

URI EHRLICH

The  
Nonverbal Language  
of Prayer

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105

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**Mohr Siebeck**

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Uri Ehrlich

# The Nonverbal Language of Prayer

A New Approach to Jewish Liturgy

Translated by Dena Ordan

Mohr Siebeck

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In memory of my grandparents

Martha and Arthur Dernburg



## Preface to the English Edition

Prayer has many names: *tefillah* (petition), *tehinah* (beseeching), *ze'akah* (shouting), *ze'akah* (cry), *shavah* (cry for help), *renanah* (cry of prayer), *pegi'ah* (plea), *nefilah* (falling down); *amidah* (standing).

(*Tanhuma, Va-ethanan* 3)

This midrash highlights the multidimensional nature of the Prayer and names a variety of expressive means alongside the Prayer's verbal aspect. It is this book's aim to portray the nonverbal components of the Prayer – physical gestures, attire, and vocality – and to demonstrate their importance for, and integrality to, the prayer-act.

The English edition is a revised version of my Hebrew book “*Kol azmotai tomarnah*”: *Ha-safah ha-lo milulit shel ha-Tefillah* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1999), which was an expansion of my doctoral dissertation (Hebrew University, 1993). This book's favorable reception among the Hebrew-reading public has already led to the publication of a second edition (2003). From its original appearance, various colleagues encouraged me to produce an English edition of the book as a means of making my work available to scholars not conversant with modern Hebrew, particularly those whose interests lie in the fields of Jewish studies and the study of religion.

In the process of preparing the English edition, I introduced many changes to the body of the text, the notes, and the bibliography, this both to update the book and especially to adapt the book to its new audience. The citations of the text sources were based largely on the translations listed in the bibliography; however, I took the liberty of introducing changes where the translation seemed unsatisfactory, or where lack of clarity interfered with the discussion, without so indicating for each individual instance.

Dena Ordan undertook the task of translating and editing the English edition. Her linguistic skills and good judgment are represented throughout, and I note her efforts with thanks. Two colleagues read and commented on the manuscript. It is my pleasant task to thank Richard Sarason for reading the entire manuscript and for his insightful and constructive comments. Thanks are also due to Gerald J. Blidstein for reading and

commenting on part of the manuscript. I must also thank Moshe Lavie for tackling the complex task of preparing the indexes, and Raphael Posner of Posner and Sons Ltd., Jerusalem, for his skilled typesetting of the book. Finally, I would like to express my appreciation to Peter Schäfer and Martin Hengel for inviting me to publish this book in the Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism series of the Mohr Siebeck Press. I thank Dan Benovici of the Magnes Press for his assistance in choosing a publisher for the English edition and for transferring the English language rights to Mohr Siebeck. The last stages of prepublication preparation were carried out during my stay as a Skirball Visiting Fellow at the Oxford Centre for Hebrew and Jewish Studies. I wish to thank the Centre for its hospitality.

The preparation of the English edition was supported by the Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture, the Lucius N. Littauer Foundation, the Research and Publications Committee of Ben-Gurion University, and the Norbert Blechner Chair in Jewish Values held by Daniel J. Lasker. To all, my profound thanks.

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## Abbreviations

BT, <i>b</i>	Babylonian Talmud, <i>Babli</i>
<i>m</i>	<i>Mishnah</i>
PT, <i>y</i>	Palestinian Talmud, <i>Yerushalmi</i>
<i>t</i>	<i>Tosefta</i>

### Mishnah, Tosefta, Talmud

<i>Abod. Zar.</i>	<i>Abodah Zarah</i>
<i>B. Bat.</i>	<i>Baba Batra</i>
<i>B. Kam.</i>	<i>Baba Kamma</i>
<i>B. Meş.</i>	<i>Baba Meşia</i>
<i>Ber.</i>	<i>Berakhot</i>
<i>Bik.</i>	<i>Bikkurim</i>
<i>Erub.</i>	<i>Erubin</i>
<i>Git.</i>	<i>Gittin</i>
<i>Ḥag.</i>	<i>Ḥagigah</i>
<i>Ḥul.</i>	<i>Ḥullin</i>
<i>Ketub.</i>	<i>Ketubot</i>
<i>Kidd.</i>	<i>Kiddushin</i>
<i>Kil.</i>	<i>Kilayim</i>
<i>Meg.</i>	<i>Megillah</i>
<i>Mid.</i>	<i>Middot</i>
<i>Mo'ed Kat.</i>	<i>Mo'ed Katan</i>
<i>Ned.</i>	<i>Nedarim</i>
<i>Neg.</i>	<i>Nega'im</i>
<i>Pesaḥ.</i>	<i>Pesaḥim</i>
<i>Rosh Hash.</i>	<i>Rosh Hashanah</i>
<i>Sanh.</i>	<i>Sanhedrin</i>
<i>Shabb.</i>	<i>Shabbat</i>
<i>Shekal.</i>	<i>Shekalim</i>
<i>Sukk.</i>	<i>Sukkah</i>
<i>Ta'an.</i>	<i>Ta'anit</i>
<i>Ter.</i>	<i>Terumot</i>
<i>Yebam.</i>	<i>Yebamot</i>
<i>Zebaḥ.</i>	<i>Zebaḥim</i>

### Midrash and Other Works

<i>Avot R. Nat.</i>	<i>Avot de-Rabbi Natan</i>
<i>Deut. Rab.</i>	<i>Deuteronomy Rabbah</i>
<i>Gen. Rab.</i>	<i>Genesis Rabbah</i>
<i>Koh. Rab.</i>	<i>Kohelet Rabbah</i>
<i>Lev. Rab.</i>	<i>Leviticus Rabbah</i>
<i>Mek.</i>	<i>Mekilta</i>
<i>Midr. Prov.</i>	<i>Midrash Proverbs</i>
<i>Midr. Ps.</i>	<i>Midrash Psalms</i>
<i>Num. Rab.</i>	<i>Numbers Rabbah</i>
<i>Pesik. R.</i>	<i>Pesikta Rabbati</i>
<i>Pesik. Rab Kah.</i>	<i>Pesikta de-Rav Kahana</i>
<i>Pirke R. El.</i>	<i>Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer</i>
<i>Sem.</i>	<i>Semaḥot</i>
<i>Sifre Deut.</i>	<i>Sifre Deuteronomy</i>
<i>Sifre Num.</i>	<i>Sifre Numbers</i>
<i>Sof.</i>	<i>Soferim</i>
<i>Tg. Ps.-Jon.</i>	<i>Targum Pseudo-Jonathan</i>
<i>Yal. Shimoni</i>	<i>Yalkut Shimoni</i>



## Introduction

# New Perspectives

Prayer stands at the center of Jewish religious-cultural life, a fundamental aspect of Judaism from the post-Second Temple period through recent generations. At the core of this phenomenon lies what is termed in rabbinic parlance the *Tefillah* – the Prayer *par excellence*, that is, the Eighteen Benedictions recited three times daily, or the Seven Benedictions recited four times on the Sabbath and festivals. This composition, which apparently was instituted in the postdestruction era and realized its fixed form in the generations that followed,<sup>1</sup> embodies the daring creativity of the rabbis who led the Jewish people in the late Second Temple and postdestruction centuries, and must be considered one of postbiblical Jewish culture's outstanding developments. By instituting a formulaic, well-developed complex of ordered benedictions along with an impressive series of *halakhot*, prescribed behaviors, and richly variegated religious directives, the rabbis in essence founded a new way of divine worship as an organic part of the Jew's daily life. The *Tefillah*, along with the *Shema* and its blessings, the other main liturgical unit fixed by the rabbis during the same period, opened a new era in Jewish religious culture, whose influence continues to the present. It seems only natural that this composition has occupied a central position in Jewish liturgical studies, including the present one.<sup>2</sup>

The pioneering studies of eminent scholars of Jewish prayer did not concentrate on the *Tefillah* specifically. Landmark research was carried out by Leopold Zunz,<sup>3</sup> the mid-nineteenth-century founder of the

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<sup>1</sup> The question of the historical development and institution of the *Tefillah* is a focal issue in contemporary liturgical research. This is, however, not the appropriate venue for such a discussion. See also chap. 9, n. 44 below. For a survey of the different scholarly positions regarding this topic, see Levine, *Ancient Synagogue*, 510–19.

<sup>2</sup> The multiplicity of studies on this topic is readily ascertainable from Tabory's extensive bibliography, "Jewish Prayer," 107–20.

<sup>3</sup> For example, his *Die Ritus des synagogalen Gottesdienstes* (Berlin: J. Springer, 1859). On Zunz's other works in the realm of *piyyut* and prayer, see Elbogen, *Liturgy*, index.

*Wissenschaft des Judentums*; by Ismar Elbogen in his comprehensive early-twentieth-century studies;<sup>4</sup> and more recently by Joseph Heinemann, Naphtali Wieder, and Ezra Fleischer.<sup>5</sup> Although building on previous scholarship, including specific studies of the Tefillah,<sup>6</sup> I take a different approach to the Prayer. While profoundly indebted to the vital contributions of previous scholarship, this study proceeds from a new and hitherto untried perspective. It is my firm belief that this perspective can provide a more complete and balanced view not only of the Tefillah in particular, but also of the phenomenon of prayer in general.

Past studies of Jewish prayer, since the nineteenth century, have mainly addressed its textual aspect, namely prayer formulas and the impact of manuscript finds.<sup>7</sup> But this primary focus on liturgical formulas, notwithstanding the variety of methods used to study them (literary, historical, conceptual, linguistic, etc.), ultimately leads to the neglect of additional aspects of prayer. A tacit assumption shared by these studies is that the main aspect of the prayer phenomenon, and in many instances its totality, lies in textual formulas.<sup>8</sup> Whether explicit or implicit, this assumption

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<sup>4</sup> First and foremost, his *Der jüdische Gottesdienst in seiner geschichtlichen Entwicklung* (Leipzig: Fock, 1913). This book has appeared in several editions, most recently in English translation, *Jewish Liturgy: A Comprehensive History*, trans. Raymond P. Scheindlin (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1993); henceforth Elbogen, *Liturgy*.

<sup>5</sup> For Joseph Heinemann's study of prayer in the tannaitic and amoraic period, see Heinemann, *Prayer*. For Naphtali Wieder's views, see his collected essays, *Formation of Jewish Liturgy*. For Ezra Fleischer's studies, see his *Eretz-Israel Prayer*.

<sup>6</sup> Some of the seminal studies include Ezra Fleischer's "Obligatory Jewish Prayer," and "Shemone Esre"; Yehezkel Luger's *Weekday Amidah*; and Reuven Kimelman's "Literary Structure."

<sup>7</sup> For a concise treatment of the development of prayer research, see Reif, *Hebrew Prayer*, chap. 1. For a survey of the state of research in the past decades, see Tabory, "Prayer," 1061–68. The textual focus of liturgical research received added impetus with the discovery of the Cairo Geniza. On the importance of Geniza discoveries for the study of prayer, see Fleischer, *Eretz-Israel Prayer*, 9–11. This generalization by no means ignores the important studies in other fields, in particular the development of liturgical halakhah and of prayer customs.

<sup>8</sup> Heinemann's *Prayer*, still viewed as the most important study of early rabbinic prayer, is an outstanding example. The volume is entirely devoted to prayer formulas and their rhetorical forms; even its title suggests that for Heinemann this is virtually synonymous with prayer.

narrows the scope of research and, in some respects, even distorts the research topic itself.<sup>9</sup>

To my mind what is called for is not the restriction of the study of prayer to the prayer-text, but a multifaceted examination of the *act* of prayer. Although undeniably a fundamental component, the text in and of itself gives only partial expression to the full import of the prayer-act. Viewed from this broader perspective, liturgical formulas are not just literary compositions but rather texts placed in the mouths of worshipers standing before their Creator in prayer, aimed at establishing a living dialogue between individuals and their God. Additional factors shape the holistic nature of the prayer-act in conjunction with prayer formulas: the venue of worship, the number of prayers recited and the time of day, the worshiper's emotional mood, attire, voice, and gestures, and the like. The very multiplicity of names conferred on the Prayer – *tefillah* (prayer), *amidah* (standing), *shemoneh esreh* (eighteen benedictions), *avodah she-ba-lev* (worship of the heart), and *tefillat lahash* (silent prayer) – reflects this multidimensionality.<sup>10</sup>

It is readily apparent that the Prayer takes on significantly different import if it is recited sporadically, or even once daily, or – as the rabbis mandated – thrice daily. The manner in which it is recited – out loud or whispered, in a tone of entreaty or praise, with or without concentration, in a joyous or mournful spirit – is of significance as well. Also not to be overlooked is whether the Prayer is recited in private or with the community, in synagogue or in some secluded corner. A word of clarification is called for: my concern here is not with the unique one-time situation of a particular worshiper but rather with the normative status of statutory prayer.

Central to this study is my contention that one of the most pertinent parallels in the quest for understanding the Prayer comes from the sphere of interpersonal communication. The social sciences have long espoused the expansion of the fundamental concept of interpersonal communication to encompass its nonverbal elements, perceiving the totality of the speech-act as relating to both its verbal and nonverbal aspects. Ultimately,

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<sup>9</sup> A similar critique was voiced by Hoffman, *Beyond the Text*, chap. 1. His methodological approach to this subject differs from mine, however.

<sup>10</sup> A similar multidimensionality is reflected in *Midrash Tanhuma (Va-ethanan 3)*: “Prayer has many names: *tefillah* (petition), *tehinah* (beseeching), *ze'akah* (shouting), *ze'akah* (cry), *shavah* (cry for help), *renanah* (cry of prayer), *pegi'ah* (plea), *nefilah* (falling down); *amidah* (standing). See also *Sifre Deut.*, piska 26.

this has given rise to a specific field of research – nonverbal communication,<sup>11</sup> which treats movement, intonation, attire, and other features as present in every type of interpersonal communication and as conveyors of important messages. If we submit that the prayer-act may be viewed essentially as a vehicle for human-divine communication, it seems appropriate to borrow tools from studies of interpersonal communication in order to inform our understanding. The influence of this field is readily apparent in the choice of elements included in this book, which cover such nonverbal aspects of the Jewish prayer-act as standing, bowing, orientation of the body and face, the position of the hands, departing from prayer, attire, footwear, and vocality.

Investigation of these nontextual elements of prayer calls for application of fresh skills and new tools to the analysis of Jewish sources and to the decoding of the symbolic “language” of prayer as shaped by the rabbis. Outside the field of nonverbal communication, significant contributions to liturgical studies come primarily from the disciplines of comparative religion, anthropology, sociology, and psychology. Although caution must be exercised in exploiting other fields for the study of prayer, the indispensability of broadening our research horizons and the importance of examining prayer via the approach proposed here is evident from its rewards.

The period under consideration spans nine hundred years. Customarily referred to as the late Second Commonwealth and early rabbinic periods, it stretches from before the Hasmonean revolt (mid-second century B.C.E.) to the time of the Arab conquest (first half of the seventh century C.E.).<sup>12</sup> The bulk of the literary sources attributed to this period relevant to this study, however, date to a more limited framework, from the first to the sixth centuries C.E. It was these centuries that saw the creation of the statutory prayers in Judaism, in the course of which the Prayer, which is the focus of this book, reached almost final form.

At the heart of this study stand nine gestures – actions and behaviors integral to the prayer-act as shaped during the period in question. Each gesture is treated in a separate chapter, where it is described and its significance examined. My initial goal has been, insofar as possible, to create a credible and realistic picture of each gesture as it crystallized during the

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<sup>11</sup> An extensive literature treats this topic. See, for example, Eisenberg and Smith, *Nonverbal Communication: Key, Paralanguage*. For an exhaustive bibliography citing hundreds of studies, see idem, *Nonverbal Communication: Research Guide*.

<sup>12</sup> For a definition of the rabbinic or mishnaic-talmudic period, see Urbach, *Sages*, 1:1–2. See also Tabory, *Festivals*, 13.

period in question, considering not only the gesture's status – that of normative halakhah, a widespread practice, or an individual custom – but also its diachronic development from the beginning of the era until its close. To round out this picture, differences between the two major Jewish population centers, Palestine and Babylonia, are noted, along with variations within each larger community.

To arrive at these descriptions, I have utilized in the main the various talmudic sources. In approaching each gesture, I first analyze the tannaitic sources representative of the period up until the early third century: mainly the Mishnah, the Tosefta, and the halakhic midrashim. Only then do I turn to the amoraic sources, mostly the two Talmuds – Palestinian and Babylonian – and the aggadic midrashim, representative of the fifth to sixth centuries and, in the case of some midrashic texts, an even later period. Not only do the talmudic sources contain the relevant halakhot governing the gestures, but they also bear witness to their *realia*. Examination of these sources, assisted by philological-historical methodologies, facilitates relatively precise depiction of the gestures. Taken together, they reflect differences between periods and places, and even between schools of thought or individuals. Additional sources, literary and otherwise, complete the picture. Archaeological finds, from ancient synagogues in particular, often indicate manners of prayer. Targum and *hekhalot* literature, apocryphal and sectarian texts, and contemporary non-Jewish writings, Christian and others, also impact upon this study. Generally speaking, each gesture has received a relatively comprehensive portrait as realized in the context of the recitation of the Prayer, not just from the viewpoint of the normative rabbinic ideal, which forms our primary interest, but also from the viewpoint of actual practice.

Integral to each description is an attempt to place the gesture being considered in its historical and cultural context, first by examining its nature in the periods immediately preceding and following the early rabbinic age – the biblical and Second Temple periods at one end and the medieval period at the other – and then through comparison with parallel gestures from other cultures, both those historically and religiously related to Judaism and more distant ones. Essential for arriving at a more comprehensive picture, these historical-cultural considerations naturally make a signal contribution to what I define as my main goal: arriving at a fuller understanding of each gesture's meaning.

Significant methodological problems, however, hamper realization of this goal: first of all, the need to develop appropriate tools to overcome the innate difficulty of deciphering the rich nonverbal language of prayer

with its wealth of symbolic means of expression via movement, attire, and voice. A second, no less crucial impediment lies in the scant attention the rabbis themselves devoted to clarifying the signification of the gestures, with the exception of isolated aggadic dicta. Inherent in any attempt to elicit rabbinic thinking based upon halakhic sources, particularly in those instances where the accompanying aggadic material is sparse, this difficulty is inescapable. Nonetheless, in and of itself, it cannot effectively inhibit efforts to study rabbinic thought. Notwithstanding genuine methodological obstacles, the rewards of the study of halakhah as a symbolic reflection of its formulators' conceptual world are inestimable, possessing the potential to make a contribution not only to the inquiry at hand but also to the extrapolation of broader principles of rabbinic thought.

But to return to the more restricted parameters of this study. Three disciplines in particular facilitate my quest to decipher the gestures' deeper meaning, first and foremost the above-mentioned field of nonverbal communication and its tools. Conceptualization of the prayer-act as a human-divine communicative encounter makes methodologies developed within this field a powerful means for extracting the gestures' signification.<sup>13</sup> A second useful tool lies in the cross-cultural comparison of texts and customs, of which the above-cited conceptualization of prayer as an act of interpersonal communication comprises but one stratum. Consideration of related situations in which the gesture has an overt meaning, or in which the situation itself divulges the gesture's function or meaning, also contributes to our ability to unlock the signification of gestures used in prayer. Other pertinent parallels come from the Temple ritual and the angelic realm as envisioned by the rabbis, from the context of judicial and administrative praxis, as well as from the use of gestures in the broader context of Jewish liturgy as a whole, the Shema in particular. Naturally, where relevant, comparisons to practices in other religions are brought to bear on the analysis.<sup>14</sup>

Lastly, the talmudic literature itself constitutes an invaluable source for this study. Its unique structure provides a partial solution to some of the methodological impediments raised earlier. The give-and-take of the talmudic discussion – which at times provides rationales for one or another

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<sup>13</sup> For a pioneering application of this discipline to Judaic studies, see Gruber, *Nonverbal Communication*.

<sup>14</sup> Barasch (*Language of Gesture*) utilized this comparative methodology in his consideration of the language of gestures in Giotto's art. For another study of gestures, see idem, *Gestures of Despair*.

opinion, or treats changes arising from specific circumstances, etc. – partially discloses some intrinsic halakhic considerations, enabling extraction of the underlying organizing principles. Another window on the rabbinic weltanschauung comes from the aggadic or ideological sections found in rabbinic literature. Access to this conceptual world derives not only from halakhic material that incorporates aggadah, but also from aggadic literature in which we occasionally find the homilist inserting halakhic matters. Finally, analysis of the associative editing of the talmudic halakhic literature with its comparisons and connections, on more than one occasion divulges the conceptual world of the rabbis and the rabbinic redactors. As noted, especially germane to this study are the shared and parallel passages that deal with the recitation of the focal liturgical units – the Shema and the Tefillah. Their consideration assists identification of differences and similarities between the two from the viewpoint of the molders of the halakhah.

It is obvious that the discussion of the gestures' signification, which follows their description, demands greater circumspection on the researcher's part in eliciting conclusions from rabbinic sources, both by virtue of their nature and given the aforementioned methodological difficulties. Another pitfall lies in an assumed personal familiarity with prayer, luring scholar and reader alike to interpret matters based upon personal experiences and intuitions. Consequently, I have proceeded cautiously: citing multiple examples, at times taking the trouble to prove the seemingly obvious in order to place this study on firm ground. Notwithstanding these caveats, I believe my aim of uncovering the signification of gestures associated with the Tefillah in the rabbinic period has been realized, that I have succeeded in gaining more than a glimpse into the conceptual world of the rabbis and the values expressed by the gestures of the Prayer.

I submit that the unique gestural system of the *Amidah* was fashioned by the rabbis to deliberately foster a specific type of religious experience, to which awareness of the close presence of God and perception of the act of prayer as a human-divine dialogue are essential. This dialogic principle explains the importance of the interpersonal sphere to the shaping of the *Amidah's* gestures. Its prominence notwithstanding, it is, however, not the sole sphere of influence on the *Amidah's* gestural system. As noted, other sources of inspiration that provide a connecting thread throughout this book include human nature, the Temple cult, the angelic sphere, biblical prayer, and neighboring religions.

At the core of the discussion lies the question of how the apprehension

of the close presence of God by the person praying influenced the shaping of the gestures and what religious awareness the rabbis sought to mold through their instrumentality. As we shall see, the poles of reverence vs. submissiveness inform the discussion of the halakic give-and-take surrounding many of the gestures. Similarly, there are grounds for postulating a broader debate regarding the role of the body in divine worship as opposed to a more spiritual approach, traces of which are discernible in rabbinic literature. A variety of metaphors are employed by the rabbis to describe the human-divine encounter, in other words, how God is to be addressed: the father-child, rabbi-disciple, and master-servant relationships, among others. Part of the diachronic discussion relates to the question of continuity versus innovation; aspects of both are treated in the discussion of the gestures and their signification, as are cases where existing gestures are revitalized through the infusion of new meanings. An underlying premise throughout is that the Amidah's status as a new cultural creation facilitated the development of its innovative and singular gestural system. Absent from this study are the issues of when the text of the Amidah was created and when the synagogue was founded. Although certainly relevant, they remain outside the parameters of the discussion here.

These and other issues form the focus of part two of this book, which takes a broader look at the prayer-act as it emerges from the detailed discussion of each individual gesture. Following a historical-geographical overview of the gestures used during the rabbinic period with which the first part of the book concludes, it explores the inspirational sources for the gestures as a whole, noting instances where the gestures represent either a continuation of, or a break with, previous practice. My purpose here is to shed light on the phenomenological underpinnings for the formation of the different gestures. In addition, an attempt has been made, albeit with some reservations, to formulate basic principles in the conception of prayer that emerges from the gestures as a whole – prayer as dialogue, the nature of the human-divine relationship shaped by the Prayer, where the divine-human encounter takes place and the location of its human and divine participants – and to determine the relative weight of the nonverbal sphere in the broad context of the prayer-act as a whole.

The moment of transition to the recitation of the Amidah receives vivid gestural expression in the synagogue setting. Having completed the Shema and its blessings, the worshipers stand, face toward the Temple, bend their torsos, and begin to pray silently. This study is devoted to exploration of this gestural complex's components and its inherent value system.

## Chapter One

# The Standing Posture

*When you pray, know before whom you are standing*

Our exploration of nonverbal behaviors associated with prayer begins with what may be considered the central gesture for the Prayer: the standing posture. So closely identified is this posture with the Prayer that the Hebrew word for standing, *amidah*, has become one of its widely used names. As we shall see, this distinctive ritualistically fashioned posture extends beyond an obligation for the worshiper simply to cease motion, or to rise. After establishing this gesture's pervasiveness and describing its precise nature, the chapter's second half attempts to uncover the models that feed its signification.

## Description

I begin with the observation that, in the rabbinic period, a standing posture for prayer was virtually a given. Although nowhere given explicit halakhic formulation, the prevalent, taken-for-granted, practice of reciting the Prayer standing is already well documented in the tannaitic stratum of rabbinic literature.<sup>1</sup>

The Mishnah requires a traveler to dismount in order to recite the Prayer standing: "One who was riding on an ass should dismount" (*mBer.* 4:5). Similarly, the halakhah as cited in the Tosefta reflects a state of affairs in which standing for the Prayer is viewed as obligatory:

One who arose early to travel in a wagon or on a boat – lo, he recites the Prayer [before he departs], but when the time comes for the recitation of the *shema'*, he must recite it [where he is, even if already traveling]. (*tBer.* 3:19)

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<sup>1</sup> Previous scholarly research devoted scant attention to the standing posture. For sporadic references see, for example, Krauss, *Synagogale Altertümer*, 399–400; Ginzberg, "Adoration," 210; Ap-Thomas, "Terms," 225; Blidstein, "Prostration," 19.

This halakhah juxtaposes the appropriate, if contrasting, behavior for each of the two main liturgical units: in a case where vehicular motion will interfere with standing, it is preferable to recite the Prayer prior to its fixed time. The Shema, on the other hand, for which standing is not obligatory, may be recited sitting, at its prescribed time, while the worshiper is en route.<sup>2</sup>

Evidence for Jews standing in prayer comes from non-Jewish sources as well. The Gospels voice opposition to what must have been the accepted practice of the day: “And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others” (Matt. 6:5). They also testify to the prevalence of standing in prayer: “Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone” (Mark 11:25). Although not necessarily referring specifically to the rabbinic statutory prayer, these citations do testify to the pervasiveness of the standing posture in Jewish prayer generally during that period.<sup>3</sup>

The standing posture remained the basic posture for recitation of the Prayer throughout the amoraic period. Reflecting its effective institutionalization by that time is an opinion that the obligation to stand applies not only to the person engaged in reciting the Prayer but also extends to someone found in close proximity to such a person. Based on 1 Sam. 1:26, where Hannah reminded the priest Eli, “I am the woman that stood here beside you,” the first-generation Palestinian amora Joshua ben Levi indeed elicited such a requirement (*bBer.* 31b). Unless the worshiper engaged in reciting the Prayer is standing, this halakhah makes no sense. The Babylonian Talmud also documents the behavior of Rav Ashi, a sixth-generation Babylonian amora who, having recited the Prayer seated while the congregation was listening to the explanation of his lecture, used to recite it again when he returned home, this time standing (*bBer.* 30a).

From an early period the very language of the sources reflects the strong link between the Prayer and the standing posture, illustrated in the above-cited examples. The verb עמד (stand) occurs in the context of prayer (*tefillah*) in dozens of sources, in various forms: for example, עומד עומדה (*mBer.* 3:5); עומדים להתפלל (*mBer.* 5:1); עומד ומתפלל (*tBer.* 3:20). Although עמד is occasionally found as an auxiliary verb, where it does

<sup>2</sup> This follows Lieberman’s interpretation, *Tosefta ki-fshutah*, *Ber.*, 46 l. 79. For a different explanation of this source, see Rashi, *bBer.* 30a, lemma ובספיקה.

<sup>3</sup> See also Luke 18:11. A somewhat different picture emerges from Acts, where many descriptions of kneeling in prayer are found. See Crawley, “Kneeling.”

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