

Additions to Birkat Yotzer Or for Shabbat

Among the key features of the Jewish prayer book are the numerous changes that take place for various special occasions. But of all the special occasions, the one that occurs most regularly is that of Shabbat. In fact, a look at the prayer book will indicate that more space is allotted to Shabbat prayers than to any other overall occasion. Just as on weekdays, however, the recitation of the *Shema* and the benedictions before and after it remains the central feature in the *Shacharit* and *Ma'ariv* services. Of those benedictions, only one, the morning version of *Yotzer Or*, praising God as the Creator of the heavenly lights, is modified and supplemented for the Sabbath. This essay will discuss those changes in detail. However, in order to make clear the manner in which this benediction is adapted for Shabbat, along the way we will explain its structure and content as compared with the version of this prayer that is recited at morning weekday services.

While the Ashkenazic and Sephardic prayer books only make additions to the morning Shabbat services, in the *Yotzer Or* benediction, the Italian rite makes such additions also for Friday night prayers. As expected, these additions, although quite brief, mention God's completion of Creation on Shabbat, His calling the day "Shabbat," and His giving it as a day of rest to His people.²⁸³ These additions are actually derived from the version of the liturgy that stands behind the *Siddur Rav Saadiah*,²⁸⁴ although other *Ge'onim* objected to these changes.²⁸⁵

Benediction on the Lights

The Dead Sea Scrolls include a text entitled "Daily Prayers" that praises God for the creation of the lights. This text sets forth a different benediction for each day of the lunar month.²⁸⁶ While we do not know the specifics of the liturgical practices of the sect that gathered the manuscripts at Qumran, on the shore of the Dead Sea, it is known that they recited the *Shema*²⁸⁷ and it is possible that this benediction was associated with it. Josephus connects the Essene morning prayers closely to the rising of the sun, saying that they "offer certain prayers which they have received from their forefathers, as if they made a supplication for its rising."²⁸⁸ Numerous parallels in liturgical language connect the daily prayers of the Qumran sectarians with the rabbinic *Kedushah De-Yotzer* liturgy.²⁸⁹

Mishnah Berakhot 1:4 specifies that two benedictions are to be said each morning before the *Shema*. *Mishnah Tamid* 5:1 refers to the recitation of one of the benedictions before the *Shema* in the Temple. The Talmud in *Berakhot* 11b preserves a dispute among *Amora'im* as to which of the two benedictions it was, *Yotzer Or* or *Ahavah Rabbah*. The *gemara* concludes that it was the second benediction, *Ahavah Rabbah*. It is interesting to note that while this was the position of the -Babylonian *Amora'im*, those of *Eretz Yisrael* took the position that it was *Yotzer Or*, the first benediction.²⁹⁰ One way or another, despite the different benediction formulae and text, the benedictions preserved

²⁸³. Riccardo Di Segni, Elia Richetti, *Siddur Benei Romi* (Milan, 2002), 124.

²⁸⁴. Israel Davidson, Simcha Assaf, Issachar Joel, eds., *Siddur Rav Saadiah Ga'on* (-Jerusalem, 1970), 110. The same text is found in a *siddur* preserved in the *Genizah* (Simcha Assaf, *Mi-Sifrut Ha-Ge'onim* [Jerusalem, 1933], 75).

²⁸⁵. Assaf, 75 n. 4. Assaf suggests that this text originated in *Eretz Yisrael*.

²⁸⁶. Maurice Baillet, *Qumran Grotte 4, III (4Q482-4Q520)* (Discoveries in the Judaean Desert 7; Oxford, 1982), 105–36.

²⁸⁷. 1QS (Rule of the Community) 10:10–12; Lawrence H. Schiffman, *Reclaiming the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Philadelphia and Jerusalem, 1994), 293.

²⁸⁸. War 2.128, trans. in Lawrence H. Schiffman, *Texts and Traditions: A Source Reader for the Study of Second Temple and Rabbinic Judaism* (Hoboken, 1998), 277.

²⁸⁹. Moshe Weinfeld, "Akavot Shel Kedushat Yotzer U-Fesukei De-Zimra Bi-Megillot Midbar Yehudah U-Ve-Sefer Ben Sira," *Tarbiz* 45 (1975/6): 15–26.

²⁹⁰. *Yerushalmi Berakhot* 1:8 (3c) preserves only the Babylonian tradition.

in the Dead Sea Scrolls indicate the antiquity of the daily recital of the benediction -referring to God's creation of the heavenly lights.²⁹¹

Kedushah De-Yotzer

Before continuing, we need to clarify some matters pertaining to the *Kedushah De-Yotzer* that is recited as part of all morning services in present-day Jewish prayer rites. There has been considerable debate about the history of the *Kedushah De-Yotzer*. It is now generally held that it was recited in talmudic times in both *Eretz Yisrael* and Babylonia,²⁹² although some scholars maintain that it became normative in *Eretz Yisrael* only in the geonic period.²⁹³ However, there is evidence that in a minority of congregations in *Eretz Yisrael* it was recited only on Shabbat and festivals. More importantly, however, there are indications that this prayer was recited only with a *minyan*, like the *Kedushah* of the *Amidah*.²⁹⁴ Clearly, the *Kedushah De-Yotzer* was a separate liturgical unit. Further, in analyzing the *Yotzer Or* section of the morning service, whether for weekdays or Shabbat, we need to assume that when the earliest liturgy was developing this entire section was absent and that it constitutes a somewhat later addition. Like the rest of our statutory prayers, this process was essentially completed by the publication of the great *siddurim* of R. Amram Ga'on (d. 875 C.E.) and R. Saadiah Ga'on (882–942 C.E.).

For both weekdays and Shabbat, the original benediction of *Yotzer Or* must have been quite short. The original is most probably preserved in the *Siddur Rav Saadiah Ga'on*.²⁹⁵ To grasp the manner in which various expansions have been added to this very short benediction, both for weekday and Shabbat services, we reproduce here what most probably would have been the original form of the benediction:

Blessed are You, Lord our God,
King of the Universe,
who forms light and create darkness,
makes peace and creates all.
In great compassion He gives light to the earth and its inhabitants,
And (in) His goodness continually renews the work of creation, day after day,
Blessed are You, Lord, who forms the radiant lights.

Shabbat Yotzer Or

In the widely followed Ashkenazic, Sephardic, and chasidic rites, the *siddur* includes additions for Shabbat only in the benediction *Yotzer Or*, the first *berakhah* of the three that surround the morning *Keriyat Shema*. Since each of the three morning *Shema* benedictions, two before and one after, parallel in meaning the three paragraphs of the *Shema*, we observe that the *berakhah* of *Yotzer Or* parallels the first paragraph (*Devarim* 6:4–9). Essentially, the *berakhah* emphasizes that God is the Creator of the universe's heavenly bodies, especially those that give light to the earth and its human inhabitants. This is seen as closely related to the proclamation of God's oneness as it implies that He is the only Creator of the heavens and the earth.

Some objection was raised in the Middle Ages to making such additions. Yehuda ben Barzillai (Spain, eleventh–twelfth century), in his *Sefer ha-Itim*,²⁹⁶ argues that all Shabbat changes or additions violate the prohibition of changing the statutory prayers. By his time, however, the Sabbath version of *Yotzer Or* had already become standard in almost all Jewish communities. His complaint was of no avail.

²⁹¹. Schiffman, *Reclaiming the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 290–96.

²⁹². Ezra Fleischer, "Li-Tefutzatan Shel Kedushot Ha-Amidah Ve-Ha-Yotzer Be-Minhagot Ha-Tefillah Shel Benei Eretz Yisrael," *Tarbiz* 38 (1968/9): 255–85.

²⁹³. Jacob Mann, "Genizah Fragments of the Palestinian Order of Service," *HUCA* 2 (1925): 290.

²⁹⁴. *Shulchan Arukh O.C.* 59: and *Be'er Ha-Golah*, notes *daled* and *hei*. Prominent among those who require that an individual skip the *Kedushah De-Yotzer* is Rambam, *Hilkhot Tefillah* 7:17.

²⁹⁵. This is the text given for weekday private prayer (without a *minyan*) in *Siddur Rav Saadiah Ga'on*, 13. Cf. further sources in n. to line 21 and in Ismar Elbogen, *Jewish Liturgy: A Comprehensive History* (trans. Raymond P. Scheindlin; Philadelphia and Jerusalem, 1993), 391 n. 7. The translation is adapted from that of Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks (below fn. 15) since this version was slightly different from the Ashkenazic rite that he translated.

²⁹⁶. New York (1948/49), sec. 172, pp. 250–51.

Opening of the Benediction

The Shabbat *Yotzer Or* begins with the introductory opening:

Blessed are You, Lord our God,
King of the Universe,
who forms light and creates darkness,
makes peace and creates all.²⁹⁷

The benediction begins with an adaptation of *Yeshayahu* 45:7. The verse is modified by substituting “*u-vorei et ha-kol*” – “who creates all,” for “*u-vorei ra*” – “who creates evil (or: misfortune).” As required for all long benedictions (those that begin and end with “*barukh*”),²⁹⁸ the conclusion of *yotzer ha-me’orot*, “who creates the lights,”²⁹⁹ echoes the opening sentence.³⁰⁰ This introduction to the *berakhah* of *Yotzer Or* is identical to that recited on weekdays and also on festivals occurring on weekdays.

The blessing then continues in the Shabbat version with a short proto-*piyut*³⁰¹ formed around the word *kol*, “all,” with which the introduction to the benediction concluded (*u-vorei et ha-kol*):

All will thank You.
All will praise You.
All will declare:
Nothing is as holy as the Lord.
All will exalt You, Selah, You who form all.

The section “*ha-kol yodukha...ve-ha-kol yomeru...ha-kol yeromemukha yotzer ha-kol*” emphasizes the fact that the Creator of all must be praised by all, including, as we will find in *Kel Adon*, the heavenly bodies.

At this point, the text continues by stating that it is God who causes the sun to rise and to set, praising:

The God who daily opens the doors of the gates of the East
and cleaves the windows of the sky,
who brings out the sun from its place
and the moon from its abode,
giving light to the whole world and its inhabitants
whom He created by the attribute of compassion.
In compassion He gives light to the earth and its inhabitants,
and in His goodness daily, continually,
renews the work of creation.
He is the King who alone was exalted since time began,
praised, glorified and raised high from days of old.
Eternal God, in Your great compassion, have compassion on us,
Lord of our strength, Rock of our refuge,
Shield of our salvation, Stronghold of our safety.

God sustains the world by opening the heavenly gates of the east and allowing the light to shine through the firmament, and by causing the sun and the moon to move through the heavens. In doing so God causes the earth and its inhabitants to receive His light. The text emphasizes that God does this as a result of His mercy and asks Him to continue to provide for His creatures in a merciful manner.

²⁹⁷. All translations are those of Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, *The Koren Siddur* (Jerusalem, 2009).

²⁹⁸. *Berakhot* 1:5.

²⁹⁹. The benediction is quoted in parts in *Berakhot* 11b and 12a (the second is tannaitic) as well as in *Yerushalmi Berakhot* 1:8 (3c).

³⁰⁰. Note the common conclusion of *ma’aseh bereishit* in the sentence starting *ha-me’ir* and the presence of that expression immediately before *ka-amor* at the end of the benediction. Clearly the ancient formula has been broken up and everything else has been inserted into it.

³⁰¹. By “proto-*piyut*” I mean to refer to liturgical poetry written in the talmudic period, but before the efflorescence of the classical *Eretz Yisrael piyut* of the sixth century and afterwards.

Ein Ke-Erkekha

We then encounter the poem *Ein Ke-Erkekha* that leads up to *Kel Adon*.

None can be compared to You,
There is none besides You;
None without You.
Who is like You?
None can be compared to You, Lord our God – in this world.
There is none besides You, our King – in the life of the World to Come.
There is none but You, our Redeemer – in the days of the Messiah.
There is none like You, our Savior – at the resurrection of the dead.³⁰²

This is a short poem describing the uniqueness of God and referring to messianic redemption and revival of the dead. In the present form of the liturgy, it functions to provide a transition between *Ha-Kol Yodukha* and *Kel Adon*. Its structure and meaning are the same in both the Ashkenazic and Sephardic/chasidic versions, despite a small difference in wording. Instead of the phrase “*ein ke-erkekha*,” Sephardic and chasidic rites have “*ein arokh lekha*.”

The poem begins by asserting of God that “None can be compared to You, There is none besides You; None without You. Who is like You?” The individual parts of this passage are then explained in the following lines. We are told that the words “None can be compared to You” refer to this world. The words “There is none besides You” refer to the World to Come. “None can be compared to You” refers to God as our redeemer in the Messianic Era. “And there is none like You” refers to God as saving us by bringing about the resurrection of the dead.³⁰³

Kel Adon

There then follows a hymn, *Kel Adon*, closely connected with early *-Merkavah* mysticism³⁰⁴ that speculated on the heavenly hosts, their praise of God and the Divine throne. In this alphabetic acrostic God is described as the master over all creatures, praised by every living thing. *Kel Adon* substitutes for the poem recited on weekdays, *Kel Barukh*, a much shorter alphabetic acrostic.³⁰⁵

God, Lord of all creation,
the Blessed, is blessed by every soul.
His greatness and goodness fill the world;
knowledge and wisdom surround Him.
Exalted above the holy Chayot,
adorned in glory on the Chariot;
Merit and right are before His throne,
kindness and compassion before His glory.
Good are the radiant stars our God created,
He formed them with knowledge,
understanding and deliberation.
He gave them strength and might
to rule throughout the world;
Full of splendor, radiating light,
beautiful is their splendor throughout the world;
Glad as they go forth, joyous as they return,
they fulfill with awe their Creator’s will.
Glory and honor they give to His name,

³⁰². We have modified the poetic format of Rabbi Sacks.

³⁰³. The author of this prayer seems to have taken “the World to Come” as a general category including both the Messianic Era and the resurrection of the dead.

³⁰⁴. On the role of such hymns in Jewish mysticism, see Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York, 1974), 57–59.

³⁰⁵. The acrostic of *Kel Barukh* ends with the phrase “*tamid mesaperim kevod*.” “*Mesaperim kevod*,” words beginning with *mem* and *kaf*, may be a remnant of a series of words beginning with each of the final (*sofit*) letters (*mem, kaf, nun, peh, tzade*). Cf. the chasidic and Sephardic rites for Sabbath *Musaf*, where in the reverse acrostic *Tikanta Shabbat*, the word “*az*” (for the letter *aleph*) is followed by the words, “*mi-Sinai nitztavu tzivui po’oleha ka-ra’ui*” in order to include the *sofit* letters in the acrostic.

jubilant and song at the mention of His Majesty.
He called the sun into being and it shone with light.
He looked and fashioned the form of the moon.
All the hosts on high give Him praise;
The Seraphim, Ophanim and holy Chayot
ascribe glory and greatness.

Kel Adon praises God as One whose goodness fills the world. He is surrounded by knowledge and wisdom and is described as above the holy beasts and exalted over the chariot, clearly a reference to the throne of God as understood by the early Jewish mystics, based on the prophet Yechezkel. Numerous Divine attributes like uprightness, love, and mercy are attributed to God. The poem then transitions to discussion of the heavenly lights, which God created with His wisdom. The lights are almost personified, being seen as happy to circulate in their orbits in accord with the Divine will. Further, they are understood to actually praise God. God is specifically spoken of as the Creator of the sun and the moon.

The final stanza speaks of the praise that the heavenly angels give to God, specifically mentioning Seraphim, Ophanim, and the holy beasts of Yechezkel.³⁰⁶ This concluding stanza was meant as the transition to the recital of the *Kedushah* verses, in a shorter version of the morning service that would have omitted much of what now surrounds *Kel Adon*. In such a version, the introductory section of the benediction would have been recited and the text would have continued as in our daily prayer book until reaching “*ba’adeinu*.” There it would have continued with *Kel Adon*, just as it continues with *Kel Barukh* on weekdays.

La-Kel Asher Shavat

The final addition is the paragraph *La-Kel Asher Shavat*. In the earlier *siddurim* it simply began “*Kel asher...*” – “The God who...,” omitting the preposition “to.”³⁰⁷ This prayer was not recited in some medieval communities.³⁰⁸

To God who rested from all works, and on the seventh day
ascended and sat on His throne of glory.
He wrote the day of rest in glory
and called the Sabbath day a delight.
This is the praise of the seventh day,
that on it God rested from all His work.
The seventh day itself gives praise, saying,
“A psalm, a song for the Sabbath day.
It is good to give thanks to the Lord.”
Therefore let all He has formed glorify and bless God.
Let them give praise, honor and grandeur to God,
the King, who formed all things
and in His holiness gave a heritage of rest
to His people Israel on the holy Sabbath day.
May Your name, O Lord our God, be sanctified,
and Your renown, O our King, be glorified
in the heavens above and on earth below.
May You be blessed, our Deliverer,
by the praises of Your handiwork,
and by the radiant lights You have made:
may they glorify You. Selah!

The text praises God for having rested on the Sabbath day at which time He ascended to His throne. The special character of the Sabbath results from God’s having abstained from labor on this day. This poem calls on us to join the Sabbath day itself in reciting the psalm for the -Sabbath (*Tehillim* ch. 92) along with all of God’s creations. After all, God is the Creator of everything (again notice the words “*yotzer ha-kol*”), and has given the special Sabbath day to His

³⁰⁶. On the textual variation in the last stich of the poem, see Shmuel M. Riachi, ed., *Masekhet Shel Tefillah* (Jerusalem, 2012/13), 178, Likkutim -Ve-He’arot, *bet*.

³⁰⁷. *Siddur Rav Saadia*, 121 and n. 1; Fleischer, “*Li-Tefutzatan Shel Kedushot*,” 270–71 n. 54.

³⁰⁸. *Tur O.C.* 281, referring to Toledo.

people Israel. This paragraph was most probably composed as an alternative version of everything before it except for the opening benediction and the line beginning with “-*ha-me’ir la-aretz.*” Indeed, this paragraph functions in the *Siddur Rav Saadiah Ga’on* as the entire Sabbath addition between the initial introduction to the benediction and “*yotzer ha-me’orot.*”³⁰⁹

At the end of this paragraph there follows the transition to the *Kedushah De-Yotzer*, beginning with “*titbarakh*” – “may You be blessed,” telling us that God should be praised in heaven and on earth, that is by angels and humans, for the heavenly lights that He has created.

These lines are an alternative formulation of “*titbarakh Hashem,*” the text recited right before “*titbarakh tzureinu*” in the weekday version. For Shabbat, “*moshi’einu*” – “our Deliverer,” is substituted for “*Hashem Elokeinu*” – “Lord our God.”

Conclusion

We have examined here the complex historical and literary processes that led to the various additions that are recited at *Shacharit* on Shabbat. We have seen that a variety of compositions have come together initially to create the *Yotzer* benediction for weekdays, and that through a series of further additions and substitutions there emerged a Shabbat version. When we examine the sustained message that all these passages provide we see that the initial weekday morning prayer sought to emphasize the notion of God as Creator of the heavenly lights. The Shabbat additions essentially provide greater focus, seeing the Sabbath, the day on which God rested from His work of creation, as rendering special recognition to God as Creator of the heavenly bodies that regulate the cycles of day and night, month and year, on our earth. After all, what better time is there to reflect on that than on the day that symbolizes the completeness of God’s work, in constructing both the physical universe and the spiritual character of time, than Shabbat?

³⁰⁹. *Siddur Rav Saadiah*, 121.