Practices of R' Yisrael Salanter, The Torah U'Madda Journal* 17, available at [www.YUTorah.org](http://www.YUTorah.org).

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