

2. Who Makes Up Our Community?

The Prayers *Ha-tzadikim* and *Mi Shebeirach* for the Congregation



Synagogue2000

Two Prayers, Two Settings

This study session examines two prayers from the traditional *siddur* (prayer book). The first is from the weekday *Amidah*. Many people are more familiar with the Shabbat *Amidah* than with the weekday version; the thirteen intermediate blessings of the weekday Shabbat are all prayers of petition, and the Rabbis considered them inappropriate for the Shabbat.

The thirteenth of the nineteen blessings of the *Amidah* is known as the prayer for “the *tzadikim*, the Righteous Ones.” The second is a *Mi shebeirach* prayer for the congregation. A *Mi Shebeirach*, literally “May the One who blessed. . .,” can be said on behalf of the ill, on behalf of people celebrating a joyous occasion, or, in our case, on behalf of the membership of the synagogue. This *Mi Shebeirach* prayer is customarily recited at the end of the Torah service, before the Torah is returned to the ark.

These prayers originated in different contexts and at different times. The blessing for the “Righteous Ones” was one of the earliest texts composed by the rabbis of the Talmud. The *Mi Shebeirach* did not enter the liturgy until the medieval period; the version below, is taken from *Mahzor Vitry*, an 11th-century prayer book.

Rabbi Saul Berman, of Lincoln Square Synagogue and Stern College in New York, suggests that the blessing for the “Righteous Ones” is the first of three petitions in the *Amidah* that point to what would be needed for national spiritual renewal. If the People of Israel are to find their way to wholeness with God *as a people*, they will need leadership from the types of individuals listed in the first part of this blessing. In Berman’s reading, the people included here are the elite or exceptional members of the community. In contrast, the list found in the *Mi Shebeirach* prayer does not seem so exclusive. In fact, we might consider those who perform the activities described in it as ordinary and not exceptional at all.

Moving Between the Communal and the Individual

Both of these prayer texts alternate between references to specific individuals or groups and the community or congregation. As you read each prayer, ask: does the community mentioned here include all the subgroups mentioned, does it include them and others who are not specifically mentioned, or is the community a different group of people than those specified?

There are many versions of the *Mi Shebeirach* prayer. Which groups would you name in a blessing on behalf of the congregation?

Ha-Tzadikim (“The Righteous”)

עַל הַצְּדִיקִים וְעַל הַחֲסִידִים וְעַל זְקֵנֵי עַמְּךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל,
 וְעַל פְּלִיטַת סוֹפְרֵיהֶם, וְעַל גְּרֵי הַצֶּדֶק וְעַלֵּינוּ,
 יְהִמוּ נָא רַחֲמֶיךָ, יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ,
 וְתֵן שָׂכָר טוֹב לְכָל הַבוֹטְחִים בְּשִׁמְךָ בְּאֵמֶת,
 וְשִׁים חֻלְקֵנוּ עִמָּהֶם לְעוֹלָם,
 וְלֹא נִבּוֹשׁ כִּי בָךְ בְּטַחֲנוּ.
 בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ, מִשְׁעֵן וּמִבְטָח לַצְּדִיקִים.

Show compassion to the righteous, to the pious, to the elders of Your people, Israel, to the remnant of their sages, to the righteous converts and to ourselves ETERNAL our God. Give a good reward to all who sincerely trust in Your Name, and may our lot be with them forever. We will never be ashamed, for we put our trust in You. Blessed are You, ETERNAL, support and trust of the righteous.

TEXTS AND TRANSLATIONS OF THESE TEXTS
 IN CONTEMPORARY PRAYER BOOKS

PRAYER BOOK	MI SHEBEIRACH FOR THE CONGREGATION	HA-TZADIKIM ("THE RIGHTEOUS")
<i>Siddur Sim Shalom</i>	Page 414	Page 115
<i>Birnbaum, Daily Prayer Book</i> <i>Ha-siddur Ha-shalem</i>	379	88
<i>Kol Haneshamah</i>	416 (Shabbat)	114 (weekdays)
<i>Gates of Prayer</i>	452	65
<i>Gates of Prayer for</i> <i>Shabbat and Weekdays</i>	186	29



Mi Shebeirach for the Congregation

Modern prayer books have a similar but not identical text. This version uses a somewhat archaic Hebrew.

מִי שֶׁבֵּרַךְ אַבְרָהָם וְיִצְחָק וְיִשְׂרָאֵל אֲבוֹתֵינוּ וְחַסִּידֵימָה הָרֵאשׁוֹנִים
 הוּא יְבָרֵךְ כָּל קְהֵלוֹת הַקֹּדֶשׁ וְאֵת כָּל הַקְּהָל הַזֶּה.
 יֵם וְנִשְׁיָהֵם וּבְנֵיהֶם וּבְנוֹתֵיהֶם וְכֹל אֲשֶׁר לָהֶם
 מִי שֶׁתְּקַנּוּ בְּתֵי כְּנִסְיֹת לְתַפְלָה
 וּמִי שֶׁבָּאִים לְתוֹכוֹ לְהִתְפַּלֵּל וּמִי שֶׁנֹּתְנִין נֶר לְמֵאוֹר
 וְיֵין לְקִדּוּשׁ וְהַבְּדֵלָה וּפֶת לְאוֹרְחִים
 וְצַדִּיקָה לְעֲנִיִּים וּמִי שֶׁמְכַנְיֵסִין אוֹרְחִים בְּתוֹךְ בֵּיתָם
 וְכֹל אוֹתָם שְׁעוֹסְקִין בְּצַרְכֵי צִיבוֹרָם
 הַקֹּדֶשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא יִשְׁלַם שְׂכָרָם.
 וְיִסִּיר מֵהֶן כָּל מַחֲלָה וְיִרְפָּא כָּל גּוֹפּוֹתָם וְיִסְלַח כָּל עֲוֹנוֹתָם
 וְיִבְרַךְ עוֹבְדֵי יְדִיהֶן בְּכֹל זְמַן וְעֵידוֹן
 וְנֹאמַר אָמֵן

This version of the *Mi Shebeirach* prayer is from *Machzor Vitry*, one of the earliest known Hebrew prayer books. *Machzor Vitry* was compiled in France by Simhah ben Samuel of Vitry during the late 11th century.

May the One Who blessed our ancestors, Abraham, Isaac and Israel, our ancestors and the earlier pious ones, bless all holy congregations and this entire congregation: them, their wives, their sons and daughters, and all that is theirs, [along with] those who established synagogues for prayer, and those who enter them to pray, and those who give lamps for lighting, and wine for Kiddush and Havdalah, bread to the travelers and charity to the poor, and those who welcome the travelers into their houses, and all who involve themselves with the needs of their community. May the Holy One reward them, remove sickness from them, provide healing for all of their bodies, and forgive their sins, and bless all the work of their hands at every time and season; and let us say, Amen.



Probing the Text

1. Who is included in the list in the first sentence of the *Ha-tzadikim* prayer? Is there a single word or category that could encompass all of these groups? Why are each of these groups included in this inventory? Would it not be enough to say: “Show compassion to us”?
2. What is the connection, if any, between the various people listed in the first sentence and “those who sincerely trust in Your Name”? Does the latter designation include anyone who is not already in the first list?
3. Who is speaking when the prayer says: “We will never be ashamed”?
4. In the *Mi Shebeirach* prayer, what is the relationship between “this entire congregation” and all those who follow, listed separately? Does one include the other, or are they separate groups?
5. What distinguishes the individuals who are listed separately in this prayer?
6. There are many versions of the *Mi Shebeirach* prayer. Which groups would you name in a blessing on behalf of the congregation?

Ourselves and Our Congregations

1. These two selections identify specific types of people, and particular types of actions, that deserve our concern and prayers. How might these lists help you to think about the people and groups who make up your congregation?
2. Who is our true “reference community”—“the righteous, the scholars, the righteous converts” or “those who truly trust in God’s name”? With whom do we want to be included? Who in your congregation make up those identified in the first sentence of the “*Tzadikim*” blessing? Would you add anyone else to this list?
3. Who are those who “trust in God’s name”? Are they regulars at your services or congregational events? Are they all members of your congregation?
4. Who “keeps the synagogue going”—those who show up each week for services, or those who pay dues to keep the lights on? Is one group more deserving of our concern and prayers? Do you identify yourself more with one or the other of these (not mutually exclusive) groups? What other groups contribute to the health and vitality of your synagogue but are not listed in the *Mi Shebeirach* prayer?

