The Rav’s Siddur: Universalism, Particularism, and the Prayer Lives of Non-Jews

The Siddur and Jewish Thought

The siddur is a tool for prayer and supplication to our Creator on its most basic level, while the siddur is also a vehicle for conveying and affirming a series of philosophic principles on its more expansive level. Our prayer books are more than mere repositories of formulae that we use when performing the mitzva of prayer, they are major texts of Jewish thought because prayer is laden with significant importance to faith in general. Indeed, every new printed siddur purports to more closely and precisely conform to a particular, desired philosophic viewpoint; every unique type of Jewish belief seems to necessitate its own siddur. And not surprisingly, every time a new siddur is published, reviewers examine whether it truly and faithfully conveys the ideology it claims to convey.

Though he never published his own siddur, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik used a unique text of the prayer service. In recent years, numerous publications have drawn attention to his nussah ha-tefilla and the various philosophical and halakhic considerations underlying his text and traditions of the prayers. Given how ubiquitous and varied the prayers are, the Rav held many unique positions in these matters; there were hundreds of changes and adaptations instituted in the minyan he founded in 1963, which met and still meets at the Maimonides School in Brookline, Massachusetts. Any reflection on his legacy and his contributions to Jewish thought should also consider the way his prayers reflect and attest to his philosophy of Judaism.

1 See, e.g., Mendi Gopin, Davening with the Rav: My Rabbi and My Rebbe (Ktav Publishing House, 2006); Arnold Lustiger, Yom Kippur Machzor with Commentary Adapted from the Teachings of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik (K’hal Publishing, 2006) and Rosh Hashanah Machzor with Commentary Adapted from the Teachings of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik (K’hal Publishing, 2007); and The Koren Mesorat HaRav Siddur with Commentary Based upon the Teachings of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik (Koren Publishers, 2011). See also Itzhak D. Goldberg “Hineni he-Ani mi-Ma’as” in Mentor of Generations (Ktav, 2008), ed. Zev Eleff, 272–280, for a depiction of the care and concern the Rav gave to even the minute details of every prayer.
In addition to numerous halakhic stringencies in prayer, R. Soloveitchik also made adaptations to the *nussah ha-tefilla* which were grounded in a desire to conform to a particular philosophical position. The Rav explained them as such and did not attribute the change to other factors such as grammar, halakhic requirement, or a variant custom or prayer tradition. To offer some brief examples: the decisions to omit the prayers *Berikh Shemeih* and *An'im Zemirot* and the punctuation of the seventeenth blessing of the *Amida* were designed to conform with a specific philosophical view. While many Jews might be content to read whichever words appear in the siddur in front of them, the Rav took care to make sure the prayer texts actually matched his authentic Jewish worldview.

Many of the unique aspects of R. Soloveitchik’s *nussah ha-tefilla* have already been explored in other venues, and so this essay will focus on the ways in which his siddur gives attention to the relationships among

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2 Hershel Schachter, *Mi-Peninei ha-Rav* (Flatbush Beth Hamedrosh, 2001), 47. Two reasons are given for omitting the prayer, both philosophical: the use of the phrase “*Bar Elahin,*” which suggests that a human being can, in theory, craft an independent relationship with a special angel called the “*Bar Elahin,*” and second, the individual’s overly confident assentation that he is a servant of the Holy One Blessed is He.

3 Isaiah Wohlgemuth, *Guide to Jewish Prayer* (Maimonides School, 2014), 103: “It consists of praises of God written by a medieval German Jewish author. . . . The Rav felt that we have reached the highest level of praising God with [the Biblical] *Kedushah,* and anything else would be anticlimactic.” According to Hershel Schachter, *Nefesh ha-Rav,* 162, the Rav did recite *An'im Zemirot* on Yom Kippur, although this seems to contravene the reason supplied by R. Wohlgemuth, which implies it is always inappropriate for a Jew to compose a song of praises in place of the ones that appear in the Bible. It is possible that the Rav did recite it only on Yom Kippur in keeping with the custom of the Vilna Gaon, which would have reached him by way of his family practice. Nevertheless, when offering a philosophical reflection on the matter (as reported by Wohlgemuth) he arrived at his own rationale for why, in principle, it should never be recited at all. It is worth noting that the current practice at the Maimonides Kehillah is to omit *An'im Zemirot* even on Yom Kippur.

4 Joseph B. Soloveitchik, “Thoughts on Prayer,” in *Worship of the Heart* (Ktav, 2003), 178, discusses two views on whether the short phrase “the fire offerings of Israel” are the final words of the first sentence of the blessing, or the first words of the second sentence of the blessing. The Rav preferred the latter view and understood that these words were part of the request that God accept our prayers and sacrifices in the present; they are not part of the request for a redemptive future and a time of a rebuilt Temple. Such a view appears problematic; after all there are no sacrifices or fire offerings in our present day. The Rav explained that the phrase “the fire offerings of Israel” actually refers to the negation of the self on the part of the individual who stands before God in prayer, and thus the “offering” is not an animal sacrifice in the future Temple, but an act of self-sacrifice offered in the present. In the original Hebrew version of this essay (*Ha-Darom,* 1978), the Rav’s citation of Tosafot (*Menahot* 110a, s.v. *u-Mikhael*) includes the view that the fires refer to “the souls of the righteous,” an idea he also referenced in “Redemption, Prayer, Talmud Torah,” *Tradition* 17:2 (1978), 70–71 (although those words are missing in the English translation).
God, Jews, and non-Jews. We first review small changes that might relate to conversion to Judaism, punishment of gentile sinners, the selection of Israel, and the relationship between Jew and gentile; however any conclusions we might reach about those topics are only tentative. More attention will be given to the Rav’s unique view about the prayer lives of gentiles, and the changes he made to his siddur which reflect that deeply held belief. It is important to stress at the onset, that while these conclusions are implicit in the text of the Rav’s siddur, and consistent with his wider writings about prayer, he almost never directly pointed to a change in the siddur and explained how that change reflected a deeper philosophy of the prayer lives of non-Jews.

**What is Meant by the Word “Prayer”?**

Colloquially, Jews use the word “prayer” to refer to a sequence of praises, requests, and thanksgivings that are recited daily, in fulfillment of what is—to many authorities—a Biblically mandated positive commandment, even if the details are rabbinically ordained.5 R. Soloveitchik introduced two different terms to refer to two different types of entreaties directed towards the Divine. “Tze’aka,” outcry, is the Rav’s technical term for a wordless expression of distress directed by any human being towards God, while “tefilla,” or prayer, is his term for thoughtful, “meditative-reflective” consideration of human needs and desires.6 For the Rav, some parts of the siddur are considered “prayer” while others are considered “outcry.”

On at least one occasion, the Rav expressed the view that both of these expressions were limited to human beings. Tze’aka is dubbed “human outcry,” something that an animal cannot engage in.8 Elsewhere, however, “outcry” is extended even to “a mute creature of the field,” as it is not limited to human beings.9 Irrespective of this possible limitation

5 The well-known debate between Rambam and Ramban can be found in Sefer ha-Mitzvot, positive command #5. The Rav discussed Rambam’s view in a variety of settings, including “Thoughts on Prayer,” 146.
6 In “Redemption, Prayer, Talmud Torah,” 66–68, the Rav used the word “tze’aka,” but used the related word “ze’aka” in his more halakhic works. See for example Joseph B. Soloveitchik, Shiurim le-Zekher Abba Mari z”l, vol. 1 (Mossad HaRav Kook, 2002), 96–97, 102–106.
7 See “Redemption, Prayer, Talmud Torah,” 68, which considers selihot as an example of outcry and not prayer on account of the flexibility of formulation and the lack of strict, specific wording. Nevertheless, the Rav did subject even the selihot to some of the strict halakhic rules normally associated with prayer; see Gopin, 88 (requiring the mattir of praise before issuing requests), and Wohlgemuth, 43 (not modifying the text of Biblical verses).
8 “Redemption, Prayer, Talmud Torah,” 57.
to "outcry," it is clear, however, that "prayer" is limited to human beings. Moreover, it is limited to those human beings who have an awareness and appreciation of their relationship with God. It is unachievable for atheists, pagans, or non-believers.\footnote{Redemption, Prayer, Talmud Torah, 58–60, indicates that the Jewish people were only able to participate in "prayer," properly defined, after the Torah was given at Sinai. Before that moment, they only engaged in outcry.}

**Methodological Limitations**

When analyzing instances where R. Soloveitchik’s *nussah ha-tefilla* differs from the typical, contemporary, American Ashkenazic practice, we are confronted with two significant methodological problems. Not every change made to the siddur bears a clear philosophical implication, and this for two separate reasons.

First, some differences or discrepancies between the Rav's *nussah ha-tefilla* and the conventional prayer service might reflect two parallel traditions of prayer, and not a conscious change or adaptation on the Rav's initiative. He may have merely followed an earlier tradition from the Vilna Gaon or from his grandfather, Rav Hayyim Soloveitchik, and so his prayer choices do not reflect any personally held philosophical positions, *per se*; they are reflections of being part of a different prayer tradition. To give one example, the Rav followed the view of the Vilna Gaon (Ma'ase Rav #48) to vowelize the word “*u-shevahakha*” immediately after *Kedusha*, as opposed to the more conventional “*ve-shivhakha*.” The Rav explained that he did so because of a commitment to the prayer tradition of his teachers, and not because he wished to affirm a slightly different philosophical view.\footnote{See Gopin, 43; Lustiger, *Yom Kippur Machzor*, xxxvi (#11), and *Rosh Hashanah Machzor*, xlvii (#11). The Rav’s text makes two changes in vowelization, one to the prefix (“*ve*” becoming “*u*”), and one to the actual word “*shivhakha*” becoming “*shevahakha*.” Lustiger implies the reason for the change is focused on the pronunciation of the prefix, but in truth this is secondary and merely a phonological consequence of avoiding two consecutive *sheva na* were we to say “*ve-shevahakha*.” In Gopin’s view, the Rav was explicit that the change was based on his prayer tradition and was not intended to convey a specific philosophical view. At the same time, there is a slight philosophical difference between the two versions. “*Shivhakha*” is a noun, meaning “Your [=God's] praise” (see Leviticus 7:16 for a similar vowel pattern), while “*shevahakha*” is a participle meaning “praising You” (see I Samuel 15:15 for a similar pattern), and so the former formulation might run afoul of the issue of positive and negative attributes (see Guide of the Perplexed, 1:58). Still, the Rav chose this version on the basis of a fealty to his traditions and not on the basis of a desire to conform to avoid assigning specific positive praises to the Almighty.}

Beyond this, we also face a second methodological limitation. Even if we can demonstrate that the Rav was responsible for a particular change, and that this did not originate in his teachers’ writings, we may not be
able to determine the exact rationale behind the change unless he wrote about the topic or explained his reasons to his students. Ideally, the Rav would have explicitly explained the reason for such a change or would have addressed a similar idea in his other writings.

Thus, most of Rabbi Soloveitchik’s prayer changes that relate to non-Jews cannot be directly linked to any specific philosophic position, and therefore we must be careful not to conclusively attribute a specific intent to any particular feature of his practice. As we shall see, the Rav’s unique nussah ha-tefilla as relating to conversion, the future punishment of gentiles, and Jewish-gentile relations may be attributable to other factors, and not to a specific hashkafic position. Still, they present an important survey of some of the questions about Judaism and gentiles that are implicit in the prayers, which will be important for our further discussion.

Conversion and the Memorial Prayer

The most widely used text for the memorial prayer “Kel Malei Rahamim” is somewhat negative on the conversion of gentiles to Judaism, indicating that they fail to reach the level of those born Jewish on a philosophical, existential level (using the phrase “al kanfei ha-shekhina,” upon the wings of the Divine Presence). This version of the memorial prayer was written in order to distinguish between those born Jewish, whose souls can sit above the Divine Presence, and those who convert to Judaism whose souls cannot attain that level and only sit beneath the Divine presence.12 R. Soloveitchik utilized a different text for the memorial prayer (“tahat kanfei ha-shekhina,” under the wings), however, which avoids this distinction since converts to Judaism attain the same spiritual levels of those born Jewish.13 Does this reflect R. Soloveitchik’s position on conversion more generally?14 The first methodological limitation cautions us to refrain from making any broad statements about the Rav’s philosophy, since both the typical version and the Rav’s version are two different prayer traditions that existed side by side for centuries; perhaps the Rav was merely following his prayer tradition. Indeed, since the version he used was the original one for the prayer and also the one that most closely resembles a scriptural verse (Psalms 91:3), perhaps he preferred to follow the historical, original version of the text; he need not have wanted to take a specific stand about gentiles embracing of Judaism.

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12 This reading of Kel Malei Rahamim’s meaning is advanced by the Shelah, Isaiah Horowitz, Sefer Shenei Luhot ha-Berit, vol. 2 (Warsaw, 1930), 40b.
14 For a brief discussion of the radical transformation of conversion in the thought of the Rav, see Pinchas Peli, Al ha-Teshuva (World Zionist Organization, 1975), 253.
Punishment of Gentiles and the Ten Martyrs

Daniel Goldschmidt records multiple versions for the concluding stanza of the *piyyut* of the ten martyrs on Yom Kippur. The most widespread version of the text today reads “*hai, ze’okh komatam*” which roughly translates “O Living One [=God], extinguish their stature,” asking God to destroy the gentile nations who harmed the Jewish people during the times of persecution. An alternative version, somewhat softer and possibly changed to accommodate concerns of censorship, reads “*hai, za’aki keshov,*” which translates “O Living One, hear my outcry.” R. Soloveitchik used the second version, which uses softer language in describing the punishment of the enemy nations.

Was this merely another instance of having an alternative prayer tradition, or was it a conscious change or choice to moderate the language calling for retribution on gentiles? As far as we know, the Rav recited other prayers that mentioned vengeance against the enemies of the Jewish people, including the weekly *Av ha-Rahamim* prayer, and various *Selihot* and *Kinot*. His writings also indicate that he had no objections to discussing the Divine punishment of gentiles who had persecuted the Jewish people.

R. Soloveitchik was generally skittish about calling for punishments towards others in prayer. Prayer is inner-focused and is an opportunity for a Jew to express concerns, loneliness, and even lowliness; it is not an opportunity to focus outwardly on the punishment of others. Indeed, other changes made in the *nussah ha-tefilla* reflect this philosophical position. The Rav changed the twelfth blessing of the *amida* to avoid asking for the destruction of others. Also, he moved the location of the *aliya* ...

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16 The root z-a-kh is a hapax legomenon and its meaning is unclear in its original context, Job 17:1 (and see Ibn Ezra). The translation “to extinguish” assumes that the root is cognate with the Biblical Hebrew root d-a-kh which means to extinguish (see Rashi to Job), with the d/z substitution (between the voiced alveolar stop sound and the voiced alveolar fricative), a typical switch between Hebrew and Aramaic. Though Rashi to Job understands the root d-a-kh to mean to jump, the root generally means to extinguish in Biblical Hebrew.
18 See the discussion in “*Peleitat Sofereihem,*” in *Divrei Hagut ve-Ha’arakha*, 152–153.
19 The typical version of the blessing prays for the destruction of the “*zedim,*” sinners; the Rav used an alternative text, replacing this word with “*malkhut zadon,*” according to Gopin, 43. Wohlgemuth, 146, explains the reason for the change as “it is preferable to ask for the ‘evil kingdom’ to disappear, not its people” (noting evidence from *Berakhot* 10a). One imagines the Rav might have translated “*malkhut zadon*” as “the reign of sin” and thereby turned the petition into a request for an end of sinful behavior instead of a blessing about the punishment of sinners. Other recent publications concerned with the Rav’s *nussah* offer an alternative interpretation of this change. See *The Koren Mesorat HaRav Siddur*, lxvi; Lustiger, *Yom Kippur*
divisions of two parashiyot in the book of Deuteronomy because he felt that even the death and punishment of a wicked person was ultimately a bad thing. Thus, it is possible that the change to the Yom Kippur service reflects a general concern about prayers for retribution, not a specific one about gentiles.

There is yet another possible reason why the Rav may have preferred this text, having nothing to do with notions of punishment and retribution. The piyyut of the ten martyrs is recited as part of the selihot service on Yom Kippur, and the Rav considered selihot as an example of human outcry and not as an example of formal prayer. The Hebrew word used by the Rav for human outcry was “ze’aka,” the precise word used at the end of this prayer. The word choice may have been intended to highlight the general distinction between outcry and prayer; it may have no bearing on the Rav’s views about future vengeance against gentile nations.

The Morning Blessings and the Relationship Between Jew and Gentile

R. Soloveitchik utilized a different text for the second of the morning blessings, reciting “she-lo asani nokhri,” in place of the more conventional, synonymous phrase “she-lo asani goy.” One could theorize many possible reasons for this change:

- A belief that this text is the original and more authentic version of the blessing.
- A desire for the blessing to better match the Biblical terminology in which “nokhri” means foreigner and “goy” means any nation, even the Jewish people.
- A desire for the blessing to reflect halakhic categories and terminology (see Rambam, Hilkhhot Korban Pesach 9:7, Hilkhhot Bi’at Mikdash 6:8).

Machzor, xxxvii (#13) and Rosh Hashanah Machzor, xlvii (#13). It is unclear whether these “zedim” were Jewish or gentile heretics, but the general principal applies to praying for the harm of any group.

See Gopin, 116. R. Soloveitchik did not end an aliya at Deuteronomy 17:13 or 21:21, on Shabbat or during the week, because doing so involves concluding a Torah reading with negative content—the capital punishment of a wicked person. The injunction against ending an aliya on a negative note is based on Orah Hayyim 138.

See Schachter, Nefesh ha-Rav, 107; Gopin, 51.

For a brief summary of the blessing’s textual development and the impact of censorship, see Michael Broyde, A Concise Code of Jewish Law for Converts (Urim, 2017), 106.

Wohlgemuth, 44, gives this interpretation of the emendation from “goy” to “nokhri” but does not indicate that the Rav made the change for this reason.
- Reluctance to use the term *goy* in prayers, given that the term has taken on a slightly derogatory connotation when applied to gentiles.

In discussing the blessing in one of the lectures he delivered in memory of his father, the blessing is referred to using its standard text “she-lo asani *goy,*” and is explained “this blessing ostensibly relates to the selection of Israel.”

Here, too, a prayer change cannot be fully understood. Was there a desire to use a more honorable term to refer to gentiles?

Though the reasons for these first emendations are hard to determine conclusively, there is one sphere in which the Rav changed the prayers on the basis of a philosophic belief about Jews and gentiles. He made three changes to the typical prayer service in consideration of the roles non-Jews have in prayer: how they pray, and the ways they enter into our own prayer dialogue. We examine these changes in the next section.

**Prayer Lives of Gentiles: The Gentile’s Relationship with God**

It is typical to consider prayer as a forum for the Jew to express his or her interests and concerns to the Almighty; it is not a space where the non-Jew is present, physically or even mentally in the mind of the Jewish worshipper. Jews at prayer are, for the most part, focusing mostly on Jewish concerns, individually or communally.

Secular people appear to be generally excluded from the prayer space in the Rav’s own essay, “The Lonely Man of Faith.” Only covenantal Adam the second can have “an awareness of man finding himself in the presence of and addressing himself to his Maker, and to pray has one connotation only: to stand before God . . . the very essence of prayer is the covenantal experience of being together with and talking to God.”

Thus, though other human beings might formulate requests or entreaties in accordance with their secularized faith systems, Judaism would not consider that properly as prayer, per se. “Prayer must always be related to a prayerful life which is consecration to the realization of the Divine imperative, and as such it is not a separate entity but a sublime prologue to Halakhic action.”

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25 The Lonely Man of Faith (Doubleday, 2006), 53–54. The Rav also dubbed this a “dialogical medium” and “mental entrancement”; see Worship of the Heart, 10–12, 23–24.

26 Ibid., 63. Connecting prayer to halakha seems to make it exclusive to the Jewish faith, but see Reuven Ziegler, Majesty and Humility: The Thought of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik (Maimonides School, 2012), 123, who cites considerable evidence that “The Lonely Man of Faith” refers to “any religious faith, not just Judaism.” Still, the general thrust of the essays of the late 1970s cited below supports the distinction.
The contours of this position are also implicit in the Rav's writing on interfaith dialogue, including the essay “Confrontation,” 27 and a number of his letters. 28 Tefilla is a special term used to refer to the way the Jewish people communicates with our Creator. Were a gentile to deliver a series of requests to his or her Creator, we would not consider that as prayer proper; instead it is a separate action, part of an entirely different category—perhaps only ze’aka, human outcry. 29 

Still, the complete exclusion of the non-Jew from the world of prayer directly contravenes both Biblical verses and also Jewish law. In his prayer on the occasion of the dedication of the first Temple, Solomon explicitly carves space within the Temple for the gentile, the aforementioned nokhri, to gather in the Temple and pray to his Creator (I Kings 8:41–44). 30 The Talmud furthermore rules that gentiles can even offer sacrifices in the Temple as well (Menahot 73b). Consequently, any theory of prayer must also explain what roles gentiles play within the conception of prayer in Judaism. What did Solomon suppose that the gentile was doing when he would visit the Temple? What did the Sages envision the gentile did when offering a sacrifice?

Though the issue is not addressed in “The Lonely Man of Faith,” R. Soloveitchik discussed it in one of his lectures to the Mizrachi:

The Western Jew feels that he is part of society in general and is convinced that his future and the future of mankind are as one.

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29 It is possible that the Rav felt that gentiles do engage in prayer when they pray to God within the internal logic of their faith systems. However, from a Jewish perspective this is not seen as “prayer” because “prayer” must be grounded within halakhic categories.
30 Isaiah also describes a time when “all flesh” (66:23) or “all the nations” ascend to Jerusalem for prayer and sacrifice (56:7), but when these well-known verses are considered in the greater context, it appears to refer only to foreigners who have first converted to Judaism (56:3–6). For more on this topic and an alternative interpretation, see Malka Simkovich, The Making of Jewish Universalism: From Exile to Alexandria (Lexington Books, 2017).
He prays, for example, that the benevolent Western countries prevail against the evil Eastern countries. . . . But this is not a specifically Jewish prayer, directed towards Him “Who hears the prayer of Thy people in mercy,” but one of all mankind directed towards the One “Who hears the prayer of every mouth,” Jew and non-Jew alike. . . . The Patriarchal covenant demands unique prayer of us, prayers that signify the strange and the paradoxical in Jewish history.31

This citation is of critical importance, because it formulates a dialectic of prayer within the Jewish tradition. We speak of one type of prayer that only Jews participate in, and another sort of prayer that all of humanity engages in.

In this address, the Rav argues that there are actually two sub-types of tefilla or prayer. Covenantal prayer is limited to the Jew and Adam the second, and it reflects the relationship between a Jew and his or her Creator. This contrasts with the more universal prayer that any creature can direct towards the one true God, and which Adam the first can also offer. The universal prayer is concerned with famine, disease, and war, while Covenantal prayer is focused on the existential connection between the individual and God.32

The argument is given treatment for only a few pages in this lecture and was fleshed out ever so slightly in the later essay, “Redemption, Prayer, Talmud Torah.” There, too, the Rav explains how prayer has “two irreconcilable aspects,” on one hand it concerns itself with “human needs, wants, drives, and urges,” but simultaneously is fixated on the more transcendent moment when the Jew stands ready to “return everything he considers his own to God.”33 This idea both gives religious significance to prayers made by gentiles, but also draws a clear distinction between those prayers and the prayer-conversation between a Jew and God detailed in “The Lonely Man of Faith” and the Rav’s other writings. The idea is reflected in three changes to the Rav’s nussah ha-tefilla.

The Text of the Sixteenth Blessing of the Amida

The same passage in Five Addresses notes that Jews reference these two types of prayer with different terminologies in the last of the middle blessings of the Amida. When God listens to covenantal prayer, we say that He listens to the “prayer of Thy people with mercy,” and when He listens

31 Five Addresses (Tal Orot, 1973), 148–149.
32 The two types of prayer respond to two different types of crisis—surface crisis and depth crisis, see Worship of the Heart, 30–32.
33 “Redemption, Prayer, Talmud Torah,” 65, 70, and 72.
to universal prayer He listens to the "prayer of every mouth." The change in formulation is important because although it includes gentiles within a framework of a prayer relationship with the Divine, it specifically delineates a separate terminology for the way God relates to their prayers. It is not reflective of God's close relationship with His own nation, "with mercy"; it is a distant and generic prayer, the prayer of any mouth.34

According to at least one account,35 the Rav used both formulations in his prayer service, ostensibly to note thrice daily that prayer exists on these two levels. Here we witness an emendation to the prayer text attributed directly to him and explained by him. The blessing which concludes the series of petitions of the Amida captures the dialectical nature of prayer by using two different phrases, one for each category of prayer.

The Conclusion of the Hoshanot Service
An excerpt from the end of the prayer of Solomon which discussed Jewish and gentile prayer is recited annually at the conclusion of the Hoshanot service:

These words of mine that I prayed before Hashem shall be close to Hashem our God day and night, to meet the needs of his servant, and the needs of his nation Israel, the needs of each day on its day: In order that all the nations of the Earth know that Hashem is God, there is no other (I Kings 8:59–60).

The first of these two verses conceives of prayer as a personal dialogue between God and the Jewish people, the word “close” and the phrase “day and night” suggest a constant connection forged through the prayers. The focus shifts in the second verse, and now attention turns to “all the nations of the Earth.” Prayer is no longer private, personal, mysterious or covenantal—it is now something which is knowable and accessible to all of humanity.

There are two ways to understand I Kings 8:60, although either way still transitions from the particular, Jewish prayer to the more universal,

34 Abudraham cites two interpretations of the phrase in his commentary on the Amida, either that “peh” refers to the mouths of the Jewish people, since the numerical value of mouth is identical to circumcision, mila (both 85), or that it refers to all of humanity or all of creation as in “all flesh” (Psalms 65:3, and see Ibn Ezra). The Rav was consistent on this point, as we will see in his application of Psalms 65:3 to universal prayer. But others disagree and argue that this formulation refers to covenantal prayer as well.

35 Gopin, 44; Wohlgemuth, 150; The Koren Mesorat HaRav Siddur, lxvi; Lustiger, Yom Kippur Machzor, xxxvii (#15), and Rosh Hashanah Machzor, xlvii (#15).
human prayer. The textual parallel to the section of gentile prayer (I Kings 8:43) suggests that this verse refers to the fulfilment of the prayer of the gentile, and in that case the verse refers in its entirety to the universal prayer of “every mouth.” Solomon asks for two outcomes; first, that the prayer of the Jew be close to God, and second that the prayer of all nations be heard by God as evidence for His uniqueness. Yet, most commentators understand the verse differently; Solomon only asks for the fulfilment of the prayers of the Jew, but when God first meets the need of the Jew, then even the nations recognize that God is One and True. This view agrees that the verse refers to universal prayer, as an individual outside the covenantal community sees and appreciates the power of prayer, but he or she can only appreciate it on the level of the universal prayer concept, open to all of humanity as a legacy of Adam the first. In this interpretation it is the Jew, not the gentile, who expresses the universal prayer which is heard in the latter verse, but it remains a general, universal prayer.

The decades-long custom at the Rav’s minyan at Maimonides is to close the Aron Kodesh, which had been open for the entire Hoshanot service, before the final verse is recited.36 Closing the ark between the recitation of I Kings 8:59 and 8:60 is a stark reminder that these two consecutive verses speak of radically different things, and highlights that there are two different types of prayer. Both verses are read as both Jew and gentile have a role in the world of prayer, but they are different, so the ark is closed to differentiate between the two types of prayer.37 The custom highlights the important philosophical ideal for the entire community.

The Prayer for Ill Non-Jews

One final example also relates to the prayer lives of gentiles, although this case differs from the two preceding examples. Earlier we intuited how the texts reflect what Jews (ought to) think about the prayers of gentiles, while this example focuses on how Jews pray for gentiles. Though the two situations differ, there is substantial overlap, because in both conditions Jews contend with the role of prayer for those outside of our covenantal community.

36 Personal conversation, Mark Blechner (December 31, 2022). Mr. Blechner recalls this custom being in place at Maimonides from the 1960s through the present day.

37 This may be analogous to the widespread custom to close the ark in the middle of Alenu on the High Holy Days when we contrast between the Jewish experience and the gentile experience. There is one small difference, though. In Solomon’s prayer, the nokhri recognizes God in general, despite missing the deeper nature of the Sinaitic covenant. In Alenu, the gentile seems to have no recognition of God on any level, and instead only bows to other, foreign deities.
It is common for Jews to recite a special prayer for the sick after Torah reading. The prayer calls for a complete recovery of the sick individual, in body and soul, for all their organs and sinews, poetically using four different Biblical verbs for healing in succession. The Talmud rules that it is appropriate to visit the gentile sick (Gittin 61a), and it is common for Jews to pray for gentiles who are ill. One would have imagined that a Jew could use the standard formula when praying for gentiles who are not well, perhaps omitting a phrase like “among all the sick people of Israel,” but the core of the prayer could remain generally the same for all sick individuals.

Yet, within the Rav’s system, prayer for sick Jews is a prayer of the covenantal community for a part of the covenantal community and so is an example of particularistic, Jewish prayer. The Rav explicitly couched the prayer for the sick in those terms “the community of prayer . . . it means a community of common pain, of common sufferings.” The prayer for the sick members of the community is not merely an emotional response to suffering or a practical request for healing—it is a statement of common feeling, common responsibility, and common destiny.

When a Jew prays for other human beings who are sick, but who are not members of the prayer community, the nature of the prayer is different, as it shifts into the universal, more instrumental type of prayer. In describing this second type of prayer, the Rav explained, “The individual prayer usually revolves around physical pain, mental anguish, or suffering which man cannot bear anymore. . . . Even a mute creature in the field reacts to physical pain with a shriek or outcry. Such a reaction was, to be sure, equated with prayer: ‘Hearer of prayer, unto You all flesh must come’ (Psalms 65:3).” The request is radically different. For that reason, he refrained from using the typical “Mi she-Berakh” text for a gentile, and instead composed an entirely different formula.

Gone are the four verbs for healing, gone the inclusion of this sick individual among the community of other sick individuals, and gone are the poetic descriptions of healing for all the person’s organs are sinews. Instead, the prayer begins with a Biblical verse, Abraham’s prayer for Avimelekh (Genesis 20:17). It is noteworthy that the standard prayer for the sick does not involve citation of a Biblical verse, though many

38 In the Rav’s nussah ha-tefilla, the prayer begins with an invocation of the three patriarchs, but no other Biblical figures are mentioned, on the basis of Berakhot 16b. Indeed, because a special covenant was made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—but not with Moses, Aaron, David, or Solomon—only they should be singled out at the start of covenantal prayer.
40 Ibid., 21 (emphasis added).
41 Gopin, 117.
examples of prayer and subsequent healing could have been used. The verse provides precedent and perhaps even a mattir, that Jews do participate in the universal, instrumental, non-communal type of prayer when praying for other sick human beings, and so it begins the prayer. However, this prayer is different in nature from the typical prayer for the sick and so a significantly different text is used.

In this third example as well, we find an instance of a prayer for a universal concern—the health and healing of a human being, but also find a careful change in formulation between prayers for a universal concern, and the unique prayer conversation between a Jew and his or her Creator. Yet again, we find that the Rav’s philosophy is reflected in the precise language of his nussah ha-tefilla.

**Relational Prayer and Instrumental Prayer**

Most Jews would seldom even consider whether their prayers to God might differ qualitatively from the prayers of a gentile, but R. Soloveitchik believed this represented a significant dichotomy and felt it was an important one within Jewish thought. True to form, he felt that the prayers in their most precise formulation should capture this distinction, and so he instituted three unique siddur practices to make sure that the philosophic distinction was reflected in the prayers. These changes provide insight into the three specific prayers themselves, and also provides insight into the general idea of Jewish prayer.

The thrust of the Rav’s teaching here is the notion that prayer is not instrumental, not merely a request for a particular outcome, but that it is also relational and is a statement of the bond a Jew shares with the Divine. Instrumental prayer might carry a lesser need for precision—if the goal was only to make a request one way or another, then the exact words may not be so crucial, because the core supplication remains intact. But the more prayer is central to faith and our relationship with God, the more it is a statement about what we believe, then the more precision is required in the prayer service. Rabbi Soloveitchik was committed to this idea, and it permeated his unique nussah ha-tefilla and prayer service.

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42 Such as Numbers 12:13, Psalms 30:3, 106:30, II Chronicles 30:20, or Isaiah 38:16. The standard prayer for the sick makes brief allusion to Isaiah 38:16, as one of the four verbs for healing “le-hahlimo” is used in that verse and only one other time in the Bible; however, no full verse is cited verbatim as it was in the Rav’s prayer for gentile sick individuals.

43 It is also noteworthy that Genesis 20:17 refers to God as Elokim, the universal term for God that appears in the first chapter of Genesis during the creation of Adam the first, and not with the covenantal name of God that appears in the second chapter of Genesis.