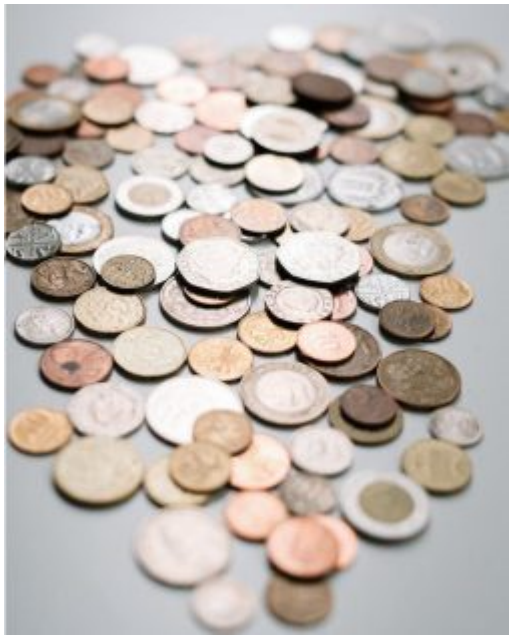
Minimal and Maximal Religiosity: A Wealth Reader



Traditional Jewish law outlines three prayers to be said each day: *Shacharis* in the morning, *Mincha* in the afternoon or evening, and *Maariv* in the night, after the fall of dark.

Before we say the *Amidah* in the morning or at night, it is traditional to take three steps forward and back, and murmur "God, open my lips / and my mouth will tell Your praise." As an entry point to the radical stance of standing before God, the subtlety is apt. We ask not for prayer, but for an opening, the smallest widening of an aperture so that the rest happens, almost on its own accord. It is the opening—the turn *towards*—that is the challenge for us. These simple words bring to mind Mary Oliver's pitch-perfect poem about prayer, from her *Devotions*:

Oliver invites us to "pay attention, then patch / a few words together," and she reminds us that we need not "try / to make them elaborate," for "this isn't / a contest but the doorway / into thanks."

As an entry point to prayerful attention, our simple line carries water, then. The rich textual ambiguities in this line help. The word for lips, ש-פ-ת, sh-p-t, from ש-פ-ה, also connotes a boundary, or a border, and it can mean 'language' or the bank of a river or sea. Given this, we may be asking for more than an opening of the lips, but the opening of a boundary, our borders, the guardrails that we put up around our fragile ego to be broadened. It is striking that the word we use for language and for boundary are the same—it is no far jump to say that language is our boundary of sorts, as in some ways we can only experience that which we have the words to experience, the language to articulate, or the language to not-articulate (*have a drink and mull that one over*). Perhaps we are asking not only for an opening of our lips, our tongue, or our boundaries, but our entire language, our linguistic boundaries. Perhaps. Indeed, opportunities for such a prayer exist.

We need not say God's name *more*, but say God's name *right*…

But as beautiful as this humble line of ours is, there are points at which we augment this line with a different, somewhat less artfully enigmatic line. A verse from *Devarim*, we murmur this prayer twice during the week: during the daily *Mincha* prayer, and during the *Mussaf* prayer, said only on Shabbos and holidays.

"When I call the name of God, grant greatness to our God."

Although we follow this line with our usual plea for opening, the line is intriguing. Why do we feel the need to add this verse? There are a number of commentaries that one can most likely turn to, but I have a simple thought to offer. *Mincha* and *Mussaf* are both added prayers, of a sort. The very word *Mussaf* comes from the word for *additional*, in fact. *Shacharis* has a sort of essentiality to it, as the first prayer of the day, and it is not for nothing that we see it as aligned with Avraham, the first of the forefathers. *Shacharis* is the first prayerful stance of the day. *Maariv*, on the other hand, is thought of as *reshus*, voluntary, according to the sages, although many do opt to pray this nighttime prayer every evening. *Mincha*, and *Mussaf*, occupy a liminal territory, marked neither by the fresh newness of *Shacharis* nor of the nighttime looseness of *Maariv*. And this might tell us something about the identity of this line.

In religious life, just as in psychological life, there is a maximizing tendency and a minimizing tendency. The former suggests that more is better, that God might be more accessible the *more* we speak of the divine, the higher we build our synagogues, the more pages of Torah we study. If God dwells in the center of the circle, we might expand the circle with wide enough turns so that God might stretch everywhere. This is a sort of religious or theological maximalism *(or is it religious consumerism?).* The minimizing tendency operates in a different register, a somewhat subtler register. The minimizing tendency asks what we lose when we gain it all. The minimizing tendency whispers prayers under its breath at gala dinners and at stringency-laced holiday preparations. In this key, the emphasis lies not in what we might still need, but what we might need less of. We need not say God's name *more*, but say God's name *right*, not make *more* money, but make money with *responsibility*, not pray more, but become a prayerful person.

Perhaps it is thus in the added prayers that we whisper this prayer: "When I say God's name," we hope, let it not just be *another* added naming of God, but let it "bring greatness to our God."

In the last 80 years, the Jewish community has been forced first to lose everything, and has rebuilt itself with remarkable success. As we reach this reckoning point of safety, (relative) security and strength, it is time to ask ourselves whether our attempts at adding, adding, and adding are still bringing the greatness to God's name that we aspire towards. We are at such a reckoning point, due to untold blessings.

As we explore the topic of wealth, here's what we are reading, and thinking about, as we consider the *more* and *less* of religious life. First off is a classic, Tzvi Freeman's *Is Judaism Socialist or Capitalist?*, followed by Henry Wismayer's *Why Space Tourists Won't Find the Awe They Seek*, and finally Rex Woodbury's *What Happens When You're the Investment,* which we might read with a gloss to be talking less about the individual and more about the religious community. What happens when finances and Jewish community become increasingly linked? Join us in thinking about these questions, as we explore the world of finances and the religious community, together.