

## An Outline of the *Amidah's* Blessings

The structure of the *Amidah* is explained in the following *Talmudic* passage:

Rav Yehudah said, "One should never request his needs in the first three [*b'rakhot*] or in the last three [*b'rakhot*] but only in the middle ones, since Rabbi Hanan said, "The first section – like a servant who organizes his praise of his master; the middle – like a servant requesting payment from his master; the end – like a servant who received payment from his master and takes his leave."<sup>28</sup>

### *B B'rakhot 34a*

Blessings 1-3 are always the same, regardless of when the *Amidah* is recited. These are blessings of praise (שבח).

1. Patriarchs—*Avot*. The Conservative Movement now allows the *Shliah Tzibbur* the option of including the Matriarchs (*Imahot*) in this introductory blessing.
2. God's Might—*G'vurot*.
3. Holiness of God's Name—*K'dushat HaShem* (*k'dushah* = angelic liturgy, morning and afternoon)

Blessings 4-16 are petitionary (בקשה) prayers which are omitted on *Shabbat* and festivals; replaced by a single blessing on the theme of the day. As Steven Brown notes in *Higher and Higher*,<sup>29</sup> these blessings can be divided into three categories of spiritual, personal, and national needs.

Spiritual Needs – These first four blessings correspond to what Maimonides described as a process of true repentance and change:

1. Insight – *Binah* – First, we become aware of the wrongs committed.
2. Repentance – *T'shuvah* – We then admit the wrong doing, first to ourselves and then to the offended party.
3. Forgiveness – *Slichah* – Then we ask forgiveness from the person we offended.
4. Redemption – *G'ulah* – Finally, when we prevent ourselves from committing the same mistake again, we are redeemed.

<sup>28</sup>Adapted with permission from Steven M. Brown, *Higher and Higher: Making Jewish Prayer Part of U.* (New York: United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism – Department of Youth Services, 1996, 7<sup>th</sup> printing).

<sup>29</sup>Ibid. 117.

Physical Needs – Personal. Once we have attended to our spiritual needs, we can turn to our physical ones.

5. Health and Healing: *R'fuah*
6. Year of Prosperity: *Birkat HaShanim*

Physical Needs – National. We then shift focus from the personal to the collective with our expressions of hope of reunification of the Jewish people in the land of Israel with justice and self-rule, and the return of God's presence to the land of Israel, with a rebuilt and rejuvenated Jerusalem as its capital.

7. Ingathering of the Exiles: *Kibbutz Galuyot*
8. Restoration of Justice: *Birkat HaMishpat/Din*
9. Against Heretics: *Birkat HaMinim*
10. The Righteous: *Birkat HaTzadikim*
11. Rebuilding Jerusalem: *Boneh Y'rushalayim*
12. Davidic Reign: *Tzemaḥ David*

The final petition stands somewhat apart from the others. Here is where we ask God to hear our prayers. This is the point where the Rabbis taught that it is appropriate to insert our own private requests to God.

13. Acceptance of Prayer: *Shomeah T'fillah*

Blessings 14-16 are the same, regardless of when the *Amidah* is recited. These are blessings of thanksgiving (תודה).

14. Temple Service – *Avodah*. This prayer recalls the special sacrificial service that was performed during the days of the Temple. Now, we recite it as an expression of hope that Zion will always remain at the center of Judaism. Here, special insertions are made for *Rosh Hodesh* (the new month) and intermediate days of festivals, because they too make reference to the ancient practices of sacrifice.
15. Thanksgiving – *Hoda'ah/Modim*. Here, we are thanking God for the daily miracles in our lives, those seen and unseen. Because of its connection to miracles, this is the point where special prayers for *Hanukkah* and *Purim*, two holidays which center around miracles, are inserted.
16. Peace – *Birkat HaKohanim/Birkat HaShalom/Priestly Benediction* (Numbers 6:24-26), and the blessing for peace. (This blessing has evening and morning versions with basically the same meaning. In the afternoon and evening services, we recite *Shalom Rav*; in the morning we recite *Sim Shalom*.)