

The Structure and Thesis of the Amidah in three session

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Session 1: The Middle Blessings

I Amidah origins

על נְשִׁלְשָׁה דְּבָרִים הָעוֹלָם עוֹמֵד,

Hezekiah

2Chronicles 31:21

בְּעִבּוּדֵי בֵּית־הָאֱלֹהִים וּבַתּוֹרָה וּבַמִּצְוָה

Shimon Haṣadik

Avot 1:2

עַל הַתּוֹרָה וְעַל הָעִבּוּדָה וְעַל גְּמִילוּת הַסְּדִים

Rabban Yoḥanan b. Zakkai

Avot De'Rebbe Natan 4, p. 23

וְאִשְׁנָה בֵּה לַתְּלִמִּידִי וְאֶקְבַּע בֵּה תַּפְלָה וְאֶעֱשֶׂה בֵּה כָּל מִצְוֹת

Rabban Gamliel

Mishnah Berakhot 4:3

בְּכָל יוֹם מִתְּפַלֵּל אָדָם שְׁמֹנֶה עָשָׂרָה

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. אַתָּה חוֹנֵן לְאָדָם דָּעַת
2. וּמְלַמֵּד לְאָנוּשׁ בִּינָה
3. חֲנֻנוּ מֵאַתָּה דָּעָה בִּינָה וְהַשְׁכָּל
4. בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי חוֹנֵן הַדָּעַת

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 | |
| | לתורתך | אבינו | השיבנו | 1. |
| | לעבודתך | מלכינו | קרבינו | 2. |
| | לפניך | בתשובה שלימה | והחזירנו | 3. |
| | | | 4. בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי הָרוֹצֶה בְּתִשְׁבּוּבָה | |
-
- | | | | | |
|--------------------|-------------------------|----|------|-----------|
| 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' א-להינו בעמך ישראל ובתפילתם
2. והשיב את העבודה לדביר ביתך
3. ואישי ישראל ותפילתם [באהבה] תקבל ברצון
4. ותהי לרצון תמיד עבודת ישראל עמך

Blessing 6 = forgiveness

1. סֶלַח לָנוּ אֱלֹהֵינוּ כִּי חָטְאָנוּ
2. מְחַל לָנוּ מַלְכֵנוּ כִּי פָשַׁעְנוּ
3. כִּי מוֹחֵל וְסוֹלֵחַ אַתָּה
4. בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי חֲנוּן הַמֵּרַבָּה לְסִלּוֹת

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|--|------------|-------------------------|
| 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. רָאֵה בְּעֲנֵינוּ
3. וְרִיבָה רִיבָנוּ
4. וּגְאֹלָנוּ מִהֶרָה לְמַעַן שְׁמֹךְ
5. כִּי גֹאֵל חֲזָק אַתָּה
6. בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי גֹאֵל יִשְׂרָאֵל

Ps. 119:153-54

1. רָאֵה-עֲנֵי וְחַלְצֵנִי
2. כִּי-תוֹרְתְךָ לֹא שָׁכַחְתִּי
3. רִיבָה רִיבִי וּגְאֹלֵנִי

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

- מַעֲיִן שְׁמוֹנָה עָשָׂרָה דְּשִׁמוּאֵל. אָמַר לֵיהּ:
4. הַבִּינֵנוּ,
 5. רְצֵה תְּשׁוּבָתֵינוּ,
 - 6-7. סֵלַח לָנוּ גֹאֲלֵינוּ,
 8. רַפָּא חַלְיֵינוּ בְּרַךְ שְׁנוּתֵינוּ.

Berakhot 29a:

- וּשְׁמוּאֵל אָמַר:
4. הַבִּינֵנוּ ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ לְדַעַת דְּרָכֶיךָ,
 5. וּמֹל אֶת לִבֵּנוּ לִירְאָתְךָ,
 - 6-7. וְתִסְלַח לָנוּ לְהִיּוֹת גְּאוּלִּים,
 8. וְרַחֲמֵנוּ מִמַּכְאוּבֵינוּ,
 9. וְדַשְׁנֵנוּ בְּנֵאוֹת אֶרֶץךָ.

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)
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