

AMIDAH - THE STANDING PRAYER

by Rabbi Yehudah Prero

The Amidah is commonly referred to as the silent prayer. This, however, is a misnomer, for the Amidah is to be said softly, not silently, to yourself. The words should be audible to your ears and your ears alone. To your heart and your heart alone. Far too often the Jewish people have been faced with despair. But rather than wither we have responded with hope, with courage and even with joy and optimism. Much of the Amidah is an expression of our longing for a better, more humane world.

Hashem Sefasai Tiftach / G-d Open My Lips

A toddler thinks that she cannot walk, but she can. A child fears he will never swim, but he will. Each of us is aware of our abilities and potential, and we all experience fear, doubt and hesitation. Many of our limitations in life are more perceived than real. Often, it is only phantoms that are holding us back. In Hebrew the word for lips is the same as the word for banks, as in river banks. The banks of a river define its limits. When we say "G-d, open my lips," we are also saying, "G-d, help me to see beyond my perceived limitations. Help me to see all the way to the horizon of my potential."

1. I will create time in my life to nurture my soul.
2. Life is a gift I received; I will find a way to "give something back."

Man: Microcosm of the Universe

G-d created two worlds: One of immense proportions and another equally vast, though not manifestly so. In Hebrew the word for world, or universe, is *olam*. The universe is referred to as *olam hagadol*, the macro-universe. Man is known to our sages as *olam hakatan*, the micro-universe. The word *olam* also has another connotation: it means concealment. The fullness of what is contained in an *olam*, a universe, is not always apparent. Man, microcosm of the universe that he is, is the keeper of a potential that borders on the infinite. On one level this thought defies our comprehension, while in the same instance it is clearly understood. We all wonder if there is anything that lies beyond the reach of human beings. Each and every one of us is a unique *olam*, a universe of potential. One minute you see it and the next it seems to vanish. Our potential stretches as far as the eye can see.

Zachreynu L'Chaim / Remember Us for Life

The voice was that of one who survived the unfathomable hell of Auschwitz. A silent terror still lines his face—even when he smiles. "If I had a choice," he said, "of having to relive every torturous moment again or to be a German guard in the camps, I'd go through it all again rather than serve for

even one hour as a guard."

The German guards lived and breathed. They went home to wives and children, they enjoyed the finest classical music and they laughed: All in a day's work. But they were dead.

The life that we ask for and strive for on Rosh Hashanah is more than just survival. It's a life of value and meaning. You can be alive and dead or you can be alive and live. Choose life!

Magen Avraham / Shield of Abraham

There is, they say, a spark of Abraham in all of us. Abraham, the founder of the Jewish nation, was one man in a very foreign world. No one—literally no one—thought the way he did. No one shared his values, his vision, his dedication to meaningful actions.

Each of us is the fusion of body and soul, physical and spiritual. At times it seems the soul is so alone, forever lost in the fatty recesses of the body, in the murky world of materialism.

In Yiddish there is a particular term for the special spark in every Jewish soul, it's known as the *pintele yid* (the Jewish essence). This *pintele yid*, this essence, is a deep part of every Jew, a longing that can never be extinguished. A bit of light, no matter how dim, forever shines. The miracle of the exodus of Russian Jews to Israel is not so much that they are finally free, not so much that there even exists an Israel to receive them, but that by the thousands and hundreds of thousands they still care very much about being Jewish. Seventy years of relentless physical and psychological oppression was unable to extinguish the Abraham—that spark in the Jewish soul.

An Israeli newspaper reported that tens of thousands of recent Russian immigrants, children and adults, have received a *bris mila* (circumcision) upon their arrival in Israel. Many of these take place in almost assembly line fashion with the *mohel* performing one after another. A newspaper reporter was questioning the immigrants waiting in line about the motivation for their actions. When asked if he believed in G-d, one middle-aged Russian who was raised on a steady diet of Communist propaganda declared, "No, I don't believe in G-d, I'm an atheist." The curious reporter, a bit taken aback, went on, "Then why are you having a *bris*?" There in the land of Israel, the land of King David and the Maccabees, of the Western Wall and Ethiopian Jews, the Russian answered proudly, "Without a *bris*, it is impossible to be a Jew!"

Only a Jewish atheist could utter such words, and only the spark of Abraham could yield such an atheist.

U'Vchayn Tayn Pach'dcha / Instill Awe and Fear

"There aren't many injuries in BASE jumping. You either live or you die."

Frank Gambalie, expert BASE jumper

"I expect to lose three to four friends a year."

Nancy Prichard, prominent ice climber

Did you ever notice how people will pay good money to be frightened? Millions of people visit amusement parks each year. And where do you find the longest lines? At the roller coaster: a ride that tries to convince you that your next moment will be your last.

A brush with death is exhilarating. In an article about extreme sports, *U.S. News & World Report* observed that, "many athletes go to the extreme because they feel most vibrantly alive when straddling the line between safety and danger." If you've ever had a "close call" in a car then you know that you were far more alert and alive after the narrow escape than you were the entire day before.

In Hebrew the word for fear is *Yira*, which also means to see or to perceive. If you choose to see life for what it is, an enormous opportunity and a serious responsibility, rather than look the other way, well, that can be frightening—or exhilarating.

U'Vchayn Tzadikim / The Righteous Will See and Be Glad

Far too often the Jewish people have come face to face with utter despair. Surely history would pardon us if we succumbed to despondency and lethargy in the face of this relentless confrontation.

Yet we have chosen to do otherwise. We have responded with optimism and hope, even where there seemed to be none, with quiet courage and with joy. You read the newspapers, day in and day out, and you long for a more humane world. We believe that it is possible—despite the headlines.

Avinu Malkeinu / Our Father Our King

A father has a very special love for each and every one of his children but not necessarily the means to give them everything he wants to give. An omnipotent king looks out from his palace and sees a nation—faceless individuals he will never know.

There are moments in Jewish history when we sense both Avinu, our Father and Malkeinu, our King.

A high-tech war in the Persian Gulf brought down a shower of missiles on a largely undefended Israel. In such a scenario, Israeli military experts predicted, hundreds if not thousands would be lost.

Avinu Malkeinu, hundreds of residential buildings were reduced to rubble and yet there was scarcely a casualty.

3. The love I feel for my (sister, husband, daughter, father etc.) is transcendent; I will cherish it forever and seek ways to express it.
4. It is a privilege to be a part of the Jewish people; I will search for ways to deepen that connection.