

Prayer #20

Final Hymns on Shabbat and Yom Tov

R. Yaakov Bieler
Summer 5771

Traditionally, Ma'ariv and Musaf services on Shabbat and Yom Tov are concluded with the communal singing of either Adon Olam or Yigdal.¹ But it should be noted that standard Jewish practice calls for also reciting these poems early each weekday and Shabbat morning prior to the formal morning prayers, following the blessings over the Tora.² In light of the “bookend” nature of the recitations of these prayers, i.e., their invocation both morning and night at least on Shabbat and Yom Tov, R. Joseph Hertz, former Chief Rabbi of England,³ writes regarding Yigdal,

This hymn⁴ opens the Morning Service and is the concluding hymn on Sabbath and Festival eves. English Jews thus close their devotions on those sacred occasions as

¹ For translations, see fn. 5 below. For historical background re these two liturgical poems, see:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adon_Olam ; <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yigdal>

² See e.g., The Koren Siddur, pp. 22-5; The Complete ArtScroll Siddur, pp. 12-5.

³ The Authorized Daily Prayer Book, Bloch Pub. Co. NY, 1963, p. 400.

⁴ Although both Adon Olam and Yigdal deal with principles of belief (see the parallel passages in the two poems indicated below in fn. 5), Yigdal is far more comprehensive with respect to formulating RaMBaM's Thirteen Principles of Faith in poetic form. Here are the abbreviated form of the Thirteen Principles:

- (1) I believe with perfect faith that the Creator, blessed be His Name, Creates and Rules over all creatures, and that He alone Made, Makes, and will Make all things.
- (2) I believe with perfect faith that the Creator, blessed be His Name, is One; and there is no oneness like His in any way; and that He alone is our God Who Was, Is and ever will Be.
- (3) I believe with perfect faith that the Creator, blessed be His Name is not physical, that no physical attributes can apply to Him, and that there is nothing whatsoever to compare to Him.
- (4) I believe with perfect faith that the Creator, blessed be His Name, is first and last.
- (5) I believe with perfect faith that the Creator, blessed be His Name, is the only One to Whom it is proper to pray, and that it is improper to pray to anyone else.
- (6) I believe with perfect faith that all of the words of the prophets are true.
- (7) I believe with perfect faith that the prophecy of Moses our teacher, peace be to him, was true, and that he was the father of the prophets—those who preceded him and those who followed him.
- (8) I believe with perfect faith that the entire Tora now in our hands is the same one that was given to Moses our teacher, peace be unto him.
- (9) I believe with perfect faith that this Tora will not be changed, nor will there be any other Tora from the Creator, blessed be His Name.
- (10) I believe with perfect faith that the Creator, blessed be His Name, Knows all the deeds and thoughts of humanity, as it is said, (Tehillim 33:15) “He fashions hearts of them all, comprehending all their deeds.”
- (11) I believe with perfect faith that the Creator, blessed be His Name, Rewards those who keep His Commandments, and Punishes those who transgress them.
- (12) I believe with perfect faith in the coming of the Moshiach, and though he may delay, I wait daily for his coming.
- (13) I believe with perfect faith that the dead will live again at a time of the Creator's Choosing: blessed be His Name, and exalted be His Mention forever and all time.

faithful Jews,⁵ believing in the existence of a Creator—one,⁶ spiritual⁷ and eternal;⁸ believing in Prophecy⁹ and the Tora of Moses;¹⁰ in the rule of justice in God’s universe;¹¹ in the Messiah,¹² and in the immortality of the soul...¹³

R. Hertz therefore emphasizes the role played by the recitation of Yigdal at the end of the Shabbat and Yom Tov services, i.e., now that the individual is relieved of his weekday concerns of profession and earning a livelihood, he is able and even encouraged to turn his thoughts to not only enjoying Oneg Shabbat and Simchat Yom Tov, but also reflecting upon the deep beliefs and trust which lie at the heart of Judaism. While during the week he may have time only to recite these ideas “on the fly”, the daily

5

Adon Olam

Yigdal

(trans. from Authorized Daily Prayer Book)

(a) Lord of the World, He Reigned alone While yet the universe was naught,	(1) The Living God we praise, exalt adore! He Was, He Is, He Will be evermore!
(b) When by His Will all things were Wrought, Then first His Sovereign Name was known.	(2) No unity like unto His can be: Eternal, inconceivable is He.
(c) And when the all shall cease to be, He dread lone splendor He shall Reign.	(3) No form, or shape has the Incorporeal One. Most Holy He, past all comparison.
(d) He Was, He Is, He shall Remain In glorious eternity.	(4) He was, ere aught was made in Heaven, or earth. But His Existence has no date, or birth.
(e) For He is One, no second shares His Nature or His Loneliness;	(5) Lord of the Universe is He Proclaimed, Teaching His Power to all His Hand has framed.
(f) Unending and beginningless, All strength is His, all sway He Bears.	(6) He Gave His Gift of Prophecy to those In whom He Gloried, whom He Loved and Chose.
(g) He is the Living God to save, My Rock while sorrow’s toils endure.	(7) No prophet ever yet has filled the place Of Moses, who beheld God face to face.
(h) My banner and my stronghold sure, The cup of life whene’er I crave.	(8) Through Him (the faithful in His House) the Lord The law of truth to Israel did Accord.
(i) I place my soul within His Palm Before I sleep as when I wake.	(9) This law God will not Alter, will not change For any other through time’s utmost range.
(j) And though my body I forsake, Rest in the Lord in fearless calm.	(10) He Knows and Heeds the secret thoughts of man: He Saw the end of all ere aught began.
	(11) With love and grace doth He the righteous bless, He Metes out evil into wickedness.
	(12) He at the last, will His Appointed Send, Those to redeem, who hope and wait the end.
	(13) God will the dead to life again Restore. Praised be His glorious Name for evermore.

⁶ Yigdal stanza (2).

⁷ Ibid. stanza (3).

⁸ Ibid. stanzas (1), (4).

⁹ Ibid. stanzas (6), (7).

¹⁰ Ibid. stanzas (8), (9).

¹¹ Ibid. stanza (11).

¹² Ibid. stanza (12).

¹³ Ibid. stanza (13).

repetitions serve well to prepare him to more thoughtfully reflect on the principles of faith once Shabbat and Yom Tov arrive.

The central themes associated with Shabbat and Yom Tov could be understood to reinforce the principles contained within Yigdal and Adon Olam, and vice versa, in the following manner: The two major historical events that are mentioned in Kiddush for Shabbat (one of which is also emphasized in the Yom Tov Kiddush),¹⁴ and which served as the rationales for the Mitzva when Shabbat was first presented¹⁵ to the Jewish people in the Ten Commandments,¹⁶ are 1) the Creation of the universe and

¹⁴ Friday night Kiddush:

Blessed are You, Lord, our God, King of the Universe, who Sanctified us with His Commandments and Desired us, and Gave us His holy Sabbath with love and pleasure, as an inheritance, **a remembrance of the act of creation.** For the Sabbath is the first of the holidays, **a remembrance of the Exodus from Egypt.** For You have Chosen us, and Made us holy from all the nations, and You Gave us Your holy Sabbath with love and pleasure; Blessed are You, Holy Master, who Sanctifies the Sabbath.

Yom Tov Kiddush:

Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the universe, Who chose us from all the nations, and Elevated us above all tongues, and Sanctified us with His Commandments. And You Gave us, Lord our God, with love, [Sabbaths for rest and] festivals for happiness, holidays and times for joy, this day [of Sabbath and this day of]

- (on *Pesach*: the Festival of Matzot, the time of our freedom
- (on *Shavuot*): the Festival of Weeks, the time of the giving of our Torah
- (on *Shemini Atzeret/Simchat Torah*): the eighth day, the Festival of Assembly, the time of our happiness

[with love], a holy convocation, **a remembrance of the Exodus from Egypt.** Because You Chose us, and Sanctified us from all the nations, [and Sabbath] and Your holy festivals [in love and in favor] in happiness and in joy You have Given us as a heritage. Blessed are You, God, Who Sanctifies [the Sabbath] and Israel and the holiday seasons. (Amen). *(It is understandable why the Creation is mentioned only in the Shabbat Kiddush, as opposed to that recited on Festivals. The Festivals are all associated with the Exodus from Egypt: Pesach—the actual Exodus; Shavuot—the receiving of the Tora at Sinai fifty days after the Exodus; Sukkot—the journeys in the desert for forty years. While Yom Tov is associated with Shabbat because Shabbat is technically considered one of the festivals—see VaYikra 23:2-3 with respect to the verses that immediately follow—nevertheless Creation is more directly connected with Shabbat than with the Festivals.)*

¹⁵ There is a Rabbinic tradition that Shabbat was among the Mitzvot taught the Jewish people at Mara, and therefore some time prior to Sinai, based upon the verse (Shemot 15:25) “And he cried unto the LORD; and the LORD showed him a tree, and he cast it into the waters, and the waters were made sweet. There He made for them a statute and an ordinance, and there He tested them”. An aspect of Shabbat that the Tora text explicitly mentions prior to Sinai is associated with gathering and preparing the Manna, a phenomenon that also preceded Sinai: (Shemot 16:22-6) “And he said unto them: 'This is that which the LORD hath spoken: To-morrow is a solemn rest, a holy Sabbath unto the LORD. Bake that which ye will bake, and seethe that which ye will seethe; and all that remaineth over lay up for you to be kept until the morning.' And they laid it up till the morning, as Moses bade; and it did not rot, neither was there any worm therein. And Moses said: 'Eat that to-day; for to-day is a Sabbath unto the LORD; to-day ye shall not find it in the field. Six days ye shall gather it; but on the seventh day is the Sabbath, in it there shall be none.” Nevertheless, there is no clear indication that the laws of Shabbat in their entirety were taught to the Jewish people before Moshe descends from Sinai.

¹⁶ Shemot 20:10

For in six days the LORD Made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and Rested on the seventh day; wherefore the LORD Blessed the Sabbath day, and Hallowed it.

Devarim 5:14

2) the Exodus from Egypt. These two seminal happenings in the relationship between God and man in general, and His Interactions with the Jews in particular, serve as touchstones with respect to establishing the majority of the key principles of Jewish belief:

The Creation

- i) God is the Creator of all things (AO b).
- ii) His Existence preceded that of anything else, including matter (AO a,c; Y 4).
- iii) He is not subject to time or change, qualities that affect only that which was Created (AO c,d; Y 1, 2, 4).
- iv) God is Unique for no other entity could have accomplished the Creation (AO a, e, f; Y 5).

The Exodus

- v) God's Ability to Perform miracles is an indication that He Brought into existence the substances and entities which He is Causing to act unnaturally (AO b; Y 5).
- vi) God is the Source of salvation and redemption (if He can Do this for the Jewish people, He can Do this for individuals as well (AO g, h, l, j; Y 12, 13).
- vii) God Communicated with human beings by means of prophecy (Y 6, 7).
- viii) God has Revealed His Will via the Tora to His People (the Commandment of Sephirat HaOmer demonstrates the organic link between Pesach and Shavuot) (Y 8, 9).
- ix) The wicked (the Egyptians, Pharoah) will ultimately be judged and the righteous (the Jews prepared to follow Moshe out of Egypt) rewarded (Y 11).
- x) He Knows and Manipulates the hearts of men (Pharoah) (Y 10).
- xi) God Redeems a nation by Sending His Representative (Moshe) (Y 12).

Jonathan Sacks¹⁷ writes about hymns like Yigdal and Adon Olam,

...The presence of (Adon Olam and) Yigdal in the Siddur reminds us that it is not only a book of prayer, but also the supreme book of Jewish faith. Judaism contains little systematic theology. We speak of God more than we speak *about* God. Yet Judaism is a faith whose distinctive beliefs find their home in the prayer book. We do not analyze faith in academic detachment. We sing it, affirming faith with joy.

It is very evocative to consider the singing of Yigdal and Adon Olam as a musical rendition of the principles of Jewish belief, best contemplated on Shabbat and Yom Tov. The next time we are sitting back in shul and enjoying the communal choral harmonies of these poems, our thoughts should simultaneously turn in reflection to the foundations of our religion.

And thou shalt remember that thou was a servant in the land of Egypt, and the LORD thy God Brought thee out thence by a Mighty Hand and by an Outstretched Arm; therefore the LORD thy God Commanded thee to keep the Sabbath day.

¹⁷ The Koren Siddur, Koren Publishers, Jerusalem, 2009, p. 369.