

The Structure and Thesis of the Amidah in three session

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Session 1: The Middle Blessings

I **Amidah origins**

על שלשה זכרים העוֹלָם עוֹמֵד,

Hezekiah

2Chronicles 31:21

בעבודת בית-האֱלֹהִים נִתְוַרֵּה וּבָמֶצֶנָּה

Shimon Haṣadik

Avot 1:2

על הַתּוֹרָה וּלְהַעֲבֹדָה וּלְגָמִילוֹת חֲסִידִים

Rabban Yoḥanan b. Zakkai

Avot De'Rebbe Natan 4, p. 23

וְאַשְׁנָה בָּה לְתַלְמִידִי וְאַקְבָּעַ בָּה תִּפְלָה וְאַעֲשָׂה בָּה כָּל מְצֹוֹת

Rabban Gamliel

Mishnah Berakhot 4:3

בָּכֶל יוֹם מִתְפָּלֵל אָדָם שְׁמָנָה עֲשָׂרָה

II **Major explicators of the structure of the Amidah.**

R. Sa'adyah Gaon, 10th century

R. Judah Halevi, early 12th century

Maimonides, late 12th century

R. Asher b. Shaul 13th century

Rabbenu Bahya b. Asher 14th century

Eliezer Levi and Ezra Fleischer 20th century

Six and six

III The redemptive thesis divides the Amidah into six units:

- Unit I: Blessings 1–3
 - Unit II: Blessings 4–7
 - Unit III: Blessings 8 and 9
 - Unit IV: Blessings 10–15/16 (16 ends the unit with a plea for prayer to be answered which is thematically independent of the unit)
 - Unit V: Blessings 17 and 18
- Unit VI: blessing 19, Explication of Priestly Benediction, independent of thesis.

IV Amoraic contribution to the understanding of the **Amidah structure**

In the mid-third century, the Amora R. Joshua b. Levi of Lydda, Israel, saw the structure of the Amidah as consisting of a beginning and ending triad of blessings of praise with a middle section of requests.

His contemporary, R. Hanina, nuanced this scheme, stating:

“The first [blessings] are like a slave who organizes his praise before his master; the middle are like a slave who requests his allotment from his master; and the last are like a slave who receives his allotment from his master and takes his leave.”

This generates a tripartite structure: Praise, requests, gratitude

Origen of Caesarea (231-250)

Each person should organize his prayer according to these topics.

This is what they are:

In the beginning and the preface of the prayer something having the force of praise should be said of God . . . (blessing 1)

After this, each person should place general thanksgiving, bringing forward for thanksgiving the benefits given many people and those he has himself received from God.

After thanksgiving, it seems to me that he ought to blame himself bitterly before God for his own sins (blessing 6)

and then ask first for healing that he may be delivered from the habit that brings him to sin (blessing 7-8)

and second for forgiveness of the sins that have been committed . . . (blessing 6-7)

And finally the prayer should be concluded with a doxology of God . . . And having begun with praise, it is right to conclude the prayer by ending with praise. (blessing 18)

V The Intermediate Blessings

The thirteen blessings consist of prayers for (6+6+1):

4. knowledge
5. return to God (= repentance)
6. forgiveness
7. deliverance
8. healing
9. year of (agricultural) prosperity
10. ingathering of the exiles
11. restoration of proper judges/leaders
12. destruction of the wicked
13. support of the righteous
14. rebuilding of Jerusalem
15. restoration of the davidic line (the Palestinian recension has one blessing for 14 and 15)
16. acceptance of prayer.

VI Blessings 4-7

Blessing 4 = the gift of intelligence

1. אֱפָה חֹזֶן לְאָדָם קָרְעָת
2. וּמְלֵפֶד לְאָנוֹשׁ בִּנָה
3. חִזְנוֹ מְאֹתָךְ דָעָה בִּינָה וִפְשָׁפֵל
4. בָּרוּךְ אֱפָה יי' חֹזֶן קָרְעָת

1. You endow humanity with intelligence
2. and teach mankind understanding
3. Endow us from Your intelligence, understanding, and discernment.
4. Blessed are You, A-donai, endower of knowledge

Blessing 5 = Torah, Avodah, Teshuvah

c	b	a
לְתוֹרַתְּךָ	אָבִינוּ	1. הַשִּׁבְנוּ
	לְעִבּוֹדָתְּךָ	2. קָרְבִּינוּ
	מַלְכֵינוּ	3. וְהַחֲזִירָנוּ
	לְפָנֶיךָ	4. בָּרוּךְ אֱפָה יי' הַרְזֹצָה בְּתִשׁוּבָה
a	b	c
1. Bring us back	our Father	to Your Torah.
a	b	c
2. Draw us near	our King	to Your service.
a	d	b
3. Lead us back	by complete repentance	to Your presence.
4. Blessed are You who desires repentance.		

1. רָצָה ה' אֶלְהִינוּ בְעַמֵּךְ יִשְׂרָאֵל וּבְתִפְלִיתְמָ
2. וְהַשֵּׁב אֶת הַעֲבֹדָה לְזֹבֵר בֵּיתְךָ
3. וְאִישֵּׁי יִשְׂרָאֵל וּבְתִפְלִיתְמָ [כְּאַהֲבָה] תִּכְבַּל בְּרָצָן
4. וְתַהַי לְרָצָן תִּמְדַּי עֲבוֹדָתְךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל עַמְּךָ

Blessing 6 = forgiveness

a	b	c
1. Pardon us	our Father	though we have sinned.
a	b	c
2. Forgive us	our King	though we have rebelled
3. [for You are a forgiving and pardoning God]		
4. Blessed are You, O gracious One who repeatedly pardons.		

Blessing 7 = redemption

1. רָאָה בְּעָנָנוּ
3. וַיַּבְּחַדְלֵנוּ
4. וְגַאֲלֵנוּ מִהְרָה לְמַעַן שְׁמָךְ
5. כִּי גֹּאֵל חָזָק אָפָה
6. בָּרוּךְ אָפָה יְיָ גֹּאֵל יִשְׂרָאֵל

Ps. 119:153-54

1. רָאָה-עָנָנוּ וְמַלְאָכִינוּ
2. כִּי-תֹּרֶתֶת לֹא שְׁכַחֵתִי
3. רַיְבָּה רַיְבִּי וְגַאֲלָנִי

1. See my plight and deliver me,
2. for I have not neglected Your Torah.
3. Champion my cause and redeem me.

1. See our plight
3. Champion our cause and redeem us.
4. Redeem us quickly for Your name's sake
5. For a mighty redeemer are You
6. Blessed are You, A-donai, redeemer of Israel

Jerusalem Talmud, Taanit 2:2

- מַעַן שְׁמוֹנָה עָשָׂר דְּשָׁמוֹאָל. אָמֵר לֵיהֶ :
4. קְבִינָנוּ,
 5. רְצָח תְּשׁוּבָתֵינוּ,
 - 6-7. סְלָח לְנוּ גּוֹאָלֵינוּ,
 8. רְפָא חְלִינָנוּ בָּרוּךְ שְׁנוֹתֵינוּ.

Berakhot 29a:

- וְשָׁמוֹאָל אָמֵר :
4. קְבִינָנוּ ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ לְדַעַת דְּרָכֵיכָה,
 5. וּמֹל אָת לְבָבֵנוּ לִירָאָתֶךָ,
 - 6-7. וְתִסְלָח לְנוּ לְהִיּוֹת גָּאֹלִים,
 8. וְרַחֲקָנוּ מִפְּקָאָדֵינוּ,
 9. וְדִשְׁנָנוּ בְּנֹאות אָרֶץ.

8. healing
9. year of (agricultural) prosperity
10. ingathering of the exiles
11. restoration of proper judges/leaders
12. destruction of the wicked
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