



Min ha-Meitzar

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Since October 7th, I think I've experienced for the first time the true relevance of the words of our liturgy. It's like I've finally *davened* the way the composers of these prayers intended.

I had a small version of this experience with the onset of COVID, when “do not abandon us, YHVH our God... for our souls are weary from... pestilence and plague,” in Tah_{an}un, suddenly meant something. Recently, the words of the Amidah have opened up to me anew. Before, some of them seemed difficult to make relevant to my life, as if they were remnants from the experience of past centuries that didn't speak to modern realities. Now, however, I find the words written in the daily Amidah to be manifestly relevant, as if they were tailor-made to be recited today, in December 2023.

I would like to give some examples:

In the second blessing, where we describe God's greatness or heroic qualities, we call God “מתיר אסורים” - the One Who unties the bound.” In the past, I might have proposed all sorts of psychologizing readings of this phrase (aren't we all in our own forms of mental prisons?). But now it is impossible not to think about our captives coming home. The literal meaning of the words has been totally revitalized.





Moving through the Amidah, the sixth blessing begins “סלח לנו אבינו כי חטאנו” - forgive us, Our Father, because we sinned.” It’s a general call for forgiveness, and maybe in the past I’ve thought about some mild wrong I caused another. But now I read this line and I ask myself: could I have done more or could I be doing to protect our loved ones, to bring home hostages, to prevent ongoing suffering?

The 11th blessing, beginning “השיבה שופטינו כבראשונה” - restore our judges like they were in the beginning,” used to be my prime example of modern alienation from the words of the Amidah. After all, most Jews in the world live under democracy—why would I want to go back to the way things used to be before all this tremendous progress was made? But now I can’t help but think about failures of leadership in our current politics. Maybe we were better off with leaders past.

And the 12th blessing certainly used to cause me trepidation. Now I can say it with some resolution: “כל אויבך מהרה יכרתו” - all Your enemies should be swiftly eradicated.”

The last blessing, so simple and general, has become a devastating plea: “שים שלום” - grant peace.”

The liturgy no longer seems out of touch, as if it cannot speak to us “enlightened” moderns.

The Amidah suddenly seems written for me and for this time, and painfully so. If I’m finding it hard to hold all the relevance I now find in the Amidah, I can hardly imagine how Jews throughout history, who felt that they lived in a reality where the liturgy was also manifestly relevant, got through their day-to-days.

All I can say is that I can only begin to appreciate how lucky I’ve been that the Amidah didn’t speak to me in these ways before.

