Yirat Shamayim
The Awe, Reverence, and Fear of God

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THE ORTHODOX FORUM

The Orthodox Forum, initially convened by Dr. Norman Lamm, Chancellor of Yeshiva University, meets each year to consider major issues of concern to the Jewish community. Forum participants from throughout the world, including academicians in both Jewish and secular fields, rabbis, rasheiyeshivah, Jewish educators, and Jewish communal professionals, gather in conference as a think tank to discuss and critique each other's original papers, examining different aspects of a central theme. The purpose of the Forum is to create and disseminate a new and vibrant Torah literature addressing the critical issues facing Jewry today.

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A DISTURBING DESCRIPTION OF THE SERVICES IN MANY MAJOR CONTEMPORARY ORTHODOX SYNAGOGUES

In his widely publicized article analyzing the possible causes for the massive amount of conversation taking place during formal communal prayer in Orthodox settings, clinical psychologist Dr. Irving Levitz offers the following characterization:

In most Orthodox synagogues, when the cacophony of noise from adult socializing and the clamor of children playing, crying and scampering about has reached some unacceptable decibel level, rabbis and synagogue presidents will stop the service in order to scold, admonish, and even threaten the offending worshippers. Protests from the pulpit tend to affect no more than a temporary respite, however, and within moments, the congregation resumes its social agenda.
Sociological and psychological considerations aside, from a theological perspective, the lack of decorum during synagogue services can easily be attributed to shortcomings in the degree of Fear of God in the average synagogue worshipper.

**YIRAT HASHEM (FEAR OF GOD) AND THE COMMANDMENTS**

Based upon the manner in which the term *Yirat HaShem* (the Fear of God) is used in biblical verses, it is evident that the need for a Jew to develop such a sensibility is both a Commandment in its own right, as well as a type of *weltanschauung* informing both the performance of all Commandments and behaviors defined as other than specifically religious observances and practices. Furthermore, according to at least one *Aggadic* passage in the Talmud, the sensibility of *Yirat HaShem* is both considered a prerequisite as well as an ultimate outcome for the overall Jewish religious experience. However, in order to fulfill certain individual Commandments, *Yirat HaShem* appears to not only add additional religious significance to a course of action that already contains intrinsic value, but sometimes constitutes the very essence of the particular Commandment. One such Commandment whose not only optimal, but even minimal level of fulfillment is defined by the codifiers as requiring a clear-cut sense of *Yirat HaShem* is *Tefilla* (prayer).

**YIRAT HASHEM BY VIRTUE OF ALWAYS BEING IN GOD’S PRESENCE**

R. Moshe Isserles, in his gloss on *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim* 1:1, concerning what one is to do in the morning upon awakening, draws on RAMBAM’s *Guide for the Perplexed* 111: 52 to describe how the realization that one always finds himself standing before God, independent of particular acts of prayer or blessing, inevitably should result in ongoing emotions of fear and dread in everyone.

RAMA, *Orach Chayim* 1:1

[Psalm 16:8] “I have placed the Lord before me always…” This is a great principle of Torah and a quality of
the righteous that walk before God. Because the sitting of a person, his moving about, or his engagement in activities when he is alone in his house is extremely different from his sitting, moving and activity when he is before a great king. And his manner of speech and his uninhibited opening of his mouth [i.e., he speaks whenever he wishes] when he is together with his household and relatives is nothing like his speech when in the presence of a king. All the more so when a person considers that the Great King, the Holy One, Blessed Be He, Whose Glory Fills the entire universe, is Standing over him and Sees his actions, as it is said, [Jeremiah 23:24] “Can anyone hide himself in secret places and I will not See him? says the Lord,” immediately an individual should sense fear and subservience and terror of the Lord, Blessed Be He, and he should be shamed before Him unceasingly.

Consequently, it is possible for a sensitive, introspective individual, by means of reflection regarding one’s existential reality vis-à-vis the Divine,\(^\text{13}\) to achieve Yirat HaShem without ever engaging in formal prayer, or invoking blessings. The formal structure of prayer as well as the more informal occasions for individual blessings, in addition to providing an ongoing means by which the God-fearing individual can express himself to the Divine, can also be understood to serve as constant and varied reminders to the individual of his ongoing relationship to God since he might at least from time to time lose sight of this reality when caught up in the exigencies of everyday life.\(^\text{14}\)

**INFORMAL LITURGICAL AFFIRMATIONS**

**IMPRESSING UPON A PERSON THAT HE IS ALWAYS IN GOD’S PRESENCE**

While the petitionary nature of the Amida (lit., the standing; a prayer consisting of nineteen blessings of praise, supplication and thanksgiving, which serves as the centerpiece of the morning, afternoon and evening services), implicitly suggests that for the individual
engaged in prayer to have a meaningful spiritual experience, he must sense that he is very much in God’s Presence.

_Sanhedrin_ 22a

Said R. Chana bar Bizna in the name of R. Shimon Chasida: One who prays should view himself as if the Divine Presence is immediately before him, as it is said,¹⁵ [Psalms 16:8] “I have placed the Lord before me always…”¹⁶

Jewish primary sources as well as portions of the “informal” Jewish liturgy¹⁷ suggest that such awareness is expected to be de rigueur throughout one’s waking hours, even when one is not formally praying per se.¹⁸

From the moment that one gains consciousness in the morning, the chilling and intimidating realization arising from the _Modeh Ani_ (I give thanks) statement¹⁹ that a Jew is expected to immediately recite, i.e., that one not only suddenly finds himself in the Presence of the Great King but that he must attribute the continuation of his very life to a specific and individual Divine decision made daily, should give him considerable pause and overwhelming perspective. This early morning acknowledgement of HaShem’s control over each of our lives and deaths is a completion of a theme begun the night before prior to retiring, when during the course of _Kriyat Shema Al HaMita_²⁰ (lit., the _Shema_ recitation on the bed), reference is made to the conception of sleep as the consignment of one’s soul/life to God along with the sincere hope that it will be “returned.”²¹

Whereas the issue of the dependency for our very lives becomes crystallized only when we go to sleep and then awaken, or during other hopefully isolated moments when we find ourselves at risk due to life-threatening illness or potentially lethal circumstance, the assumption that we are always expected to approach HaShem as literally our King and we His Subjects/Slaves applies to even our mundane conscious existences via the myriad blessings incumbent upon us to pronounce daily. We are required to repeatedly articulate our acknowledgment of God’s Kingship
“Blessed are You, Lord our God and King of the universe…” in the form of the many blessings that comprise not only the broader structure of the morning, afternoon, and evening prayer services, but also whose individual recitations are precipitated when we are about to perform a Mitzva (commandment), such as prior to and following eating, while we are traveling, upon seeing a remarkable sight.

Aside from the obvious implications of the word Melech (King) within each blessing, Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 5:1 mandates that specific understandings of the various Divine Names used in these blessings should carefully be contemplated each time we invoke a specific Name of God.22

The blessings known as Birchot HaShachar 23 (Blessings of the morning), particularly when they were originally recited at every stage of one’s arising from bed and during the course of getting dressed,24 further serve to impress upon the individual how dependent he is upon HaShem for all of his everyday actions as he progressively moves from an essentially unconscious and non-functioning state during sleep to the resumption of full human activity upon awakening.25 Such blessings appear to serve as a hedge against man developing a sense of his independence and self-reliance, and therefore their recitation ought to further contribute to a sense of Yirat HaShem.

THE AWARENESS OF BEING IN GOD’S PRESENCE MUST INTENSIFY STILL FURTHER IN ORDER TO SUCCESSFULLY PREPARE FOR FORMAL PRAYER

Nevertheless, even as a general sense of God’s Immediacy and Kingship is meant to accompany us as we go about our daily activities, a more intense realization of these verities is required in order to pray properly and thereby confront the One who is the focal point of our requests, praises, and thanksgivings. The assumption that already prior to beginning to pray, one ought to be aware that he is entering into a particularly direct relationship with the Divine to the point of engendering “fear and trembling,” underlies parallel Talmudic passages that appear to equate the experiences of formal prayer with receiving prophetic Revelation.
Berachot 31a–b

The Rabbis taught: One should not stand to pray while in a mood of melancholy, joviality, conversation, or light-headedness, but rather consumed by joy emanating from the opportunity to fulfill a Commandment.

Shabbat 30b; Pesachim 117a

...to teach you that the Divine Presence does not dwell in a mood of laziness, melancholy, joviality, light-headedness, conversation, or meaningless activities, but rather when he is pervaded by a spirit of joy emanating from the opportunity to fulfill a Commandment, as it is said, [II Kings 3:15] “But now bring me a minstrel. And it came to pass when the minstrel played, that the Hand of the Lord Came upon him.”

The parallel between those yearning for prophecy and therefore understandably needing to prepare themselves in order to qualify for such a spiritual experience, and individuals intending to pray Shacharit, Musaf, Mincha, and Ma’ariv clarifies the actions of the Chasidim HaRishonim (early pietists) who in Berachot 30b are described as “waiting an hour, and only then praying in order to direct their hearts to their Father in Heaven.” Although Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 5:1 delineates the need to reflect upon the implications of God’s Names within the context of the recitation of blessings, such reflections are similarly appropriate each time the Divine Name is invoked throughout our formal prayers, whether as part of biblical verses, particular supplications, or expressions of thanksgiving, creating a type of mantra whereby HaShem’s Name serves as a means by which we personally iterate His Power and Kingship over us repeatedly throughout the prayer service. It is highly likely that contemplating the implications of the various Names of God and similar matters well before actually beginning a particular prayer service constituted at least a portion of those pietists’ preparations for prayer.
THE REQUISITE ATTITUDE FOR ACTUALLY BEGINNING TO ENGAGE IN FORMAL PRAYER AS DEFINED BY JEWISH LITURGY

The standard liturgy of the morning service itself suggests that as soon as one enters a synagogue in which he intends to fulfill his obligation to pray, it is expected that a particularly intense awareness of Yirat HaShem be achieved. The following verses, containing ample references to Yirat HaShem in both verbal and kinesthetic forms, are customarily recited as one first comes into a place of prayer:  

Numbers 24:5 How goodly are your tents, Jacob; your dwelling places, Israel.

Psalms 5:8 As for me, due to Your abundant Kindness, I will enter Your House; Eshtachaveh [I will prostrate myself] toward Your Holy Sanctuary BeYiratecha [in fear/awe of You].

Ibid. 26:8 HaShem, I love the House in which You Dwell, and the Place where Your Glory Resides.

Ibid. 95:6 As for me, Eshtachaveh [I will prostrate myself] VeEchra’a [and bow]; Evrecha [I will kneel] before HaShem, my Maker.

Ibid. 69:14 As for me, may my prayer to You, HaShem, be at an opportune time; O God, in Your abundant Kindness, Answer me with the Truth of Your Salvation.

Chafetz Chayim, citing Sha’arei Teshuva in the name of Pri Eitz Chayim, recommends a practice designed to assist one preparing to pray immediately before physically entering the synagogue:

Mishna Berura, 46, Introduction

Before one comes into the synagogue, while he is still standing in the courtyard of the synagogue, he should say, [Psalms 55:15] “…And we walk to the House of God BeRagesh [with emotion].” And he should be overcome
with emotion and he should recoil when he enters the synagogue due to his great fear. And he should wait and delay a short while and say, [Psalms 5:8] “As for me, due to Your abundant Kindness, I will enter Your House…” And only afterwards, he should enter. 33

The association of Psalms 55:15 with the moment just prior to an individual’s entering the synagogue parallels RAMBAM’s directives concerning the manner in which one is to enter the Temple’s Courtyard:

RAMBAM, *Hilchot Beit HaBechira* 7:5

...And anyone who enters into the courtyard, should do so calmly, and only in an area where he is permitted to enter there, and he should see himself as standing before God, as it is said, [1 Kings 9:3] “...And my eyes and my heart will be there [in the Temple] all of the days.” *And he should walk with terror, fear and dread*, as it says, [Psalms 55:15] “And we walk in the House of God BeRagesh.”

*Chafetz Chayim* apparently co-opts the homiletical interpretation of R. Yitzchak in *Megilla* 29a regarding Ezekiel 11:16, “…and I will Be to them a *Mikdash Me’at* [miniature Sanctuary]…” and extends the concept that a synagogue is a “House of God” by microcosmically paralleling the Temples of Jerusalem, to include developing a mindset similar to what was required for entry into the Temple in order to walk through a synagogue’s doors! 34 Furthermore, verses in the Torah emphasize that when people came to participate in or observe the Temple’s Divine Service, *Yirat HaShem* was unambiguously experienced and enhanced, 35 and there is apparently a similar expectation for when someone comes to a synagogue to participate in a prayer experience. Not only is it wholly understandable that the mindset of *Yirat HaShem* that ideally informed one about to enter the Temple should likewise be required in order to properly enter a synagogue, but the general commandment to “fear My Temple” 36 which clearly was originally intended to create an aura surrounding
the Temple, is at least on some level applicable today to the synagogues in which we pray:

Sefer Mitzvot Katan, 6

To fear the Mikdash, as it is written [Leviticus 19:30] “And My Temple you shall fear.” And today, the synagogue is a miniature Temple.

“To fear the Temple:” it is explained in Yevamot 6b – in the same verse37 is stated observance of Shabbat and fear of the Temple. Just as in the case of Shabbat, one does not fear Shabbat but rather the One that Commanded its observance, so too with regard to the Temple, it is not the Temple that is to be feared, but rather the One Who Warned concerning how it is to be treated…

And what constitutes fear of the Mikdash? One is not to enter the Temple Mount with his shoes or his pack, and he is not to make it into a shortcut, and expectorating obviously is inappropriate. And it is prohibited to make our synagogues into shortcuts…and it is inappropriate to act frivolously within them, and to eat in them other than meals associated with religious occasions. And one is not to enter into them to escape either the sun or the rain…

VISUAL AIDS TO DEVELOPING AND MAINTAINING AN ATTITUDE OF YIRAT HASHEM WITHIN THE SYNAGOGUE PROPER

Once inside the synagogue space wherein prayer is intended to take place, in addition to the prayers themselves that constantly invoke God’s Name and make repeated references to His Kingship,38 visual reminders are often placed in strategic positions in order to attempt to insure a congregation’s serious attitude and cognitive focus. Biblical verses chosen for their inspirational content are emblazoned above the Torah Ark as well as upon the curtains that hang in front of it.39 The cloth covers of Ashkenazi Sifrei Torah (Torah scrolls) and the coverings of synagogue furniture such as the Shulchan (central Torah reader’s table) and the Shtenders (book rests for the leaders...
of the services as well as the synagogue dignitaries) are similarly embroidered with pointed phrases and spiritual symbols. In some sanctuaries, verses are painted on the walls and incorporated within the synagogue’s windows, particularly those made of stained glass. A striking visual focal point are mystical charts known as Shivitis,\(^{40}\) on which Psalms 16:8, the verse previously centrally cited in the passages from Sanhedrin 22a and Rama’s commentary on Shulchan Aruch, is decorously written in calligraphy, with the Tetragrammaton given particular prominence, surrounded by various themes executed in micrography, often including mystical representations of the Temple Candelabrum and the palm of a human hand. Such charts can be observed in some synagogues either next to or in front of the place designated for the Shliach Tzibbur (the representative of the congregation designated to lead services) to stand. The underlying assumption behind these “decorations,” is that they serve as pointed reminders, in coordination with the prayers themselves, of the type of atmosphere that should ideally exist during the times when prayers are being offered by the congregation.

**CUSTOMS AND PRACTICES ASSOCIATED WITH PRAYER IN THE SYNAGOGUE THAT ARE DESIGNED TO ENHANCE YIRAT HASHEM**

Aside from the numerous visual cues that are typically scattered around the synagogue space designated for prayer, specific behaviors either mandated by Jewish law or simply customary, are also designed to contribute to producing and maintaining an atmosphere of Fear of God.

Although the Amida is obviously the highpoint of any formal prayer service, the additional proclaiming God’s greatness within the context of the biblical references in Pesukei D’Zimra (verses of praise), of Shacharit (morning prayers), as well as the recitation of the Shema (Deuteronomy 6:4–9; 11:13–21; Numbers 15:37–41 in succession) as part of the morning and evening prayers, constitute not only significant prayer experiences in terms of themselves, but also contribute to creating an aura of fear of God. The first section of
the morning prayers is devoted to describing God as a Creator, a judge, a redeemer, a source of miracles. When a person thinks about the implications of such qualities, it would seem to be virtually impossible not to experience the powerful emotions described by RAMBAM as the fundamental responses to the observable universe:

RAMBAM, *Mishna Torah, Hilchot Yesodei HaTorah* 2:2

And what is the path towards loving and fearing Him? When a person reflects about His great, amazing Actions and Creations, and recognizes His Intelligence that can neither be evaluated nor delineated, immediately he loves and glorifies and extols and powerfully desires to know the Great Name…

But when he reflects about these matters themselves, immediately **he stumbles backwards and he fears and he recognizes that he is a tiny, insignificant, inconsequential creature of extremely limited intelligence standing before the most Perfect Intelligence**…

And while a goodly part of *Pesukei D’Zimra* does describe how much we appreciate HaShem’s kindness, mercy and concern for us, nevertheless, the sense of *Yirat HaShem* ought to be inescapable as well.

Once *Pesukei D’Zimra* are completed, and the section known as *Kabbalat Ohl Malchut Shamayim* (the acceptance of the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven) is begun, the overall mood, if anything, only intensifies. The recitation of *Shema* and its surrounding blessings is standardly associated with deep concentration, recognition of the gravity of what is being verbally accepted and ratified, and even with martyrdom during times of persecutions of the Jews.

*Chaye Adam* 21:4, 5, 11

*Kriyat Shema* must be read with terror, fear and trembling…

It is prohibited to hint with one’s eyes, to point with
one’s fingers, and obviously to engage in work...during
the reading of the first paragraph, and it is prohibited to
do so during the second as well...

...It is good if the individual has in mind that he
would be prepared to subject himself to death for the sake of
this belief [in the uniqueness of HaShem], and he should
imagine in his mind that he is being burned at this mo-
ment for the sanctification of His Name, to fulfill [Psalms
44:23] “For Your Sake are we killed all the day long...,” and
he should think that he is actually carrying this out...

As for the Amida, Shulchan Aruch notes the association between
sacrifices and prayer suggested in the Midrash –

_BaMidbar Rabba_ 18:21

[Hosea 14:3] “Forgive all iniquity and receive us
graciously. So we will offer the words of our lips instead
of calves” – Israel said: Master of the Universe! During
the time that the Temple was extent, we would offer a
sacrifice and we would be atoned. But now all we have at
our disposal is prayer...

Israel said: When the Temple was extent, we would
offer fats and limbs [of animals] and we would achieve
atonement. But now all we have is our own fats and
bloods and souls. Let it be before You that these will earn
atonement for us...

and in addition to the obvious broader parallels existing between
these two ritual categories, the author homiletically identifies the
manner in which very specific practices ought to be adopted so that
prayer will be brought in line with the offering of sacrifices in a most
detailed and comprehensive manner.

_Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim_ 98:4

Prayer is in place of sacrifice, and therefore it should
parallel the example of sacrifice
(a) with respect to intention, no irrelevant thoughts should be present, since within the context of sacrifices, such thoughts would render the offerings disqualified;

(b) it should be engaged in while standing, similar to the Temple Service during which the Priests, as well as those providing the sacrifices all stood;

(c) a fixed place should be established for prayer, since with respect to sacrifices, each type of offering had a specific place for its slaughter and the application of its blood;

(d) ideally, nothing should stand between the pray-er and the wall, just as with respect to sacrifices any object or substance that would stand between the blood being applied and the wall of the altar upon which it was being thrown, would render the sacrifice unacceptable;

(e) one should have nice clothing set aside especially for prayer, paralleling the priestly garments that the Priests were required to wear while engaged in the Temple Service…

When one considers not only the individual details that Shulchan Aruch outlines, but also the general mindset demanded of the priests engaged in offering sacrifices in the Temple, the engendering of an atmosphere of precision, seriousness and even fear by all participants in the prayer service is clearly implied.

The body language that is particularly associated with the Amida further contributes to the deference and trepidations that Yirat HaShem naturally engenders:

Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 18:5

(a) One should line up his feet one next to the other, as if he possesses only a single foot in order to resemble angels, as it is said, (Ezekiel 1:7) “And their feet were like a straight foot…”

(b) and one should bow his head slightly to the ground,
(c) and he should shut his eyes so he will not look at anything, and if he prays from a Siddur, he should concentrate upon looking only into the Siddur,

(d) and he should place his hands upon his heart, the right hand atop the left,

(e) and he should pray with a whole heart, in terror, in fear and in subservience, like a poor individual begging at the door,

(f) and he should utter the words from his mouth with intention and precision…

Ibid. 20:4

(g) And in the Kedusha [the section added when the Amida is repeated in the presence of a Minyan (ten adult males)], everyone should be careful to line up their feet, that both should be together, as if they were a single foot,

(h) and when everyone says, “Holy, Holy, Holy!” and “Blessed” and “May He Reign,” each should raise his body and his heels upwards,

(i) and the custom is to lift his eyes upwards,

(j) and it is good if the eyes are closed.

Contributing further to the sense that one is literally standing before HaShem while praying is the series of bowings that mark the end of the various forms of the Kaddish prayer,⁴⁷ the Barchu (lit., bless; the introduction of the portion of the prayers leading up to Shema,⁴⁸ as well as the introductory statement of the blessing when one is called to the Torah), the turning points within the Amida⁴⁹ as well as the manner in which the individual is directed to conclude his prayers.⁵⁰

Sefer Kol Bo 11

And one has to bow within the course of each Amida five bows, both at the beginning and end of Avot [lit., the fathers; the first of the nineteen blessings], at the
beginning and end of Hoda‘a [lit., thanksgiving; the first of the last three blessings whose theme is thanksgiving] and when one has completed his prayer, he bows again and takes three steps backwards, but no more than that since otherwise it appears as hubris, and then one turns towards his left, which corresponds to the “Right” of the Holy One, Blessed Be He, and then towards his right, which corresponds to His “Left,” and then he utters Amen, all within the same single bow…

On Rosh HaShana and Yom HaKippurim, perhaps in an effort to impress upon the pray-er even more the degree to which he is to acknowledge his subservience to God in the spirit of emphasizing the Malchiyot (kingship) theme of the Days of Awe, in addition to the standard bowings, it is customary to also engage in literal prostrations.51

*Kitzur Shulchan Aruch* 129:16

During the repetition of the Amida [on Rosh HaShana], when the prayer leader recites, VaAnachnu Korim [and we bow] it is customary for the congregation to say this with him and also bow and bend their knees. However they do not “fall on their faces” [i.e., prostrate themselves fully] except on Yom HaKippurim during the description of the Temple Service …52

Another parallel between the Temple and modern-day synagogues is obliquely referred to in Mishna Sukka 5:2. The Mishna notes that a Tikun Gadol (a significant rectification of an unfortunate situation) was instituted during the Simchat Beit HaShoeiva (rejoicing over the point of water drawing, used for the water libations on Sukkot). This “rectification” is interpreted by later commentators as the construction of balconies to separate men and women in order to alleviate the frivolousness that arose when the genders came together in the Temple. This is the historical precedent for the sexes being separated by a Mechitza (barrier) in contemporary Orthodox synagogues, not
only to physically mimic the Temple, but also to similarly try to maintain a relatively sober atmosphere during prayer.

RAMA, quoting the Responsa of Binyamin Ze‘ev, offers a comment that although not necessarily having direct bearing on decorum, nevertheless implies a particular approach to being able to give prayer one’s undivided attention.

RAMA on Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 98:1

It is prohibited for a person to kiss his small children in the synagogue, in order to establish within his [the parent’s] heart that there is no love like that for the Holy One, Blessed Be He.

While the focus of this instruction would appear to be theological in nature, i.e., what sort of emotional stance is one to assume vis-à-vis HaShem during the time when one prays, there is also the tacit assumption that if parents are enjoined against showing their children affection while in the synagogue, children will not necessarily be present, unless they are old enough to properly participate in the service for significant lengths of time. Taking care of children who require an adult’s full attention, and being able to pray properly appear to be mutually exclusive. 53 Shulchan Aruch HaRav 98:1 is quite unequivocal in this regard:

...And children, who cause their parents to become confused with regard to prayer, should not be brought at all to the synagogue.

Assuming a different perspective, a medieval pietist quite provocatively draws upon the manner of worship of other religions as a basis for developing a minimal standard for the ideal behavior and mood that should permeate Jewish houses of worship:

Sefer Chasidim, 18

...[After a discussion of the prohibitions against all forms of unnecessary conversation during prayer services]
And woe to the evildoers who conduct themselves frivolously and are devoid of the terror of Shakai [the particular Name of God connoting Self-sufficiency and All-powerfulness] and upon whose faces there is missing His Fear and His Awe, and they don't understand and they don't learn lessons despite their having traversed the “islands of the Kittiyim”\(^5^4\) and they saw and they considered that in all of those lands the kings bow on their knees in their houses of worship, and they stand in terror and fear and trembling and their palms are spread out to their gods, the works of their hands, that neither see nor hear.\(^5^5\) Surely, we who stand before the King, King of all Kings, the Holy One, Blessed Be He, living and existent, exalted and on high, may His Name be blessed, and may His memory be lifted up, to Him belong all silences and praises, all the more so we should stand before Him in terror and fear and trembling. And concerning those who claim to be fatigued and therefore are unable to stand, the verse states, [Isaiah 43:22] “But you have not called upon me, Jacob. But you have been weary of Me, Israel.” Throughout the day you are not tired, but when it is time to pray, you are tired. All day they stand in the market before the bureaucrat or before some foolishness and are not tired. And at the time for prayer they are unable to stand.

*Sefer Chasidim* raises the specter of communal prayer lacking *Yirat HaShem* as not only spiritually unfulfilling, but even constituting a public *Chillul HaShem* (profanation of God’s Name).

**IS THE PRAYER EXPERIENCE IN THE CONTEMPORARY MODERN ORTHODOX SYNAGOGUE IN KEEPING WITH THE STANDARD OF YIRAT HASHEM THAT APPARENTLY WAS IDEALIZED IN THE PAST?**

Despite all of these reminders, textual interpretations, visual cues, and liturgical associations intended to inspire and maintain a high
level of *Yirat HaShem* throughout the communal prayer experience, a visitor to most contemporary modern Orthodox synagogues in North America would be hard-pressed to report that he experienced an atmosphere that reflected high levels of spirituality or particular engagement with and fear of God. Considerable restlessness and movement, conversation,\(^56\) perfunctory prayer at break-neck speed,\(^57\) individuals arriving quite late and leaving early, inappropriate dress in terms of modesty and/or informality all contribute to the absence of a sense that the congregation is in the presence of the King of Kings, that it is suffused with fear and awe of the Divine.

Samuel Heilman, in his classic ethnographic study of a Modern Orthodox synagogue, *Synagogue Life,\(^58\)* categorizes the typical prayer experience in the following semantic terms, reflecting a major gap between the few who are spiritually sensitive and the majority who apparently are not, at least when it comes to prayer:

*Kehillat Kodesh,\(^59\)* Jews seldom if ever call their worship “prayer” or even [in the Hebrew] *Tefilla*, terms which strictly speaking, connote a spiritual experience infused with *Kavana* [intention, spiritual focus]. Instead they allude to their *Davening*, a Yiddish term, while it denotes prayer, also refers to the context, both spiritual and mundane, in which prayer occurs. Hence while only the inspired may be able to pray, everyone can *Daven*, even those who, like children, know nothing of the majestic spirituality of *Tefilla*.

The fact that the Orthodox Union, the National Council of Young Israel, and the Rabbinical Council of America have cooperated for the last few years to declare *Parshat BeShalach,\(^60\)* a “Shabbat of Awareness” with regard to “synagogue decorum and spiritual awareness”\(^61\) gives ample testimony to the existence of a problem. Irving Levitz has written,

The widespread practice of combining prayer with social camaraderie…is an enigma. Orthodox Jews, as a rule, do
not blatantly violate or openly ignore *Halachic* imperatives…

Orthodox Jews are, therefore, particularly conscientious about *Halachic* standards pertaining to the sanctity of their synagogues and fastidious about such matters as the height of the *Mechitza*, the placement of the *Bima*, the prescribed liturgical service,\(^6\) the flawless precision with which the Torah is read and the exacting requirements with which the scroll is written. Yet despite the most decisive *Halachic* prohibitions against talking or socializing during the synagogue service itself, the vast majority of Orthodox Jews see nothing disturbing or incongruous about praying in a social environment.\(^6\)

What might explain this profound “disconnect” between the primary sources and *Halachic* codifiers of Jewish Orthodox tradition and the current religious climate in our synagogues?

The first official indication that originally, the “bar may have been set too high” in terms of the type of intention and concentration that is discussed in the Talmud and the early Codes, or at least that during a significant portion of post-Talmudic Jewish history, the demand for high levels of *Kavana* was considered to be a standard that *Rov Tzibbur Eino Yachol La’amod Bo* (most of the Jewish community was unable to live up to), is a comment attributed to *Tosafot* by *HaGahot Maimoniyot*, a gloss on RAMBAM’s *Mishna Torah*. Responding to RAMBAM’s strong statement concerning the importance of *Kavana* for prayer, *HaGahot Maimoniyot* blunts the force of RAMBAM’s adjuration.

*RAMBAM, Mishna Torah, Hilchot Tefilla, 4:1*

There are 5 things that prevent\(^6\) prayer from occurring: …and 5) the intention of the heart.

*Hagahot Maimoniyot on Hilchot Tefilla 4:1, 20*

*Tosafot* have written that in this entire issue we are now not careful, since even under the best of
circumstances we do not have so much proper concentration for prayer…[a precursor to Heilman’s distinction between Tefilla and davening?]

*Tur* is more specific than *HaGahot Maimoniyot* as to the origin of the view that focus and intention are no longer demanded in order to be considered to properly pray:

*Tur, Orach Chayim* 98

And R. Meir MiRotenburg wrote, “We are not careful concerning all of this at this time since we ordinarily do not have much *Kavana* during our prayers.”

*Lechem Mishna*, commenting on the same reference in *Mishna Torah*, suggests a Talmudic source that implies that the minimum level of *Kavana* required for prayer is considerably lower than the discussion appearing in *Eiruvin* 65a which most probably served as the basis for RAMBAM’s position in *Hilchot Tefilla* 4:1. This commentator therefore posits that even in Talmudic times, there was already a recognition that it would be difficult for at least some pray-ers to commonly and regularly sustain the requisite amount of minimal intention required to pray properly:

*Berachot* 34b

When one says the *Tefilla*, he must say all of the blessings with intention. And if he cannot say all of the blessings with intention, he should say one with intention.

R. Chiya said in the name of R. Safra who received it from the school of Rebbe: This one [blessing] should be the “Blessing of the Patriarchs” [the first of the nineteen blessings].

RAMBAM does appear to reference the source in Berachot in a later comment in *Mishna Torah*:
RAMBAM, Mishna Torah, Hilchot Tefilla 10:1

One who has prayed VeLo Kivein et Libo [but failed to focus his mind] should pray again, this time with intention. But if he had previously succeeded in focusing his attention during the first of the Blessings [the view of R. Chiya in the name of R. Safra], he does not pray a second time.

R. Chaim Brisker in an attempt to reconcile 4:1 with 10:1, posits that there are two types of Kavana: (a) (Eiruvin 65a; 4:1) The awareness that one is standing before the King of Kings while engaged in prayer (if such a sensibility is lacking, then the very act of prayer has by definition not taken place and therefore if one is capable to think of this by praying again, he should, and if not, then he should forgo prayer until such time as he becomes capable to think such thoughts); and (b) (Berachot 34b; 10:1) In addition to recognizing that one is standing before HaShem, the individual must understand what he is saying. When the latter form of Kavana is lacking, nevertheless an act of prayer has occurred, albeit one considerably flawed. Furthermore, “understanding what one is saying” is minimally defined as understanding the meaning of the first Blessing. While these two sources in Mishna Torah could have been reconciled in other ways, e.g., since when one tries to pray a second time, it is easier to begin to think about before Whom one is standing than to suddenly acquire understanding of the Hebrew language. There is greater insistence upon a repetition in the first instance than in the second, and consequently greater readiness to accept a BeDiAvad (a posteriori) performance (minimally the first blessing has to be understood in order to be considered to have fulfilled one’s obligation). R. Chaim’s solution could also be seen as “lowering the bar” in the sense that a greater number of people can be considered to be able to pray when defining the minimal Kavana needed as a state of mind (4:1) rather than a body of cognitive knowledge (10:1). Yet the fact that the comment of Hagahot Maimoniyot is attached to 4:1 rather than to 10:1 suggests within the context of Rav Chaim’s interpretation,
that even the requirement to sense that one is standing before God is considered too elitist and therefore has been waived.

However, it seems that other more recent decisors have attempted to “swing the pendulum” back in the opposite direction in terms of encouraging significant levels of Kavana, if not the absolute demands made previously.

*Aruch HaShulchan, Orach Chayim, 98:4*

...Truly the *Tur* and *Shulchan Aruch* have written that we are now not careful about all of this, because we do not concentrate so much in prayer. But one must take care to pray in a manner of supplications, like a pauper who begs in the doorway, and to do so calmly and not to make prayer appear burdensome and something that one wishes to exempt himself of as quickly as possible, i.e., even if one recites prayer in a supplicatory manner, if he does not approach the matter as one who needs something and comes to ask it of the king, but rather only prays in order to fulfill his religious obligation, and to exempt himself from it, it is an unacceptable prayer.

And although *Chafetz Chayim* is not as positively assertive as *Aruch HaShulchan*, he nevertheless supplies his own caveats to the rather extreme implications of *Shulchan Aruch*.

*Mishna Berura on Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 98, 6, 7*

And it is obvious, that in any case, if a person wishes to pray while in a state of anger or the like, that he should at first attempt to dissipate the thoughts that are disturbing him, as stated in 98:1.71

And the *Pri Megadim* writes in the name of the *Levush*, “Even though we are not able to have Kavana, nevertheless we do what we can.” Therefore one is not to pray in a house where there is new beer or mead, all the more so if there is a bad or spoiled odor.
Fear of God and Prayer

In summary, although there appears to be a tradition dating from the medieval period suggesting that either because of the principle of *Nitmā'atu HaDorot* (the steady spiritual decline of progressive generations) or a long-overdue admission that what is described in the Talmud and Codifiers are reflections of a "*Halacha* of aspiration," it is important to attempt to maximize the degree to which one who prays understands not only what he is saying, but the overall mindset of a servant/slave of God that is associated with the act of prayer. Furthermore, it should be relatively obvious that just as a pray-er’s overall spiritual perspective has the potential to be deeply reinforced and positively realigned on each occasion that he engages in praying to *HaShem* in a reflective and self-conscious manner, were an individual to become routinized in approaching prayer in a perfunctory, mechanical style, devoid of the intense awareness that he is literally standing before God and all that that suggests, it is likely that he will approach the rest of his Judaism in a similar manner. Consequently, successful efforts to enhance abilities of Jews to properly pray per force should have far-reaching implications for everything that they do, both overtly religiously as well as in all other aspects of their lives.

**CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES TO RESTORING HIGHER LEVELS OF YIRAT HASHEM TO PRAYER AND THE SYNAGOGUE**

Even if we would be sympathetic to the demands of recent decisors to attempt to restore higher levels of *Kavana* to typical Jewish prayer services, a number of factors can be identified that would each have to be addressed in order for there to be any real chance to raise the level of prayer in Modern Orthodox North American synagogues, as well as in our personal lives.

(a) American society in general and its unique ethnic and religious communities in particular are becoming progressively decentralized, distrustful, and even disrespectful of sources of authority both from within and without. In terms of the Modern Orthodox community, unfortunately, this includes Rabbinic authority both in
terms of the diluted influence of individual Rabbis as well as the Rabbinic organizations which attempt to promote various policies and initiatives. Calls insisting upon increased synagogue decorum and individual self-discipline have been, and will probably continue to be, met with significant resistance by those who associate the sources of such initiatives with what they consider as the antiquated past and/or calls emanating from authority figures with little clout. In addition to the problems of general distrust and even disrespect for authority, if the metaphorical terminology describing the ideal relationship between a Jewish worshipper and God is specifically one between king and servant, our lack of experience with monarchies, coupled with the American historical tradition of having freed ourselves from British royal control in favor of establishing a democratic governmental structure, contributes to difficulty with accepting HaShem as our literal King.

(b) Our culture is increasingly one where individuals obtain their information, entertain themselves and even engage in their professions by means of video representations of texts on interactive screens. How effective will books be upon their readers, even Siddurim and Machzorim, when they are not interactive, colorful, and engagingly designed?

(c) As materialism flourishes in the Modern Orthodox Jewish community, the sense of dependency on God that lies at the heart of prayer, is steadily eroded. When individuals are self-satisfied, and at least can afford themselves the illusion that they are in relative control of their circumstances, what incentive do they have to devote themselves to trying to pray sincerely and urgently?

(d) American society has never been particularly philosophical or introspective. Can homegrown pragmatism be overcome with a desire to transcend oneself and engage in metaphysics and contemplation of the Divine?

(e) Haym Soloveitchik has written of the dissolution of the time honored mimetic Jewish tradition by the effects of the Enlightenment, Socialism, Communism, Zionism, and the Holocaust which all served to severely disrupt the practices and behaviors that had been handed down previously from generation to generation.
Could it be said that a different, fairly negative, mimetic tradition now exists in the sanctuaries of our synagogues which socializes young people, Ba’alei Teshuva (returnees to religious observance) and Geirim (converts) into practices with regard to prayer that are destructive and anti-spiritual?

(f) Measurements made of the attention spans of not only children, but also adults has indicated a significant decline over the years. How can individuals be expected to concentrate for intense prayer sessions when their minds have not been trained to focus for sustained periods of time?

POSSIBLE INITIATIVES TO IMPROVE PRAYER IN THE MODERN ORTHODOX WORLD

If Jewish religious leadership agrees that Tefilla in many Orthodox shuls and schools leaves a great deal to be desired, then rather than engaging in dramatic hand-wringing, strategies for improving the situation have to be sought after. In the spirit of the progressive thinking of Tosafot and R. Meir MiRotenberg, who took the radical step in the face of so many opinions coming before them, of deciding that praying with little or even no Kavana is better than not praying at all, our Rabbis should undertake a similar course and come up with ideas that comply with the Halachic system by which the importance, meaningfulness and inspiration that was always meant to be associated with prayer can be realized anew. Some of these strategies might include:

(a) A redesign of Siddurim that would engender greater focus and a more meaningful spiritual experience.
(b) A commitment to explore theology, i.e., attempting to understand God, the purpose of the world, the phenomenon of faith in synagogues and schools.
(c) An adaptation of meditative techniques to the prayer experience. Aryeh Kaplan for example, discusses the effects of memorizing prayers, closing one’s eyes while reciting at least portions of the liturgy and placing particular focus upon the first blessing of the Amida.
(d) Engineering the synagogue service so that it will be maximally conducive to spiritual experience. Variables to be addressed include: speed at which prayers are conducted, the order of the service’s components, the qualities of and expectations for those chosen to lead the services, the number of honors bestowed, and the length of sermons, interpolations and announcements.

(e) Rethinking synagogue architecture and interior decoration in order to advance the prayer experience. Aside from incorporating appropriate symbols and cues throughout the sanctuary, attention should be given to the color scheme, sound-locks to exclude extraneous noise from the hallways, the utilization of light and windows, furniture, seating configuration that would best contribute to creating an atmosphere of spirituality.

(f) Considering the appropriate maximum size of Minyanim and placing limits upon settings that are unduly large. The size of a Minyan contributes mightily to the sense of intimacy and direct involvement. While the principle of B’Rov Am Hadrat Melech85 (With a great multitude there is glory to the King) would encourage the creation of larger and larger Minyanim, when the size of these gatherings lead to less Kavana and personal engagement in prayer, an approach that recognizes the value of smaller groupings is required.

(g) Trips and excursions that would carefully expose individuals to different prayer venues in order to encourage them to experience relating to the Divine in different venues. In addition to obvious venues in Israel, local settings that can serve as memorable settings for meaningful prayer should be made part of a synagogue’s regular activities. Community retreats provide excellent opportunities for creating new venues and providing fresh perspectives on spirituality.

(h) Self-conscious modeling of proper prayer focus and behavior by Rabbis, teachers, parents, and older children. While all adults should view themselves as potential role models, it is of particular importance that individuals who are expected to
appreciate the centrality of prayer consistently live up to such expectations.

(i) A development of means by which *Bei’ur Tefilla* (the explanation of prayers) as well as consideration of the appropriate *Kavannot* that should accompany prayers\(^{86}\) can become available to a greater percentage of synagogue-going Jews. The claim that the prayers are “irrelevant” or “esoteric” must be combated with education in as many venues as feasible.

(j) Encouragement for people to personalize their prayers. A means by which greater immediacy can be given to one’s prayers is when they become, at least in part, individual expressions of needs and concerns. Many individuals may not be aware of where and how such insertions can be halachically included, and such information should be made readily available to all.

(k) The establishment of different styles of *Minyanim* to appeal to the broadest range of pray-ers.

In addition to projects and programs that are specifically related to synagogue life, I believe that it is important to undertake global communal initiatives in this area as well. As long as there are lone synagogues that care about making *Tefilla* meaningful, it will remain the purview of only a few communities, allowing the vast majority of those attending Orthodox synagogues to continue the downward spiral of ever-less understanding and inspiration emanating from synagogue services. A communal approach would necessitate a coalition of congregational leaders, school faculty and administration, camp personnel, etc. to all develop coordinated curricula, activities, publicity and educational initiatives that would be conducted both inside and outside the synagogue in order to try to comprehensively address\(^{87}\) the manner in which prayer is currently conducted and practiced.\(^{88}\)

While prayer may be one of the most difficult commandments to properly fulfill, the degree to which members of a synagogue community can achieve meaningful and spiritual *Tefilla* serves not
only as a litmus test for “where the congregation is currently at,” but also a crucial means by which it can be further sensitized and become more deeply devoted to its traditions and lifestyle expectations. All efforts designed to raise our respective Tefillot to ever more significant levels are crucial for the continued religious vitality of Orthodox Judaism.

NOTES

1. The interchangeability of yirat HaShem (Fear of God) with yirat shamayim (fear of Heaven) is well exemplified by the passage in Berachot 33b.

2. Dr. Irving N. Levitz, “Talking During Tefilla: Understanding the Phenomenon, ” The Journal of Halacha and Contemporary Society, No. 33 (Spring 1997), pp. 95–119. The late Max Safrin underwrote the publication and dissemination of this article by the Orthodox Union to its network of synagogues beginning in 1998. The pamphlet has been reprinted ten times, and the article has been posted on the Internet at http://www.project-awareness.org/page_talkingduringtefillah.htm.

3. R. Chanina further said: Everything is in the Hand of Heaven except for yirat shamayim, as it is said, [Deuteronomy 10:12] “And now Israel, what else does the Lord, your God require of you other than LeYira Et HaShem Elokecha [to Fear the Lord your God]...?” Perhaps in the interests of avoiding invoking the Divine Name unnecessarily, Shamayim was substituted by the Rabbis – the phrase yirat shamayim does not appear in the Bible. However, with respect to prayer, where the focus of the pray-ers is to communicate with HaShem, it seems to me that Yirat HaShem is the term that captures this crucial component of the prayer experience with greater precision.

4. Verses that dwell exclusively on the relationship of a Jew to his/her God, one aspect of which is experiencing fear, include:

- Deuteronomy 6:13 “The Lord your God you shall fear, and Him you shall serve, and by His Name you shall swear.”
- Ibid. 10:20 “The Lord your God you shall fear, Him shall you serve, and to Him you shall cling, and by His Name you shall swear.”

5. Verses that list fear of God as a necessary prerequisite for proper Mitzva (Commandment) observance include:

- Ibid. 6:2 “In order that you will fear the Lord your God, to observe all of His Statutes and His Commandments that I am Commanding you and your children and your grandchildren all the days of your life, and in order that you will lengthen the days of your life.”
- Ibid. 13:5 “After the Lord your God you shall walk, and Him you shall fear, and His Commandments you will observe, and to His Voice you will listen, and to Him you shall cling.

6. E.g., Particular cases in point might be verses referencing the fear of God on the
part of individuals who ostensibly are not bound to *Torah Mitzva* observance, and therefore can only manifest “fear of God” in non-*Mitzva* contexts:

Genesis 20:11 “And Avraham said: Because I said that there certainly is no fear of God in this place [Gerar] and they would kill me regarding the matter of my wife.”

Ibid. 42:18 “And Yosef said to them on the third day: This do and live. It is God that I fear.”

Exodus 1:17 “And the midwives feared God, and they did not do as the king of Egypt had spoken to them, and they caused the children to live.”

7. *Shabbat* 31a–b

Reish Lakish said: What is meant by the verse [Isaiah 33:6] “And these shall be faith in your times, strength, salvation, wisdom and knowledge; the Fear of the Lord is His Treasure?” “Faith” refers to the Mishnaic Order of *Zeraim* [Seeds]; “your times” – *Moed* [Festivals]; “strength” – *Nashim* [Women]; “salvation” – *Nezikin* [Damages]; “wisdom” – *Kodashim* [Sacrifices]; “knowledge” – *Taharot* [Purity]. Yet even so, the Fear of the Lord is His Treasure.”

(While *Torah* study, particularly the Oral Tradition, is a wondrous gift that God has bestowed upon the Jewish people, awaiting their study and analysis, the most important Divine contribution to His Nation is the potential to become God-Fearing.

The parallelism implied in this homiletical interpretation suggests that just as one must work to master the Orders of the Mishna and their commentators, progressing from a state of ignorance to one of knowledge, the same is true regarding the development of *yirat shamayim*, i.e., that it is an eventual outcome of process and effort. Furthermore, since *yirat shamayim* is listed along with groups of primary sources of Jewish tradition, it is implied that a means by which such a mindset can be acquired is via the study of such texts.)

Raba said: When man is led in for judgment, he is asked: Did you deal faithfully, did you fix times for learning, did you engaged in procreation, did you hope for salvation, did you engage in the dialectics of wisdom, did you understand one thing from another. Yet even so, if the Fear of the Lord is his treasure, it is well; if not, it is not well.

This may be compared to a man who instructed his representative: Take me up a Kor of wheat to the loft, and he went and did so. Did you mix in a Kav of *Chumton*? he asked him. No, he replied. Then it was better that you did not carry it up, he retorted…

(The elements of the inventory that constitutes the basis of the evaluation of one’s life are all activities and processes in which one engages, including the study of *Torah* that was the focus of the previous interpretation. *yirat shamayim* serves as the pre-existing informing principle that legitimizes and validates each of these processes as laudable and spiritually significant, much as *Chumton* is the preservative that maintains the stored wheat’s freshness and viability. (Since each of these
elements could be motivated by alternate considerations, e.g., an individual adheres to honest business practices because of his commitment to a secular social contract rather than due to spiritual sensibilities; one studies Torah in order to gain public approbation or as a result of intellectual curiosity as opposed to attempting to probe the Will of the Divine, etc., only actions that have been conducted within the context of the Fear of Heaven will be considered worthy of positive evaluation.)

Rabba b. R. Huna said: Every man who possesses learning without the Fear of Heaven is like a treasurer who is entrusted with the inner keys, but not with the outer. How is he to enter?

(The analogy unambiguously posits that yirat shamayim must precede the act of Torah study in order for the latter to have the proper effect upon the student.)

R. Yanai proclaimed: Woe to him who has no courtyard, yet makes a gate for the same.

(The previous analogy is now being reversed, in order to demonstrate that yirat shamayim is the ultimate goal of learning, rather than merely the means by which to access it.)

R. Yehuda said: The Holy One, Blessed Be He, Created His world only that men should fear Him, for it is said, [Eccl. 3:14] “And God has Done it, that men should fear before Him.”

(The final comment of this Talmudic passage could be used to support both contentions, i.e., that yirat shamayim is both the starting and end point of the elements constituting a religious life.)

8. E.g., even if an individual would carry out a charitable act independent of any religious or spiritual associations, it still would have intrinsic value in its own right, by virtue of the help and support offered someone in need. The same could be said of someone who maintains a high standard of personal morality and integrity without understanding such values as specifically religious behavior.

9. Practices carried out by the priests in the Tabernacle/Temple, particularly from the perspective that they are Shluchei D’shamaya (lit., the surrogates of Heaven; they are authorized by God to accept sacrifices offered by man – see Nedarim 35b) would intrinsically appear to require the priests to possess a significant modicum of Yirat HaShem in order for their actions to be considered spiritual rather than merely mechanical. The virtually non-existent margin of error that pertained to the priests engaged in the Divine Service which could be taken as a manifestation of a deficit in their requisite minimum measure of Yirat HaShem is duly reflected in the punishments to Nadav and Avihu in Leviticus 10:2, as well as the anecdote recorded in Yoma 19b regarding a Sadducee who deliberately altered the incense sacrifice on Yom Kippur and met a premature and unpleasant end.

A second area that would appear to require Yirat HaShem as a sine qua non in order that the responsibilities be even minimally carried out in an appropriate fashion would be the state of mind required of those serving as judges on Jewish courts. Once again, numerous statements are made to the effect of how those who serve on Jewish courts are God’s surrogates – e.g., Sanhedrin 7a.” Said R. Shmuel bar
Nachmani in the name of R. Yonatan: Every judge that judges a completely true judgment causes the Divine Presence to dwell among Israel, as it says, [Psalms 82:1] ‘God Stands in the congregation of God; He Judges among the judges.’ And every judge that does not judge a completely true judgment causes the Divine Presence to be removed from Israel, as it is said, [Psalms 12:6] ‘For the violence done to the poor, for the sighing of the needy, now will I Arise,’ says the Lord.” In order to represent God, it would appear to be necessary to properly appreciate what a relationship with Him entails, i.e., *Yirat HaShem*.


11. The Talmud in *Eiruvin* 65a quote Amoriam who state rather categorically that not only the “ideal” prayer, but any prayer at all is to take place only when an individual truly has the requisite presence of mind to have proper intention and concentration:

   R. Chiya bar Ashi citing Rav ruled: A person whose mind is not at ease must not pray, since it is said, [Job 36:19] “He who is in distress shall give no decisions.”

   R. Chanina did not pray on a day when he was agitated. It is written, “He who is in distress shall give no decisions.”…

   R. Eliezer ruled: A man who returns from a journey must not pray for three days, for it is said, [Ezra 8:15] “And I gathered them together to the river that turns to Ahava, and there we encamped three days, and I viewed the people.”

   On returning from a journey, Shmuel’s father did not pray for three days. Shmuel did not pray in a house that contained alcoholic drink. R. Papa did not pray in a house that contained fish hash.

Absolute statements such as these influenced RAMBAM to make his own strong statement.

12. This is the identical verse cited by R. Shimon Chasida in *Sanhedrin* 22a concerning envisioning facing God during prayer. It would appear that the word *Tamid* (always) is better served within RAMA’s context.

13. RAMBAM suggests that contemplating the natural world, as opposed to engaging in traditional Jewish prayer or *Torah* study, as the most potent catalyst for achieving *Yirat HaShem*:

   RAMBAM, *Mishna Torah, Hilchot Yesodei HaTorah* 2:2

   And what is the way to develop Love for Him and Fear of Him?

   When a person contemplates His Actions and His great and amazing Creatures, and recognizes in them His Wisdom that is impossible to evaluate or delimit, immediately he loves and praises and glorifies and experiences a great and overwhelming desire to know the Great HaShem…

   But when he further reflects concerning these things themselves, immediately he stumbles backwards and he is fearful and knows that he is a tiny, lowly, insignificant creature who possesses a small, limited mind before the Perfect Intelligence…
14. RAMBAM suggests that the best time to truly reflect on the type of matters discussed by RAMA is at the end of one’s day, when rather than praying or studying Torah, one is alone and undistracted:

   RAMBAM, Guide to the Perplexed 111:51
   …When however you are alone with yourself and no one else is there and while you lie awake upon your bed, you should take great care during these precious times not to set your thought to work on anything other than the intellectual worship consisting in nearness to God and being in His Presence in that true reality that I have made known to you…

15. It is notable that whereas the statement in Sanhedrin 22a cited above suggests that the existential reality of prayer is realized when there is a sensibility that one is communicating directly with the Divine, halachic decisors appear to view the awareness that one is in the Presence of God as only one among many practical and ritual prerequisites in order to fulfill this Commandment:

   RAMBAM, Mishna Torah, Hilchot Tefilla 4:1,15,16
   There are five things that prevent prayer from taking place even if the proper time of day has arrived: 1) the purity of one’s hands, 2) the covering of “nakedness,” 3) the purity of the place of prayer, 4) matters that cause the pray-er to rush, and 5) the intention of the heart.

   What is the intention of the heart? Any prayer that is devoid of intention of the heart is not a prayer. And if one prays lacking intention of the heart, he must repeat the prayer with intention of the heart…

   (By virtue of RAMBAM listing the intention of awareness that one is standing before God not as a value unto itself, but rather as the last of five prerequisites of prayer would appear to devalue the emphasis that R. Shimon Chasida places upon this awareness in Sanhedrin.)

   Tur, Orach Chayim 90, 98
   One who prays must 1) prepare the place of his prayer, 2) prepare his clothing, and 3) his thoughts and body…

   What is [meant by] “his thoughts?” We learn in a Baraita (Berachot 31a): One who prays is required to direct his heart, as it is said, [Psalms 10:17] “You will Direct their heart; You will Cause Your Ear to listen.” (This is a paraphrase of the passage in Berachot that separates between the original anonymous Tanaitic statement, and Aba Shaul’s invoking of the verse in Psalms as a “Siman” [mnemonic device.]) The meaning [of “directing his heart”] is the meaning of the words that s/he utters with his/her lips, and that he must think that the Divine Presence is before him/her, as it is said, [Psalms 16:8] “I have placed the Lord before me always….”…and he should think that were he speaking before a human king, who is today alive and tomorrow in the grave, he would arrange his words and carefully choose them lest an error be made all the more so [is such care necessary] before the King of Kings, the Holy One Blessed Be He, where one has to be careful even concerning
his thoughts, because before Him, thoughts are equivalent to speech, because He
discerns all thoughts…

(As in the case of RAMBAM, Tur lists the requirement to have a particular
mindset for prayer as the third of three prerequisites, and the sensibility that one
is standing before God as secondary to an understanding of what one is saying.
Particularly in light of the Halachic position that as long as one is praying in Hebrew,
even if he does not understand most of what is being prayed, the Commandment
of prayer is considered to be fulfilled (see Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 62:2
Be’ur Halacha, d.h. Yachol LiKrato BeChol Lashon), one might have expected that
the awareness that the pray-er is standing before HaShem would have at least been
given greater prominence among the requirements for proper prayer, if not actually
listed as a “stand-alone” aspect of the prayer experience.)

_Shalchan Aruch, Orach Chayim_ 98:1

One who prays must intend/understand within his heart the meaning
of the words that he is uttering from his lips, and think as if the Divine
Presence is before him, and reflect that were he to be speaking before a
human king, he would organize his words and carefully choose them
lest an error be made, all the more so [is such care necessary] before the
King of Kings, the Holy One Blessed Be He, Who Probes the depths of
all thoughts…

(Since _Shulchan Aruch_ does not precede his discussion of the need for “inten-
tion of the heart” with an overarching statement of the various prerequisites for
prayer as did RAMBAM and Tur (Sh.A., O. Ch.90:1 reads: “One who prays should
not stand upon a bed, and not on a chair…”), it might be possible to contend that
R. Yosef Karo deliberately elevates _Kavana_ in general, and the recognition that one
is standing before God when praying in particular, to greater prominence than did
dis predecessors among the great codifiers. However, even in the _Shulchan Aruch_,
mention of understanding the words that one is praying is still listed before the
need to think that one is facing the Divine Presence while praying.)

16. The usage of the adverb _Tamid_ (always) clearly suggests that while the sensibility
of standing before God may be crucial for prayer, it is not relegated exclusively
to times of prayer, but should play a prominent role in all that one consciously
does.

17. Indications that a particular prayer is “informal” include, not requiring a quorum
of 10 adult males or a specific location for recitation, and a significantly shortened
length as compared to _Shacharit, Mincha, Ma’ariv_, etc.

18. According to R. Kook, just as one should place _HaShem_ before himself constantly,
so too the soul of man is constantly in a state of prayer.

_Olat RAYAH_, vol. 1, Introduction, p. 11

The constant prayer of the soul struggles to emerge from concealment
into the open, spread out over all the living faculties of the spirit and soul
as well as over all the forces of the entire living body…

As a result, preoccupation with _Torah_ and its wisdom is the constant unfolding of
hidden prayer of the soul. (Psalms 138:1) "The soul of every living being shall bless Your Name, Lord, our God."

19. "I gratefully thank You, O Living and Eternal King for You have returned my soul with compassion. Great is Your faithfulness."


21. May it be Your will, HaShem, my God and the God of my forefathers, that You lay me down to sleep in peace and Raise me erect in peace...and may You illuminate my eyes lest I die in sleep...*(ArtScroll Siddur, pp. 288–89.)*

- Lay us down to sleep in peace, HaShem, our God; Raise us erect, our King, to life...*(Ibid. pp. 292–93.)*
- Into His Hand I will entrust my spirit when I go to sleep - and I shall awaken! With my spirit my body shall remain, HaShem is with me, I shall not fear. *(Ibid. pp. 294–95.)*

22. "One should focus one's intentions on the meaning of the words: when the Name of God is mentioned, one should reflect [on the one hand] upon the manner in which It is pronounced with regard to His Adnut [status of Master] that He is the Master of all, as well as how It is written with the Yud Heh, reflecting His Existence in past, present and future; when Elokim [more specifically Elokeinu] is recited, one should reflect that He is Mighty, Omnipotent and Master of all forces."


24. *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim* 46:2 attributes the shift of these blessings from early morning arising at home to the beginning of Shacharit (the morning services) in the synagogue to ritual impurity and general illiteracy.

25. *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim* 46:1
   a) When one awakens, he should say...
   b) When he hears the sound of the rooster, he should say...
   c) When he dresses, he should say...


27. *Pesachim* 117a omits “conversation.” See fn. 87 below.

28. One reason why prophecy might be precluded by laziness, is that the prophet typically will have to energetically either deliver or act upon the Divine Message with which he was entrusted, as opposed to the typical prayer, who is not necessarily expected to do anything in particular once he is finished praying. Furthermore, due to prayer's frequency, perhaps a lower standard is established, so that individuals will have less of an excuse not to pray. See the later discussion of halachic decisors who stood down from the standard of focus and concentration originally called for with regard to prayer.

29. Whereas much prophecy takes place when the prophet is alone, prayer ideally is a social experience, and therefore the temptation for conversation and joking with another is considerable.


31. Although many biblical commentators interpret BeRagesh as connoting an experi-
ence undertaken by a group of people, in light of the comments of *Chafetz Chayim* as well as RAMBAM cited above, the term is at least understood by them to include a reference to deep emotion.

32. *Magen Avraham, Orach Chayim* 46, Introduction, attributing *HaKavanot* as his source, records a custom that in spirit parallels that of *Chafetz Chayim*, but specifically reverses the verses that are being discussed.

Before one comes to the synagogue, he should say: “And I in Your great Mercy…” When he enters he should say: “In the House of God…” …Syntactically this makes more sense than the accepted practice in light of the respective verb forms of each of the verses in question, i.e., Psalms 5:8 *Avo Beitecha* [I will come to Your House], as opposed to Psalms 55:15 *Neileich* [we are walking], implying that one is already within.

33. An Internet search results in discovering that in synagogues around the world, the following verses expressing more or less parallel sentiments to Psalms 55:15 were inscribed in some manner above the entrances of various synagogues around the world:

   Psalms 118:20 “This is the Gate of *HaShem*, the righteous come through it.”
   http://www.hsje.org/images/Alexandria/entrance%20alexandria%20shul.jpg
   Psalms 100:4 “Come through His gates in thanks, His courtyards in praise.”
   http://www.webfeats.com/Poland/p100999/Dscno134.jpg
   Psalms 118:19 “Open up to me the gates of righteousness.” http://www.jhom.com/bookshelf/synagogues/images/page178_small.jpg
   Psalms 118:20 “…I love the habitation of Your House and the place where Your Glory dwells.” http://images.creatas.com/common/detail/00/90/22849000.jpg
   Shemot 20:20 “…and in every place where I cause My Name to be pronounced, I will come to you and bless you.” http://hobartphoto.org.au/photo_galleries/normal/CaroleBradford_Entrance,OldestsynagogueinAustralia.jpg

While these verses do not challenge the individual coming into the synagogue to reflect upon fear of God per se, nevertheless, one who sees and thinks about them on his way to pray, will have the opportunity to frame his subsequent prayers with thoughts of righteousness, thanks and blessing.

34. One might speculate as to whether or not this substitution of synagogue for Temple would continue when the Third Temple is ultimately rebuilt.

35. Deuteronomy 14:23; 31:12, 13.

36. Leviticus 19:30; 26:2.

37. “My Sabbaths you will observe and My Temple you will fear, I am the Lord.”

38. In addition to the many blessings that formulaically contain the phrase “King of the universe,” additional references to God’s Kingship are made during the course of the prayers. Here is a listing of such terminology in the section of weekday *Shacharit* known as *Pesukei D’Zimra* (the verses of song/praise):

   a) Blessed is the Name of His glorious Kingdom for all eternity. (ArtScroll *Siddur*, pp. 28–29; 40–41.)

   b) Let all who walk the earth recognize and know that You alone are the God over all the kingdoms of the earth. (Ibid. pp. 28–29)
c) May He give reign to His Kingship in your lifetimes and in your days, and in the lifetimes of the entire family of Israel, swiftly and soon. (Ibid. pp. 52–53; 56–57)

d) We shall exalt You, praise You, glorify You, mention Your Name and proclaim Your reign, our King, our God. O Unique One, Life-giver of the worlds, King Whose great Name is eternally praised and glorified. Blessed are You, HaShem, the King who is lauded with praises. (Ibid. pp. 60–61)

e) (Psalms 20:10) May the King answer us on the day we call. (Ibid. pp. 62–63; 66–67)

f) (Psalms 103:19) HaShem has established His throne in the heavens, and His kingdom reigns over all. (Ibid. pp. 64–67)

g) The heavens will be glad and the earth will rejoice; they will proclaim among the nations, (1 Chronicles 16:31) “HaShem has Reigned.” (Psalms 10:16) “HaShem Reigns.” “HaShem has Reigned.” (Exodus 15:18) “HaShem will Reign for all eternity.” (Psalms 10:16) “HaShem Reigns forever and ever, even when the nations have perished from his earth.” (Ibid. pp. 66–67)

h) Psalms 145:11–12) Of the Glory of Your Kingdom they will speak, and of Your Power they will tell…

To inform human beings of His mighty Deeds, and the glorious splendor of His Kingdom.

Your Kingdom is a Kingdom spanning all eternities, and Your Dominion is throughout every generation. (Ibid. pp. 68–69)

i) (Psalms 146:10) HaShem shall Reign forever, your God, O Zion, from generation to generation, Halleluja. (Ibid. pp. 68–69)

j) (Psalms 147:5) Great is our Lord, and abundant in strength, His understanding is beyond calculation. (Ibid. pp. 70–71)

k) (Psalms 149:2) Let Israel exult in its Maker; let the Children of Zion rejoice in their King. (Ibid. pp. 72–73)

l) (1 Chronicles 29:11) Yours HaShem is the greatness, the strength, the splendor, the triumph, the glory, even everything in Heaven and earth. Yours HaShem is the kingdom and the sovereignty of every leader. (Ibid. pp. 76–77)

m) (Exodus 15:18) HaShem shall rule for all eternity [followed by Aramaic translation]. (Ibid. pp. 80–81)

n) (Psalms 22:29) For sovereignty is HaShem’s and He rules over nations. (Ibid. pp. 80. 81)

o) (Obadiah 1:21) The saviors will ascend Mt. Zion to judge Esau’s mountain, and the kingdom will be HaShem’s. (Ibid. pp. 80–81)

p) (Zacharia 14:9) Then HaShem will Be King over all the world and on that day HaShem will Be One and His Name One. (Ibid. pp. 80–81)

q) May Your Name be praised forever, Our King, God, the Great and Holy King in Heaven and on earth. (Ibid. pp. 82–83)

r) Blessed are You, HaShem, God, King, exalted through praises, God of thanks-
givings, master of wonders, who chooses songs of praise, King, God, Life-giver of the world. (Ibid. pp. 82–83)

39. In Neil Folberg’s And I Shall Dwell Among Them: Historic Synagogues of the World, (An Aperture Book), photographs from distinctive synagogues from around the world include the following verses on walls, Arks, curtains, covers and charts:

2. Deuteronomy 10:12: And now Israel what does the Lord your God Ask from you other than to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all of His Ways, and to love Him, and to serve the Lord your God with all your heart, and all your soul. – pp. 20, 58.
4. Psalms 16:8: I have placed HaShem before me always. – pp. 27, 44, 62, 65, 97, 103, 158.
5. Otzar HaMidrashim Eliezer p. 29 Know before Whom you stand. – pp. 28–31, 158.
6. Habakkuk 2:20: There was silent before Him the entire earth. – p. 37.
7. Psalms 137:5: If I forget you Jerusalem, let me forget my right hand. – p. 50.
8. Deuteronomy 6:4–9: Shema and blessed be His Glorious Name, His kingdom should be forever. – pp. 60, 88.
9. The symbol of a Koheni’s hands in the position to give the Divine Blessing – pp. 89, 92, 94–95.
10. Malachi 1:11: From the rising of the sun until its setting, great is My Name among the nations. – pp. 46, 97.
11. Avot 5:20: [R. Yehuda ben Teima said] Be audacious like a leopard, swift as an eagle, run like a deer, and be strong like a lion to do the will of your Father in Heaven. – p. 97
14. Genesis 28:17: …How awesome is this place! This is none other than the House of God and the Gateway to Heaven. – p. 97.

A virtual Shiviti is offered at the following website: http://www.kosherTorah.com/shivitisaver.html accompanied by a halachic opinion concerning the permissibility of erasing the Shem HaShem from a computer screen http://www.cckollel.org/html/heritage/questions/question37a.shtml A respondent to Rabbi Dr. Asher Meir’s essay regarding overcoming viewing improper sites on the Internet (http://besr.org/ethnic/impropsites.html) recommends the installation of such a Shiviti!


“He is the maker of heaven and earth, the sea and all that is in it.” – Ibid. pp. 70–71.
“For He commanded them and they were created.” – Ibid. pp. 72–73.
(All of the references to aspects of nature praising HaShem also assumes that they are acknowledging their Creator.)
“Gives reward to those who fear Him” – Ibid.
“He will have arrived as judge of the earth.” – Ibid. 62–63.
“He let no man rob them [the Jewish people] and He rebuked kings for their sake.” – Ibid. pp. 60–61.
“Gather us and rescue us from the nations.” – Ibid. 62–63.
“Relate among all peoples His wonders.” – Ibid.
“You imposed signs and wonders upon Pharoah and all his servants and upon all the people of the land.” – Ibid. pp. 76–77.
“You split the sea before them and they crossed in the midst of the sea on dry land.” – Ibid. pp. 78–79.
(The Song of the Sea explores this theme in even greater detail.)
45. “Give thanks to HaShem for He is good; His kindness endures forever.” – Ibid. pp. 63–64.
“May Your kindness and truth always protect me.” – Ibid.
“May Your kindness, HaShem, be upon us, just as we awaited You.” – Ibid. pp. 64–65.
“Show us Your kindness, HaShem…” – Ibid.
“Gracious and merciful is HaShem, slow to anger and great in bestowing kindness.” – Ibid. pp. 68–69.
46. Aruch HaShulchan, basing himself on an anecdotal report in the Talmud, makes a distinction with regard to special clothing between times of trouble and times of peace, between Shabbat and Yom Tov.
Aruch HaShulchan, Orach Chayim 91:2

And also it was said there [in Shabbat 10a] that R. Ashi said: I saw R. Kahana, when there was trouble in the world, would take off his cloak as if to say he took off his cloak from upon him so he should not appear like an important person [RASHI], and when there was peace in the world he would dress himself and cover himself and wrap himself and say, "Prepare to meet your God, Israel." And in times of trouble he would take off his cloak and clasp his hand and fingers like a person troubled due to fear of his master.

And therefore it is possible to derive that now, when there is trouble in the world, one should pray Mincha and Ma’ariv [why does the decisor
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omit Shacharit?] in the weekday without a top garment [jacket?] and on Shabbat and Yom Tov, one should pray with a top garment because we do not recall the troubles on Shabbat and Yom Tov… Consequently, at least according to this view, preparing for prayer in terms of dress not only may involve putting on special garments, but also taking them off within particular contexts!

48. Ibid. pp. 84–85, 142–43.
51. Chafetz Chayim, in Mishna Berura 131, 3 notes that originally the posture that would be assumed during the recitation of Tachanun (ArtScroll Siddur, pp. 132–33) (and for that matter at the end of Selichot recited during the Penitential period) was one where the individual would literally fall to the ground, but without extending his arms and legs in full prostration. However, the present custom is merely to cover one's face. The act of at least covering one's face as a result of the fear and concern that has arisen as a result of the intense prayer experience until this point parallels the actions of Moshe, Aaron and Joshua in Numbers 16:22 and Joshua 7:6.

52. While the distinction listed here between what the congregation does regarding the Aleinu prayer on Rosh HaShana as opposed to Yom HaKippurim is based upon a comment of Magen Avraham on Orach Chayim 131, 2, it is customary in many Ashkenazic synagogues for everyone to prostrate themselves both on Rosh HaShana and Yom HaKippurim, as stated in Machzor Chayim Yechezkel, (The Complete ArtScroll Machzor, Yom Kippur, ed. R. Nosson Scherman and R. Meir Zlotowitz (New York: Mesorah Publications Ltd., 1986), p. 549.

…There are varying customs [re Aleinu]: In some congregations, everyone kneels and brings his face to the floor; in some everyone kneels and bows but does not bring his fact to the floor; and in some only the Chazzan kneels and bows, with or without bringing his face to the floor…

53. An example of a modern day form of responsa expanding upon this issue appears on the website of the Chicago Eruv Inc. http://www.geocities.com/chicagoeruv/
54. A term appearing in Ezekiel 27:6, connoting far-off places.
55. A paraphrase of Jeremiah 5:21; Ezekiel 12:2; Psalms 115:5; 135:16.
56. In its introduction to the pamphlet entitled "Kunteros Galut HaShechina" (Brooklyn, 5740), p. 3, consisting of a collection of sources from different epochs of Jewish history bemoaning the lack of decorum in synagogues and warning of the potential consequences should the situation not improve, the organization Vaad LeHaromat Keren HaTorah, Committee to Strengthen Torah Judaism, writes:

[Leviticus 19:30; 26:2] “And from My Temple you shall fear!”

We the undersigned [78 Rabbis and Roshei Yeshiva are listed] are troubled to hear how many of the Jewish people – men, women and children – take lightly the holiness of houses of prayer and study, and engage there in conversations of no import and secular matters even during prayers and the reading of the Torah
– mostly as a result of ignorance regarding the significance and gravity of the transgression, but some due to disrespect, frivolity and rebelliousness, Heaven Forbid. Woe to the ears that hear that the holiness of synagogues is reduced to something that people do not take seriously…

57. In one of his letters, RAMBAM takes to task those who pray exceedingly quickly:


...Surely the recitation of 100 blessings or the praises in haste and at great speed is a complete sin. And whoever does not restrain leaders of the prayer services in this matter sins. All of these religious acts that are functions of speech, the requisite intention for them is reflection during the time of their being spoken, and the one saying them must direct his mind, and realize that with the Master of the entire universe he is speaking by means of them, whether he is requesting something of Him, or he is thanking Him or praising Him, or he is recounting His Actions and Kindnesses, or he is telling His Miracles as manifested in His Creations and His Power. These are the categories that encompass all the blessings or poems or verses of praise. And since all of this is speaking with Him Who is Exalted, how is speed allowed in such a matter? It will constitute a removal of the mind/attention from what is being said. If we are dealing with someone who does not know and does not understand what is being said, with regard to prayer he is considered no more than a parrot or raven, who has been trained to speak human words.


59. The fictitious name that Heilman gives to the Orthodox congregation that he describes in his book.

60. This particular *Shabbat* was chosen because of the reading of Exodus 14:14 – “The Lord shall Fight for you, and you will be silent.” (I have never been fully compatible with this textual association. While congregants might be urged to refrain from conversation, this does not mean that they should be silent! On the contrary, heart-felt prayer involves enunciating the words that are being recited. While during *Amida*, voices are not to be raised to the point where one's fellow congregant can hear what is being said, that does not mean that the individual is silent. The phrase in I Samuel 1:13, “…Only her lips were moving, but her voice was not heard,” describing Chana's prayers requesting finally having a child, is cited by *Berachot* 31a as the paradigm for Jewish prayer, i.e., the *Amida*. The proper recitation of *Kriyat Shema*, on the other hand, specifically requires the words to be pronounced in an audible manner in order to satisfy R. Yosi's view in *Berachot* 15a. With respect to the rest of the prayer service, certainly the portions that consist of blessings should be pronounced carefully and loudly enough so that one can hear what he is saying. Consider the following regarding the recitation of blessings outside the context of
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prayer, which Chafetz Chayim in Mishna Berura 62, 5 cross-references with respect to the blessings surrounding and following Kriyat Shema:

Aruch HaShulchan, Orach Chayim 206:5

One needs to pronounce each blessing so that he can hear his own words, and not like those who bless in whispers to the point that they themselves do not hear and therefore do not completely recite the blessing. But rather one should bless in a low voice pronouncing each individual word...

Consequently to represent the ideal as being silent during prayer as the Jews were requested to be when standing at the edge of the Sea of Reeds, in my opinion, misses the point. Refraining from conversation does not constitute "silence" during prayer.


62. Ironically, some of the disturbances that most profoundly detract from a spirit of Yirat HaShem in the synagogue are verbal disputes between congregants and synagogue officials regarding the proper order of prayers or honors bestowed at a given service. See the ou's Synagogue Trends, 11:2 (Spring 1998) at http://www.ou.org/pdf/syntrends/SynTrends_Spring_1998.pdf


64. The term Me'akev (prevents) typically carries with it the connotation that not only will the commandment being discussed not be fulfilled LeChatchila (appriori), but even BeDi' avad (aposteori).

65. The fact that this leniency is attributed to Tosafot in general and R. Meir MiRotenberg in particular, raises the possibility that not praying with proper Kavana constitutes another instance where the Rabbinic authorities of Ashkenaz found a means by which to justify somewhat questionable practices on the part of their constituencies. See Haym Soloveitchik, “Religious Law and Change: The Medieval Ashkenazic Example,” AJS Review, 12:2 (Autumn 1987), pp. 205–21.

66. Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 98:2 quotes the position of our not being careful regarding matters of Kavana in Tefilla anonymously. Shulchan Aruch HaRav, Orach Chayim 98, on the other hand, makes no exceptions for “our times” and essentially presents the highest Kavana requirements in unmitigated form.

67. An additional manifestation of the caveat that the standard level of minimum Kavana has changed the baseline of our expectations for what is necessary in order to legitimize engaging in prayer, is presented by Magen Avraham.

Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 89:8

At times of duress, e.g., one has to rise early in order to set out on a journey, it is possible to pray once the morning star has arisen, and wait to recite Kriyat Shema until its time comes. And although in this way he will not juxtapose the blessing Ga’al Yisrael [Who redeemed Israel] to the beginning of the Amida, it is better that he pray the Amida in his house
while standing stationary, as opposed to praying at the proper time while walking, and then being able to juxtapose Gaal Yisrael to the Amida. Magen Avraham 16

This requires careful study because most people's practice is not to conduct themselves in this manner [i.e., to disconnect Gaal Yisrael from the Amida, but rather they wait until they can say both together]. Perhaps they follow other decisors who state that juxtaposing this blessing with the Amida is to be preferred under these circumstances. Furthermore, Rashi has explained that praying while standing stationary is preferred because in this manner one can have more Kavana; today, since we never have that much Kavana, therefore it is preferred if one would juxtapose Gaal Yisrael to Amida...

Consequently, not only does one not take into consideration the level of Kavana when determining whether or not to pray in the first place, but there are practical consequences arising from an assumption of the inability to summon up significant Kavana in terms of the order of prayer under abnormal circumstances that disturb the normal order of the prayers.

68. R. Aharon Lichtenstein speculates that a strategic decision was made by halachic decisors such as Tosafot and R. Meir MiRotenberg to the effect that if people would literally follow the directive to only pray when feel adequately prepared and inspired, prayer, both communal and individual, would perforce cease because no one wishes to risk the danger of taking HaShem's Name in vain. Therefore, in the spirit of (Tehillim 119:26) Eit La'Asot LaShem, Heifiru Et Toratecha (A time to do something on behalf of HaShem; they have violated Your Torah), the trend for high standards of Kavana was deliberately reversed by these Rabbis. (Paraphrased from the Orthodox Forum meetings, 2006.)

69. See fn. 9.


71. Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 98:1

One who is praying must intend in his heart the meaning of the words that he utters from his lips.

And he should think as if the Divine Presence is opposite him.

And he should remove all of the thoughts that are troubling him to the point where his thoughts and his Kavana are pure in his prayer.

And he should think that since were he speaking before a human king, he would organize his words and carefully express exactly what he wished to say so that he does not err, all the more so [must one do likewise] before the King of Kings, the Holy One Blessed Be He, Who Discerns all thoughts.

And the pious ones and accomplisher of great spiritual deeds would isolate themselves and reflect upon their prayers to the point where they would divest themselves of their physicality and the domination of
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their intellectual powers, until they would achieve close to the level of prophecy.

And if an extraneous thought comes to him during his prayer, he should be silent until the thought departs.

And he should think of things that subjugate the heart and direct them towards his Father in Heaven.

And he should not think of things that are associated with frivolousness.

This statement can be divided up between those things that are to be done positively in order to enhance prayer, and those things that are to be avoided so that at least a minimal form of prayer can be achieved. Chafetz Chayim is stating that whereas the former may no longer be possible for the average individual, the latter is certainly doable and ought to be pursued.


73. It must be admitted that even perfunctory prayer may be better than no prayer at all, since there is at least the possibility that eventually, at some future point, the pray-er will be able to invest proper meaning and intention within his ritual performances that presently are empty and meaningless. Such is R. Norman Lamm’s recommendation to someone who harbors substantive doubt regarding the nature of his beliefs and his relationship to God:


…When we are convinced…that confrontation precedes cognition that the existential encounter and the sense of trust have priority over the propositional belief – that aspect of faith, then we shall realize that it is possible by an act of will to locate ourselves in a situation of prayer...

74. The manner in which Orthodox synagogue services are portrayed in contemporary American fiction illustrate the perceptions as well as the realities of the typical synagogue experience that is currently extent. Examples of such descriptions appear in the two works of Tova Mirvis, The Ladies Auxiliary, Chapt. 2 (New York: Ballantine Books, 1999); The Outside World, Chapt. 14, New York: Vintage Books, 2004); as well as Robert Greenfield’s Temple, Chaps. 14, 21 (New York: Summit Books, 1982).


75. Three major initiatives recently undertaken by the Orthodox Union focus upon: a) synagogue decorum with respect to improper conversation during prayer services, b) the “kiddush club” phenomenon whereby members of the congregation leave the sanctuary usually during the reading of the Haftora in order to make Kiddush early
and thereby engage in social drinking before services end, and c) drunkenness on Purim. All three situations targeted by the OU’s programs were at least indirectly related to prayer. A general impression on the part of most Orthodox Jews appears to be that while a great deal of discussion has been generated by the OU’s calling attention to these issues, to say that substantive change has taken place in a significant number of synagogues is questionable, and at best too early to tell.

76. R. Moshe Lichtenstein commented, probably only half in jest that in Israel a metaphor for this type of total authority is a Brigadier General. While such a reference has power within a country where there is a universal draft, in the United States, military reference points might have meant something to WWII veterans, but not very much to the average American today. (A comment made at the Orthodox Forum meetings of 2006.)


78. The change in American society from a book to a video culture does not only impact the religious community. Schools and colleges are moving away from text books, record storage is done electronically rather than by creating paper records, television shows and web casts serve as the source for current events and the news, rather than newspapers and periodicals.

79. The historian Edward S. Shapiro, in his analysis of the current state of Modern Orthodoxy (“Modern Orthodoxy in Crisis: A Test Case,” *Judaism* (Summer 2002) writes:

Modern Orthodox Jews have sought, often unsuccessfully, to reconcile the demands of Halacha with the attractions of American materialism, to live a lifestyle which Charles Leibman has described as “half-pagan, half-Halachic.” Dodi Tobin, in her paper “Parent-Child Relationships in the Context of a Year of Study in a Post-High School Yeshiva Program in Israel,” pp. 24–25 (http://www.atid.org/journal/journal00/tobin.doc ), when describing the community experience that students coming to Israel for a year leave behind, writes:

…the Modern Orthodox communities in the U.S. which were described by a *New York Times* reporter as places where “huge houses are being torn down to build even huger ones”…

The description of the Modern Orthodox community in America suggests a lifestyle embodying both piety and excess, two values that are contradictory. Indeed the values taught to Modern Orthodox students in America may contain a mixed message…

The shallowness of contemporary modern Orthodox thought is somewhat laid at the feet of the attractions of materialism when Alan Mittleman, “Fretful Orthodoxy,” *First Things*, 136 (October 2003) http://www.firstthings.com/ftissues/ft0310/opinion/mittleman.html ) writes:

Modern Orthodoxy’s immense success in building up a socially vibrant culture in the American suburbs has distracted it from the requisite intellectual task of providing depth and justification for its way of life.
“...The essence of the behavioral and thought patterns of American Jewry fits most appropriately into the general climate of America as a whole. The very ethos of this land is still a-theological. It is basically activist and pragmatic, with an overtone of distrust for doctrine or ideology. Inwardness and speculation have rarely been advanced as primary American virtues.” – from Norman Frimer, “The A-theological Judaism of the American Jewish Community,” *Judaism*, 11 (Spring 1962), quoted in Robert G. Goldy, *The Emergence of Jewish Theology in America* (Bloomington:Indiana University Press, 1990), p. 100, fn. 19.


Sources define contemporary adult attention spans to range between 5 to 7 minutes (http://www.tonjeary.com/newsletters.cfm?action=newsletters_details&newsletterID=7151 ), 20 minutes (http://www.utexas.edu/research/cswr/psti/newsletter/trainerscorner/TC_12.php ) and 90 minutes (http://meted.ucar.edu/resource/soo/ntcanat.htm ). The typical Shabbat morning service usually lasts substantially longer than 90 minutes, while the time it takes to pray the Amida properly is longer than 5–7 minutes.

During the course of the presentation of this paper at the Orthodox Forum meetings, I strongly advocated that all programs leading to Orthodox ordination should include requirements for the study of theology and philosophy. Only in this manner can Rabbis and teachers at least come to grips with issues that will most probably plague at least some of their congregants and students. Objections were raised that such studies would possibly cause confusion and even undermine the belief of some of those exposed to it. I responded that for those who are determined to assume pulpits or join the faculties of Jewish schools, this kind of study must be part of the professional training that they receive so that they can not only respond to questions, but initiate discussions of these topics as well. Certainly in the realm of being able to assist individuals develop their Kavana for Tefilla, these disciplines are most important.


Proverbs 14:28.

The same organization that was mentioned earlier as being responsible for a pamphlet presenting the issue of talking during prayer services, has also issued “Kanteros Yosheiv Tehillot Yisrael” (the Anthology of [Psalms 22:4] You Who are Enthroned by the praises of Israel), in which is collected sources from the Talmud and Midrash exploring the nature of prayer and the attitudes that ought to accompany its performance. Aggudath Israel of America launched in 2005 a “National Tefilla Initiative” that included the free distribution to synagogue Rabbis the volume *BeRumo Shel Olam – Kavannot HaTefilla Al Pi HaPoskim* (In the Heights of the Universe [Pesachim 118a] – the Intentions of Prayer according to the Decisors) accompanied by the encouragement to dedicate sermons to this subject. This year, the organization is encouraging congregations to purchase and study
together *Praying with Fire – A 5-Minute Lesson – A – Day*, by R. Heshy Kleinman. As opposed to the *Shabbat Tacharishun* project mentioned earlier, which appears to demand no more than a cessation of all conversation – even wishing another “Shabbat Shalom” – for one *Shabbat*, these initiatives assume that sermons and *Torah* study will be necessary in order to begin to change the culture of lack of decorum.

87. See my contribution to the PEJE publication, *Noteworthy Practices in Jewish Day School Education*, Vol. 2, *Tefilla* for a description of the manner in which a synagogue and a day school can coordinate a Tefilla program designed to raise the level of students’ prayer experiences.

88. A few suggestions of this nature as well as the drawing attention of specific problems regarding synagogue decorum are presented in an engaging manner in the ou’s “Let’s Schmooze about Davening” at http://www.ou.org/services/davening/openingletter.htm
   http://www.ou.org/services/davening/part1.htm
   http://www.ou.org/services/davening/actualdavening.htm
   http://www.ou.org/services/davening/learningdavening.htm
   http://www.ou.org/services/davening/openletter.htm

89. Just as the *Ba’alei HaMusar* (individuals concerned with proper religious and ethical conduct) strongly advocate people looking to improve their behavior to engage regularly in a *Cheshbon HaNefesh* (a review of one’s personal spiritual state of affairs in the interests of identifying areas in need of improvement) the same is true for religious institutions such as *shuls* and schools.