

TEN PATHS TO GOD

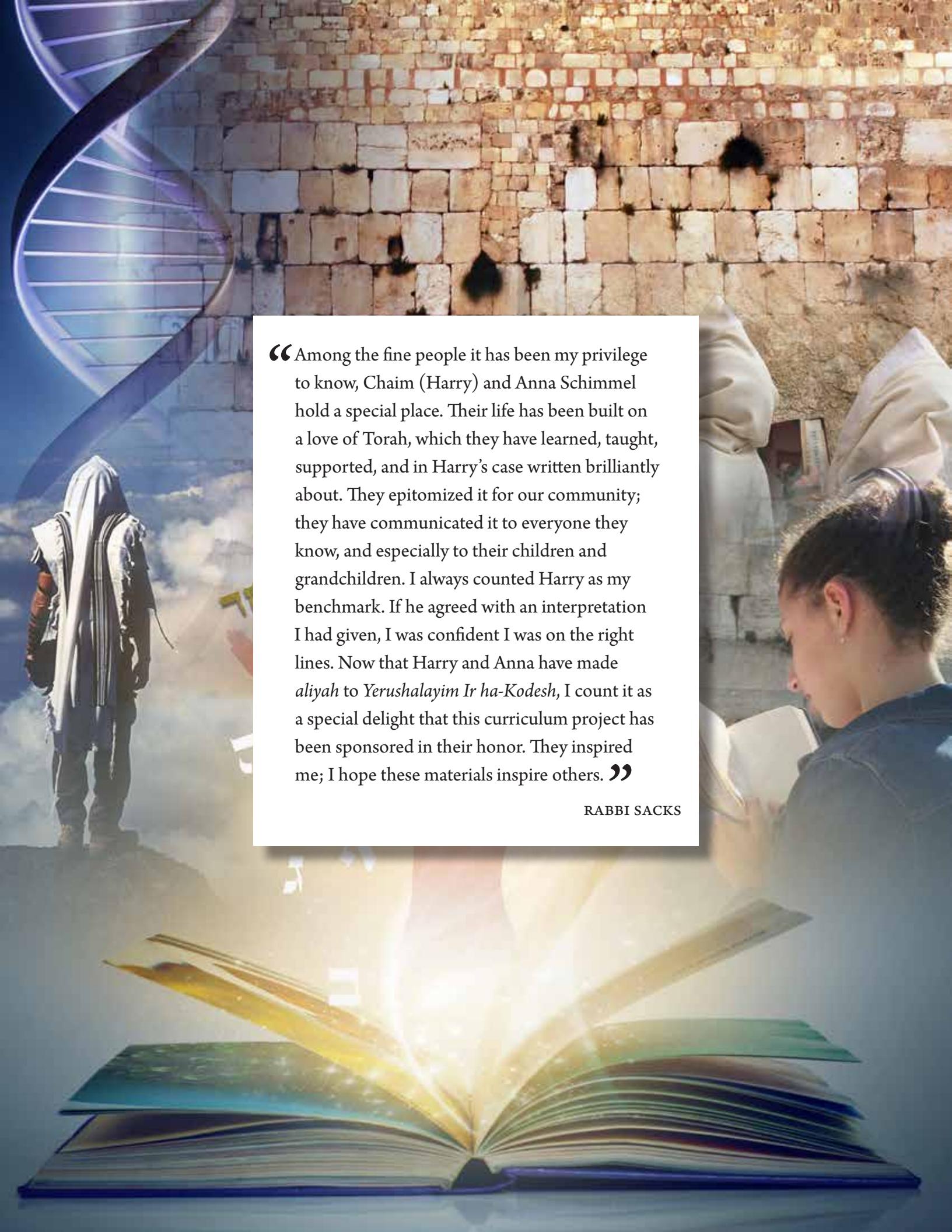
UNIT 2 – Student Guide / Advanced Level

תפילה PRAYER

Speaking to God

Based on the teachings of Rabbi Sacks





“ Among the fine people it has been my privilege to know, Chaim (Harry) and Anna Schimmel hold a special place. Their life has been built on a love of Torah, which they have learned, taught, supported, and in Harry’s case written brilliantly about. They epitomized it for our community; they have communicated it to everyone they know, and especially to their children and grandchildren. I always counted Harry as my benchmark. If he agreed with an interpretation I had given, I was confident I was on the right lines. Now that Harry and Anna have made *aliyah* to *Yerushalayim Ir ha-Kodesh*, I count it as a special delight that this curriculum project has been sponsored in their honor. They inspired me; I hope these materials inspire others. ”

RABBI SACKS

Introduction

Watch: The opening video for Unit 2



First Reading: Read through the text from the video. Highlight each word or phrase that you are unsure of, whether it is the meaning of the language or the meaning of the concept.

See the short glossary below for help.

Glossary

Redeem: to change for the better (this word has other related meanings but this is how it is being used here).

Solitude: the quality or state of being alone or remote from society.

Fate: an inevitable and often adverse outcome, condition, or end.

Infinitesimal: immeasurably or incalculably small.

Concatenation: linked together.

Descartes: René Descartes (1596–1650) French mathematician and philosopher.

Unfathomable: impossible to comprehend.

Parameters: a characteristic element.



Prayer is our intimate dialogue with Infinity, the profoundest expression of our faith that at the heart of reality is a Presence that cares, a God who listens, a creative Force that brought us into being in love. It is this belief more than any other that redeems life from solitude and fate from tragedy. The universe has a purpose. We have a purpose. However infinitesimal we are, however brief our stay on earth, we matter. The universe is more than particles of matter endlessly revolving in indifferent space. The human person is more than an accidental concatenation of genes blindly replicating themselves. Human life is more than ‘A tale, told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.’ (Macbeth 5.5.26–28). Prayer gives meaning to existence.

It is possible to believe otherwise. There can be a life without faith or prayer, just as there can be a life without love, or laughter, or happiness, or hope. But it is a diminished thing, lacking dimensions of depth and aspiration. Descartes said, ‘I think, therefore I am.’ Judaism says, ‘I pray, therefore I am not alone.’

It takes courage to believe. Jews need no proof of the apparent injustice of events. It is written on the pages of our history. Jews had no power or earthly glory. For the better part of forty centuries our ancestors lived dispersed throughout the world, without a home, without rights, all too often experiencing persecution and pain. All they had was an invisible God and the line connecting us to Him: the Siddur, the words of prayer. All they had was faith. In Judaism, we do not analyze our faith, we pray it. We do not philosophize about truth, we sing it, we *daven* it. For Judaism, faith becomes real when it becomes prayer.

In prayer we speak to a presence vaster than the unfathomable universe yet closer to us than we are to ourselves: the God beyond who is also the Voice within. Though language must fail when we try to describe a Being beyond all parameters of speech, yet language is all we have, and it is enough. For God who made the world with creative words, and who revealed His will in holy words, listens to our prayerful words. Language is the bridge that joins us to Infinity.

In prayer God becomes not a theory but a Presence, not a fact but a mode of relationship. Prayer is where God meets us, in the human heart, in our offering of words, in our acknowledged vulnerability.



Jonathan Sacks



Analysis in Chavruta: Now in *chavruta* (pairs), take a look again at the text. Discuss and answer the questions on the key terms and phrases that are highlighted for you.

Prayer is our intimate dialogue with Infinity, **the profoundest expression of our faith** that at the heart of reality is **a Presence that cares**, a God who listens, a creative Force that brought us into being in love. It is this belief more than any other that **redeems life from solitude and fate from tragedy**. The universe has a purpose. We have a purpose. However infinitesimal we are, however brief our stay on earth, we matter. The universe is more than particles of matter endlessly revolving in indifferent space. The human person is more than an accidental concatenation of genes blindly replicating themselves. Human life is more than ‘A tale, told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.’ **Prayer gives meaning to existence**.

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In prayer God becomes not a theory but a Presence, not a fact but a mode of relationship. Prayer is where God meets us, in the human heart, in our offering of words, in our acknowledged vulnerability.



the profoundest expression of our faith

1. What is "our faith" referring to? Can you give some examples of "our faith"?
2. How is *tefilla* an "expression of our faith"? What statement of belief are we making when we pray?
3. What statement are you making when you pray?

a Presence that cares

1. Why does Rabbi Sacks capitalize the 'P' of Presence?
2. Do you have a sense that the "Presence" cares about us? Can you think of examples of this from your own life?
3. How is our *tefilla* an expression of this belief?

redeems life from solitude and fate from tragedy

1. How does the opposite of belief in a God that cares lead to a feeling of solitude?
2. The ancient Greeks believed that fate (what is destined to be) determines all the good and bad things that will happen in our life and that we have no way to avoid this fate. How does believing in a caring God differ to this? How does this belief give us the power to make decisions that will determine our own fate?
3. Who do you believe makes the ultimate decision on your destiny: "fate", or God, or yourself?

Prayer gives meaning to existence

1. How can prayer, and the statement of belief in a caring God that it is, give your life meaning?
2. What meaning does your life have?
3. How does that affect the way you live your life?

It takes courage to believe

1. What is the alternative to believing in a God who cares?
2. Why does Rabbi Sacks describe faith as courageous?
3. "It is written on the pages of our history." Do you think Jewish history makes belief in God easier or harder? Why?



the line connecting us to Him: the Siddur

1. Describe how the Siddur connects us to God. Give examples from the Siddur itself.
2. Can we also use our own words to connect to God? If so, why do we need a Siddur?
3. Do you find the Siddur helps or hinders your connection to God? Why?

faith becomes real when it becomes prayer

1. Is Judaism primarily a religion of belief or action?
2. How does praying make belief "real"? Are there times when our actions can make belief "real"?
3. Rabbi Sacks says we don't just talk about faith (philosophize) or keep it in our heart, we sing or *daven* it. Why do you think faith is better acted upon, rather than kept only in your mind or your heart?

the God beyond who is also the Voice within

1. How is it possible to connect to a God who is "beyond" this world? Is it possible at all?
2. Can you hear the God of the "Voice within"? What does that "Voice" say?
3. Do you find it easier to relate to the "God beyond" or the "Voice within"?

Language is the bridge that joins us to Infinity

1. Why "must language fail" when we try and use it to describe God?
2. Why is language "all we have" to connect to God?
3. How do we use language to "join us to Infinity (God)"?



Share your analysis: Come together as a class, and share your answers to the questions. Listen carefully to the perspectives of your classmates. Did anyone take a different approach to the text from you? Does their approach resonate with you?

Themes of *Tefilla*



Exploring Themes of *Tefilla*: Together with your *chavruta* look at the following text from Rabbi Sacks' introduction to the Koren Siddur, and then the *mishna* from *Pirkei Avot* that follows it. Use the questions below to help you understand Rabbi Sacks' approach to *tefilla*, and its connection with the *mishna*.



The metaphor that, to me, captures the spirit of prayer more than any other is Yaakov's dream in which, alone at night, fleeing danger and far from home, he saw a ladder stretching from earth to heaven with angels ascending and descending... Prayer is a ladder and we are the angels. If there is one theme sounded throughout the prayers, it is *creation-revelation-redemption*, or *ascent-summit-descent*.

Creation – *Pesukei DeZimra*

In the Verses of Praise (*Pesukei DeZimra*), we climb from earth to heaven by meditating on creation. Like a Turner or Monet landscape, the psalms let us see the universe bathed in light, but *this* light is not the light of beauty but of holiness – the light the sages say God made on the first day and “hid for the righteous in the life to come.” Through some of the most magnificent poetry ever written, we see the world as God’s masterpiece, suffused with His radiance...

Revelation – *Shema/Amida*

By the time we reach *Barechu* and the blessings of the *Shema* we have neared the summit. Now we are in heaven with the angels. We have reached revelation. The Divine Presence is close, almost tangible... Now comes the great declaration of faith at the heart of prayer, the *Shema* with its passionate profession of the unity of God and the highest of all expressions of love, “with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might.”... Then comes the *Amida*, the supreme height of prayer. Three traditions fuse at this point: the silent *Amida* said by individuals, reminding us of prophetic prayer; the Leader’s repetition representing priestly worship and prayer as sacrifice; and then the *Kedusha*, prayer as a mystical experience.

Redemption – Concluding Prayers

From here, prayer begins its descent. First comes *Tachanun* in which we speak privately and intimately to the King. At this point, with a mixture of anguish and plea, we speak not of God’s love for Israel but of Israel’s defiant love of God... Then comes *Ashrei* and the subsequent passages, similar to



the *Pesukei DeZimra* but this time with redemption, not creation, as their theme. The key verse is “A redeemer will come to Zion.” The section closes with a prayer that we may become agents of redemption as we reengage with the world... We are now back on earth, the service complete except for *Aleinu*, *Kaddish* and the *Shir shel Yom*. We are ready to reenter life and its challenges...

We are not the same after we have stood in the Divine Presence as we were before. We have been transformed. We see the world in a different light. Perhaps we radiate a different light. We have spoken to and listened to God. We have aligned ourselves with the moral energies of the universe. We have become, in Lurianic terminology, vessels for God’s blessing. We are changed by prayer.

Understanding Jewish Prayer, The Koren Siddur

Creation – *Pesukei DeZimra*

1. The first theme is creation, and our part in it. How does thinking about creation help us climb the ladder to stand before God?
2. Where in our *tefillot*, specifically in *Pesukei DeZimra*, can you see examples of “magnificent poetry” that describes the world as “God’s masterpiece”?
3. Turner and Monet were painters who tried to capture the splendor of nature in the same way as the *Sefer Tehillim*. Do you think we can use music and art in all its forms, even nature itself, to find a connection to God?

Revelation – *Shema/Amida*

1. The second theme is revelation, when God reveals or communicates something to us. How is standing in front of God and praying like revelation?
2. How is prayer different from revelation? (Clue: dialogue vs. monologue)
3. The climax of our *tefilla* is the *Shema* and the *Amida*. Who wrote the *Shema*? Who wrote the *Amida*?

Redemption – Concluding Prayers

1. The third theme is redemption, looking outward to make the world a better place. What does that have to do with prayer? Where in the Siddur do we find this theme?
2. Why do we not end our *tefillot* at their climax, standing in the presence of God? Why descend at all?
3. “We are not the same after we have stood in the Divine Presence as we were before... we are changed by prayer”. Can you explain how we are different? Can you think of an example of how prayer has changed you?



שמעון הצדיק היה מישiri הכנסת הגדולה. הוא היה אומר על שלשה דברים העולם עומדת על התורה ועל העבודה ועל גמilot חסדים.

Shimon HaTzadik was one of the last of the Men of the Great Assembly. He used to say: the world stands on three things: *Torah*, *Avodah*, and *Acts of Lovingkindness*.

Mishna Avot 1:2

1. What do you think Shimon HaTzadik means when he says the world "stands on three things"?
2. Why three?
3. Who is the focus when you keep the *Torah*?
4. *Avodah* is the service in the *Bet HaMikdash*, which was replaced by the *tefilla* service after the *Bet HaMikdash* was destroyed. Who is the focus during the *Avodah*?
5. Who is the focus of "acts of lovingkindness"?
6. These "three things" in the *mishna* are the basis of the three core relationships: man and himself (**בין אדם לחברו**), man and God (**בין אדם למקום**) and man and others (**בין אדם לעצמו**). They can also be found in other sources that come in threes such as *Mishna Avot 1:12*; the three cardinal sins found in *Talmud Bavli, Sanhedrin 74a*; the three concepts of repentance, prayer, and charity that are mentioned in the *Rosh HaShana* and *Yom Kippur* prayers as "averting the evil decree". Can you see a connection between these and the three themes of *tefilla* we explored above?



Share your analysis: Come together as a class, and share your conclusions. Listen carefully to the perspectives of your classmates. Did anyone take a different approach to these themes from you? Does their approach speak to you?

Further Exploration of the Themes of Tefilla



Further Exploration of the Themes of Tefilla: Together with your *chavruta* look at one of the themes below through the two supplementary sources. Your teacher will tell you which theme to focus on. Use the guiding questions to help you.



Then join another pair to form a small *chabura* (study group) to examine the *tefila* text from the Siddur that illustrates the theme. Use the guiding questions and commentary to help you with your analysis.

Creation: Between Man and Himself (בין אדם לעצמו)



Before I was born, Your love enveloped me.
You turned nothing into substance, and created me.
Who etched out my frame?
Who poured me into a vessel and moulded me?
Who breathed a spirit into me?
Who opened the womb of Sheol and extracted me?
Who has guided me from youth-time until now?
Taught me knowledge, and cared wondrously for me?
Truly, I am nothing but clay within Your hand.
It is You, not I, who have really fashioned me.
I confess my sin to You, and do not say
That a serpent intrigued, and tempted me.
How can I conceal from You my faults, since
Before I was born Your love enveloped me.

Rabbi Shlomo ibn Gabirol, *Before I was Born*

1. What realization is Rabbi Shlomo ibn Gabirol expressing about himself? Can you describe what that must feel like emotionally?
2. Can *tefila* lead to this same humbling process? How so?
3. How is this reflected in the etymological form of the verb to pray – **להתפלל**?



All beings long for the very source of their origin. Every plant, every grain of sand, every clod of earth, small creatures and great, the heavens and the angels, every substance and its particles – all of them are longing, yearning, panting to attain the state of holy perfection. Human beings suffer constantly from this homesickness of the soul, and it is in prayer that we cure it. When praying, we feel at one with the whole creation, and raise it to the very source of blessing and life.

Rav Avraham Yitzchak HaCohen Kook, *Olat Hariyah*

1. What is the “source of their origin” for all of creation?
2. What do you think Rav Kook means when he says prayer is the “cure” for this “homesickness of the soul”?
3. How do you think praying encourages us to “feel at one with the whole creation”? How does this process change the way we see ourselves?



**בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹקֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם
שֶׁאָשֶׁר יָצַר אֶת הָאָדָם בִּחֲכֹמָה
וּבָרָא בּוֹ נָקְבִּים נָקְבִּים, תְּלֻלִים תְּלֻלִים.
גָּלוּי וִידּוּעַ לְפָנֵי כְּסָא כְּבוֹדְךָ
שָׁם יִפְתַּח אֶחָד מִמֶּנּוּ
אוֹ יִסְתַּמֵּחַ אֶחָד מִמֶּנּוּ
אֵי אָפָּשָׁר לְהַתְּקִים וְלַעֲמֹד לִפְנֵיךְ.
בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה'
רֹופֵא בְּלָבֶבֶר וּמְפַלֵּיא לְעָשׂוֹת.**

...A THOUSAND WORDS



1. Answer the questions under the "Reflection" section. What is the common theme behind them?
2. What is the image on the page? How is it related to the "Reflection" questions and the "Connection" section?
3. What statement of belief are you making when you make this beracha?
4. Describe the emotions that come with the message from this beracha.
5. What impact does this beracha have on your relationship with yourself (**בֵין אָדָם לְעַצְמוֹ**)?

ברוך Blessed are You, LORD our God, King of the Universe,
who formed man with wisdom

and created in him many openings and cavities.
It is revealed and known before the throne of Your glory
that were one of them to be ruptured or blocked,
it would be impossible to survive and stand before You.
Blessed are You, LORD,
Healer of all flesh
who does miracles.

REFLECTION

"We forget that we have
a holy body
no less than a holy spirit."
(Rav Kook, *Orot HaTehiya* 33)

Is your body a highly
efficient scientific machine
or a miracle from God?
Can it be both?

Does your human body
help you to believe in God?
If your human body is a
gift from God, how would
that change the way you
treat your body?

"The human body contains 100 trillion cells.
Within each cell is a nucleus. Within each
nucleus is a double copy of the human ge-
nome. Each genome contains 3.1 billion letters
of genetic code, enough if transcribed to fill a
library of five thousand books. Each cell, in other
words, contains a blueprint of the entire body
of which it is a part. The cumulative force of these
scientific discoveries is nothing short of wondrous.
In ways undreamt of by our ancestors, we now
know to what extent the microcosm is a map
of the macrocosm. From a single cell, it may be
possible to reconstruct an entire organism."

(Rabbi Jonathan Sacks,
Covenant & Conversation, Emor 5768)

LEARNING

This *berakha* is said after every
visit to the restroom, to thank
Hashem for the intricate won-
ders of the human body. It is

recommended to go to the restroom imme-
diately after washing your hands in the morn-
ing, and then say both the *berakha* of *Netilat
Yadayim* and *Asher Yatzar*.



Revelation: Between Man and God (בין אדם למקומות)



Lord, where shall I find You?
High and hidden is Your place.
And where shall I not find You?
Your glory fills infinities of space ...
I have sought Your presence
called You with all my heart,
And going out to meet You
I found You coming toward me.

Rabbi Yehudah Halevi, *Selected Poems of Judah Halevi*, p. 134

1. One of God's names is *Makom*/מקום, (as in בין אדם למקומות), literally "space". Does this poem help you understand why?
2. "High and hidden is Your place" vs. "And where shall I not find You"? Which one is it? Is God far away and transcendent (beyond our ordinary world) or close and imminent (immediate, close by)? Which of these do you connect to more? Why?
3. Can God be both of these at the same time? Can you think of a *tefilla* in the siddur that says so? (Clue: said on fast days and High Holidays.)



In my heart I will build a sanctuary
To God's glorious splendour,
And in the sanctuary I will raise an altar
To the radiance of His majesty.
As fire I will take
The fire of the Binding,
And as a sacrifice I will offer Him
My undivided soul.

Adapted from Rabbi Eliezer Azikri, *Sefer Charedim*

1. Originally we used the *korbanot* in the *Bet HaMikdash* to worship God. What is the message behind that form of worship?
2. Since the destruction of the *Bet HaMikdash* almost 2000 years ago, we replaced that form of worship with prayer. How is prayer also a sacrifice to God?
3. How do you offer God your "undivided soul" in your everyday life?



(If forgotten, repeat the Amida.)

קדושת השם

אתה קדוש ושםך קדוש
וקדושים בכל יום יהלוך סלה.

ברוך אתה ה' האיל הקדוש.

(בשורת ימי תשובה: **מלך הקדושים.**)

REFLECTION

How can I behave today
in a way that reflects
my inner holiness?

Am I behaving
in a way that makes
a *kiddush Hashem*?

What will you do today
to bring holiness
into the world?

LEARNING

"A person will have to answer for everything that his eye beheld and he did not consume." (Yerushalmi, *Kiddushin* 4:12) In Judaism, holiness does not mean denying the physical, rather enjoying that which is permitted to us and uplifting it to make it spiritual. *Kedusha* is the transformation and the elevation of the mundane to the holy and spiritual.

... A THOUSAND WORDS



1. Look at the list of names in the photograph. What's in a name? What does a name represent? How does your name do that?
2. Why do you think we mention God's "name" in this *beracha*? If a name reflects the essence of a person, what do the names of God reflect?
3. What do you think "Holiness" means? If God is holy, and you are created in His image, then are you holy? Do you have to work at it or does it happen automatically?
4. Read the story on the page of the Siddur. It seems that there is a lot in a name. It can define our relationship with a person. Which of God's names do you most connect to?
5. What kind of impact does this *beracha* have on your relationship with God (**בין אדם למקום**)?

HOLINESS

אתה קדוש You are holy and **Your name is holy**, and holy ones praise You daily, Selah!

Blessed are You, LORD,

the holy God. / Between Rosh HaShana & Yom Kippur: **the holy King.** /

(If forgotten, repeat the Amida.)

CONNECTION

Imagine a city in the middle of a war. The dirt flying in the air. Missiles overhead. Everything in chaos. The smell of chemicals permeating the thick fog that has become the sky and civilians running through the streets in confusion, in panic – a living nightmare. A doctor runs across the blood-stained streets looking for people he can help, wounds he can heal just enough to get people back on their feet so they can keep running, keep living. He tends to a man bleeding from a piece of shrapnel, when he suddenly hears someone call out, "Doctor."

A short distance away he sees the woman calling out. She is hurt and in need of immediate attention. But as soon as he runs toward her, he hears another voice: "David!" He looks over to see his neighbor on the ground with a serious injury. No sooner than two steps to the neighbor's direction, a small voice pierces through the sweaty air and whispers, "Dad." The doctor is paralyzed for a moment before looking for his son amidst the rubble.

"Hashem" is the Jewish People's way of saying Dad. Dad is not the person's legal name, it's not their Hebrew name, it's not their business title. It's shorthand. It's a way to say that we, as Jews, have a nickname for You, God. It's a nickname that suggests both intimacy and respect, like the appellation "Dad." It's a way to tell your father that you love him, but that you still understand he's the father, he's in charge.

Likewise with Hashem: we love You and feel close to You. And at the same time we recognize our distance and who is really in charge.

(Jon Dabach)



Redemption: Between Man and his Fellow (בין אדם לחבירו)



May it be your will, O Lord our God, to cause to dwell in our lot Love, fellowship, peace and friendship, to widen our boundaries through students, to prosper our goal with hope and with future, to appoint us a share in the garden of Eden, to direct us in your world through good companions and good impulse, That we may rise in the morning and find Our heart awake to fear your name.

Talmud Bavli, Berachot 16b

1. Why do we need to pray for help with finding "Love, fellowship, peace and friendship"? Aren't these in our own hands? Are these things easy or hard to achieve?
2. Why should we pray to have students if we are not a teacher? Does everyone have "students"? Do you have any "students"?
3. Why do we need to pray for help to find hope? Isn't that a state of mind that we can control? How can God help us find hope?



Lord and King of Peace,
Who makes peace and creates all things:
Help all of us that we may always hold fast to the attribute of peace,
So that true and abundant peace prevail between man and man, between
husband and wife,
And no strife separate humankind even in thought.
You make peace in Your heaven, You bring contrary elements together:
Extend abundant peace to us and to the whole world,
So that all discords be resolved in great love and peace,
And with one mind, one heart, all come near to You and Your law in truth,
And all form one union to do Your will with a whole heart.
Lord of peace, bless us with peace.

Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav, *Likkutei Tefillot*, I, 95

1. Why do we need God's help to make peace?
2. Do you think peace is hard to achieve? In your school? In your family? In your community? In the world?
3. Is having "one mind and one heart" the same as living in peace? Which is a greater achievement, living peacefully with "one heart and one mind" or living peacefully with people that disagree and think differently from you?



על גּוֹ נִקּוֹה לְךָ הָאֱלֹקִינוּ, לְרֹאֹות מַהְרָה בַּתְּפִאָרֶת עַזָּךְ
 לְהַעֲבֵר גָּלוּלִים מִן הָאָרֶץ, וְהַאֲלִילִים בָּרוֹת יִכְרֹטוּן
לְתִקְוָן עָזָלָם בְּמִלְכָוֹת שָׁדָי.
 וְכֹל בְּנֵי בָּשָׂר יִקְרֹאוּ בְּשִׁמְךָ לְהַפְּנוּת אֵלֶיךָ כִּל רְשֵׁי אָרֶץ.
 יִכְרֹוּ וַיַּדְרֹעוּ כִּל יוֹשֵׁבִי תִּבְלִל
 כִּי לְךָ תִּכְרֹעַ כִּל בָּרֶךָ, תִּשְׁבַּע כִּל לְשׁוֹן.
 לְפִנְךָ הָאֱלֹקִינוּ בְּכָרְעֹוּ וַיְפִלְלֹו
 וְלִכְבּוֹד שָׁמָן יִקְרֹר יִתְנוּ
 וַיִּקְבְּלוּ בְּלָם אָתָּה עַל מִלְכָוֹתֶךָ
 וְתִמְלֹךְ עַלְיהֶם מַהְרָה לְעַלְלָם וְעַד.
כִּי הַמְלָכוֹת שְׁלַחְתָּךְ הָיא וְלַעֲלוֹמִי עַד תִּמְלֹךְ בְּכָבוֹד
 בְּכַתְּבוֹב בְּתוֹרַתְךָ, הָיִם לְךָ לְעַלְלָם וְעַד:
וְאָנוּמָר וְהִיא הַלְּמִלְךָ עַל־בְּלִיל־הָאָרֶץ
בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא יְהִי הָאָחֵד וְשָׁמוֹ אָחֵד:
 Some add:
אַל־תִּרְאָא כְּפֹרֶד פְּתָאָם וְמִשְׁאָתָּה רִשְׁעָם יִתְבָּא:
עַשׂ עַזָּה וְזָפָר, דָּבָר דָּבָר וְאֶיךָ כִּי עַמְּנָן אָל:
וְעַד־זָקָנָה אָנָי הָאָוָא, נִיעַש־שְׁבָה אָנָי אָסְפָּל וְאָמְלָט: ישעה טו

שנות טו

וכירה ד'

משלוג

ישעה ח

ישעה טו

REFLECTION

"[Hillel says]: That which is hateful to you, do not do to your friend. That is the entire Torah. The rest is just explanation. Go and study it!"
 (Shabbat 31a)

How would you sum up Judaism in one sentence?

... A THOUSAND WORDS

1. What does "Tikkun Olam" mean? How can we do it?
2. Read the Reflection question. Hillel sums up the essence of Judaism. How can that help us achieve "Tikkun Olam"?
3. The photograph shows the flag of the State of Israel flying among the community of nations outside the United Nations building in New York. What role can Israel play in "Tikkun Olam"?
4. Can you make more of an impact with *Tikkun Olam* if you live in the diaspora or in Israel?
5. What kind of impact does this *beracha* have on your relationships with other people in your life (**בֵין אָדָם לְחַבְּדוֹ**)?

Share your analysis: Come together as a class. Present what you learned about the theme of *tefila* that was allocated to you, making reference to the supplementary sources and the answers you came up with to the questions accompanying them.

Therefore, we place our hope in You, LORD our God,

that we may soon see the glory of Your power,

when You will remove abominations from the earth,

and idols will be utterly destroyed,

when the world will be perfected

under the sovereignty of the Almighty,

when all humanity will call on Your name,

to turn all the earth's wicked towards You.

All the world's inhabitants will realise and know

that to You every knee must bow and every tongue swear loyalty.

Before You, LORD our God, they will kneel and bow down

and give honour to Your glorious name.

They will all accept the yoke of Your kingdom,

and You will reign over them soon and for ever.

For the kingdom is Yours, and to all eternity You will reign in glory,

as it is written in Your Torah: "The LORD will reign for ever and ever." Ex. 15

► And it is said: "Then the LORD shall be King over all the earth;

Zech. 14

on that day the LORD shall be One and His name One."

Some add:

Have no fear of sudden terror or of the ruin when it overtakes the wicked.

Devise your strategy, but it will be defeated, propose your plan,

but it will not stand, for God is with us.

When you grow old, I will still be the same.

When your hair turns grey, I will still carry you.

I made you, I will bear you, I will carry you, and I will rescue you.

Prov. 3

Is. 8

Is. 46

LEARNING

The two paragraphs of the prayer *Aleinu* represent two distinct but related themes. The first paragraph explores our chosenness in the eyes of Hashem, while the second speaks of our mission in the world – to improve it (*tikkun olam*), which is the reason why we have been chosen. In the words of

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks: "No prayer more eloquently expresses the dual nature of the Jewish People: its singular history as the nation chosen to be God's witness on earth, and its universal aspiration for the time when all the inhabitants of earth will recognise the God in whose image we are formed."



Themes of *Tefilla* in the Writings of Rabbi Sacks



Analysis in *Chavruta*: Now let's explore further themes of *tefila* in Rabbi Sacks' thought in more depth. The texts are taken from his introduction to the Koren Siddur. In your *chavruta* take one of the themes below (your teacher will tell you which one to look at). Use the guiding questions to help you analyze and understand what Rabbi Sacks is saying.

Then in your *chavruta* prepare a short presentation on what Rabbi Sacks says about the theme you explored, to be given to the rest of your class.

Prayer and Sacrifice



The connection between prayer and sacrifice is deep. As we have seen, sacrifice is not the only forerunner of our prayers; many prayers were spoken by figures in the Bible. These were said without any accompanying offering. Yet the sacrificial system is a major tributary of the Jewish river of prayer. After the destruction of the second *Bet HaMikdash*, prayer became a substitute for sacrifice. It is *avoda shebalev*, “the sacrificial service of the heart.” Yet it is just this feature of the prayers that many find difficult to understand or find uplifting. What, then, was sacrifice?

The Hebrew word for sacrifice is *korban*, which comes from a root that means “to come, or bring close.” The essential problem to which sacrifice is an answer is: how can we come close to God? This is a profound question – perhaps the question of the religious life – not simply because of the utter disparity between God’s infinity and our finitude, but also because the very circumstances of life tend to focus our gaze downward to our needs rather than upward to our source. The Hebrew word for universe, *olam*, is connected to the verb meaning “to hide” (see *Vayikra* 4:13; *Devarim* 22:1). The physical world is a place in which the presence of God is real, yet hidden. Our horizon of consciousness is foreshortened. We focus on our own devices and desires. We walk in God’s light, but often our mind is on other things.

How then do we come close to God? By an *act of renunciation*; by giving something away; specifically, by giving something back. The sacrifices of the biblical age were ways in which the individual, or the nation as a whole, in effect said: what we have, God, is really Yours. The world exists because of You. We exist because of You. Nothing we have is ultimately ours. The



fundamental gesture of sacrifice is, on the face of it, absurd. What we give to God is something that already belongs to Him. As King David said: "Who am I and who are my people that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from You, and we have given You only what comes from Your hand" (*Divrei HaYamim I* 29:14). Yet to give back to God is one of the most profound instincts of the soul. Doing so, we acknowledge our dependency. We cast off the carapace of self-absorption. That is why, in one of its most striking phrases, the Torah speaks of sacrifice as being *rei'ach nicho'ach*, "sweet savor" to God.

1. How is prayer connected to the concept of sacrifice?
2. Do you have to make any sacrifices to pray?
3. How does offering a sacrifice to God bring you closer to Him?
4. When you give a present to someone does that bring you closer to them?
5. According to Rabbi Sacks, what statements are we making when we offer a sacrifice (whether a possession, or our time and effort) to God?

Kavana: Directing the Mind



Prayer is more than saying certain words in the right order. It needs concentration, attention, engagement of mind and heart, and the left and right hemispheres of the brain. Without devotion, said Rabbi Bachya ibn Pakuda, prayer is like a body without a soul. The key Hebrew word here is *kavana*, meaning mindfulness, intention, focus, direction of the mind.

In the context of prayer, it means several different things. The most basic level is *kavana le-shem mitzva*, which means, having the intention to fulfill a *mitzva*. This means that we do not act for social or aesthetic reasons. We pray because we are commanded to pray. Generally in Judaism there is a long-standing debate about whether the commandments require *kavana*, but certainly prayer does, because it is supremely an act of the mind.

At a second level, *kavana* means understanding the words (*perush hamilim*). At least the most important sections of prayer require *kavana* in this sense. Without it, the words we say would be mere sounds. Understanding the words is, of course, made much easier by the existence of translations and commentaries.

A third level relates to context. How do I understand my situation when I pray? Rambam states this principle as follows: "The mind should be freed from all extraneous thoughts and the one who prays should realize that he is



standing before the Divine Presence.” These are essential elements of at least the *Amida*, the prayer par excellence in which we are conscious of standing before God. That is why we take three steps forward at the beginning, and three back at the end – as if we were entering, then leaving, sacred space.

The fourth level of *kavana* is not merely saying the words but meaning them, affirming them. Thus, for example, while saying the first paragraph of the *Shema*, we “accept of the yoke of the kingdom of heaven” – declaring our allegiance to God as the supreme authority in our lives. In the second paragraph, we “accept of the yoke of the commandments.” The word *Amen* means roughly, “I affirm what has been said.” In prayer we put ourselves into the words. We make a commitment. We declare our faith, our trust, and our dependency. We mean what we say.

1. Why is *kavana* more important for *tefilla* than for other *mitzvot*?
2. Which of the four levels of *kavana* do you generally reach when you pray? How can you improve your *kavana*?
3. Do you think there is still value in engaging in prayer with only the first level of *kavana*?
4. How do you think we can achieve the goal of “meaning what we say” in the fourth level of *kavana*?
5. Do you think preparation before *tefilla* would help with improving *kavana*? Would it help with all four levels of *kavana*, or just some of them?

Is Prayer Answered?

Is prayer answered? If God is changeless, how can we change Him by what we say? Even discounting this, why do we need to articulate our requests? Surely God, who sees the heart, knows our wishes even before we do, without our having to put them into words. What we wish to happen is either right or wrong in the eyes of God. If it is right, God will bring it about even if we do not pray. If it is wrong, God will not bring it about even if we do. So why pray?

The classic Jewish answer is simple but profound. Without a vessel to contain a blessing, there can be no blessing. If we have no receptacle to catch the rain, the rain may fall, but we will have none to drink. If we have no radio receiver, the sound waves will flow, but we will be unable to convert them into sound. God’s blessings flow continuously, but unless we make ourselves into a vessel for them, they will flow elsewhere. *Prayer is the act of turning ourselves into a vehicle for the Divine.*



Speaking from personal experience, and from many encounters with people for whom prayer was a lifeline, I know that our prayers are answered: not always in the *way* we expected, not always as quickly as we hoped, but *prayer is never in vain*. Sometimes the answer is, “No.” If granting a request would do us or others harm, God will not grant it. But “No” is also an answer, and when God decides that something I have prayed for should not come to pass, then I pray for the wisdom to understand why. That too is part of spiritual growth: to accept graciously what we cannot or should not change. Nor is prayer a substitute for human effort: on the contrary, prayer is one of the most powerful sources of energy for human effort. God gives us the strength to achieve what we need to achieve, and to do what we were placed on earth to do.

Prayer changes the world because it changes us. At its height, it is a profoundly transformative experience. If we have truly prayed, we come in the course of time to know that the world was made, and we were made, for a purpose; that God, though immeasurably vast, is also intensely close; that “were my father and my mother to forsake me, the Lord would take me in”; that God is with us in our efforts, and that we do not labor in vain. We know, too, that we are part of the community of faith, and with us are four thousand years of history and the prayers and hopes of those who came before us. However far we feel from God, He is there behind us, and all we have to do is turn to face Him. Faith is born and lives in prayer, and faith is the antidote to fear: “The Lord is the stronghold of my life – of whom shall I be afraid?”

1. Read the first paragraph again. In what way is Rabbi Sacks challenging our concept of prayer? What assumption is he basing this challenge on?
2. Can you relate to the first classic answer given to this question?
3. What does “No’ is also an answer,” mean?
4. How does prayer change us?
5. This approach to prayer seems to place us at the center of the prayer experience. How is this reflected in the etymological construction of the verb to pray – **לְהַתִּפְלֵל**?

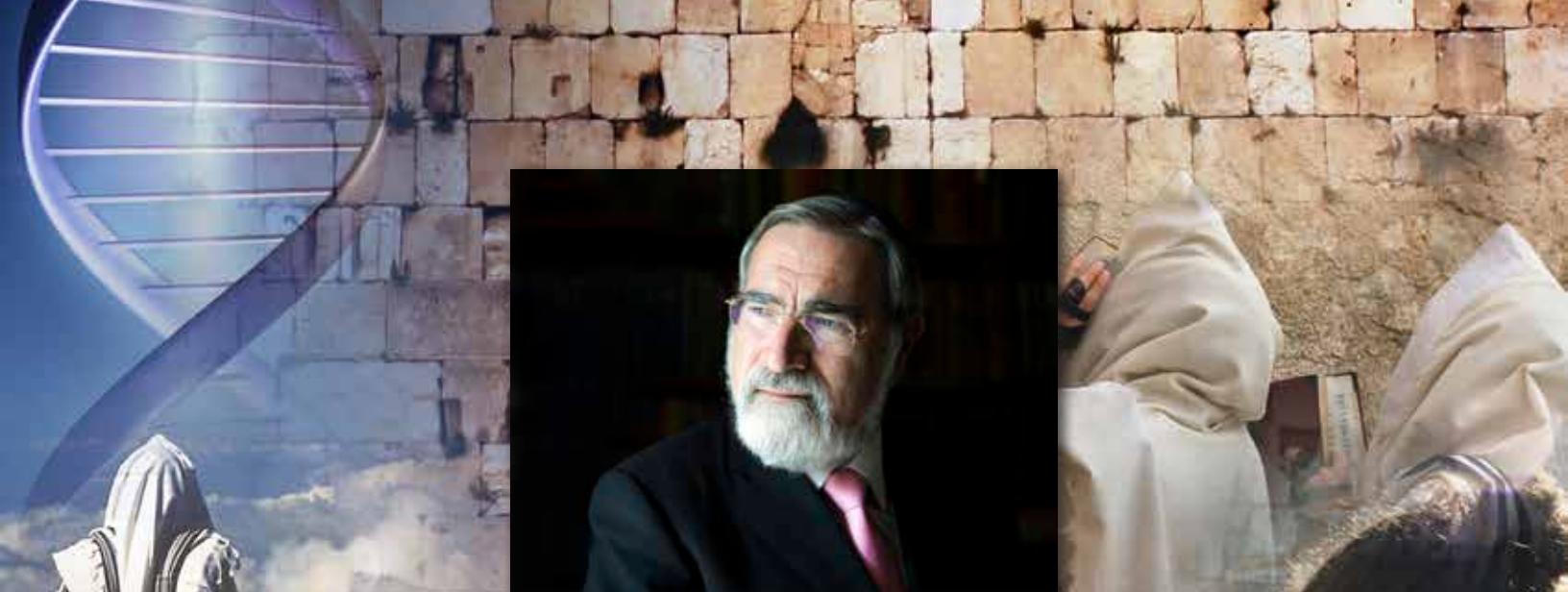
The Assignment



In this unit we have explored the themes of *creation*, *revelation*, and *redemption* in *tefillah* and how they connect to the three paradigm relationships – *between man and himself* (בֵין אָדָם לְעַצְמוֹ), *between man and God* (בֵין אָדָם לְמֶלֶךְ) and *between man and his fellow* (בֵין אָדָם לְחَבִירֹ).

Part 1: This assignment is to write your own *tefila*, with all of these themes contained within it. Try to make your *tefila* beautiful and expressive of what is in your heart. It may be a poem, or a song, or prose. If you want to explain the meaning behind it you can also write your own commentary on it.

Part 2: For bonus points, prepare a list of questions for Rabbi Sacks on any of the topics we have studied in this unit. Send your questions to your teacher, who will forward a number of insightful questions from the class to Rabbi Sacks. Rabbi Sacks will respond to a selection of the questions he receives for each unit from students around the world. Visit www.RabbiSacks.org/TenPaths to see his responses.



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