



NASO

SIMILAR, YET SO DIFFERENT

How a Fixed Text Reflects Our Changing Hearts

PARSHA OVERVIEW

Naso

Completing the head count of the Children of Israel taken in the Sinai Desert, a total of 8,580 Levite men between the ages of thirty and fifty are counted in a tally of those who will be doing the actual work of transporting the Tabernacle.

G-d communicates to Moses the law of the *sotah*, the wayward wife suspected of

unfaithfulness to her husband. Also given is the law of the *nazir*, who forswears wine, lets his or her hair grow long, and is forbidden to become contaminated through contact with a dead body. Aaron and his descendants, the *Kohanim*, are instructed on how to bless the people of Israel.

The leaders of the twelve tribes of Israel each bring

their offerings for the inauguration of the altar. Although their gifts are identical, each is brought on a different day and is individually described by the Torah.

QUESTION FOR DISCUSSION

Is there room for personal expression in our prayer book?

How can the same prayer express our varying needs and moods that shift daily?



RASHI RULE

Rashi doesn't share midrashic explanations if the basic text can be understood without them.



THE INAUGURAL OFFERING

A silver bowl and a silver sprinkling basin.

TEXT 1A

Numbers 7:12–13

יב. וַיְהִי הַמִּקְרִיב בַּיּוֹם הָרִאשׁוֹן אֶת קָרְבָּנוֹ, נַחֲשׁוֹן בֶּן עַמִּינָדָב לְמִטֵּה
יְהוּדָה.

יג. וְקָרְבָּנוֹ קַעֲרַת כֶּסֶף אַחַת שְׁלֹשִׁים וּמֵאָה מִשְׁקָלָהּ, מִזְרֶק אֶחָד כֶּסֶף
שִׁבְעִים שֶׁקֶל בְּשֶׁקֶל הַקֹּדֶשׁ, שְׁנֵייהֶם מְלֵאִים סֶלֶת בָּלוּלָה בַשֶּׁמֶן לְמִנְחָה.

12. The one who brought his offering on the first day was Nahshon,
the son of Amminadab of the tribe of Judah.

13. And his offering was one silver bowl weighing 130 and 30
[shekels], one silver sprinkling basin [weighing] seventy shekels
according to the holy shekel, both filled with fine flour mixed with
olive oil for a meal offering.

TEXT 1B

Rashi, Numbers 7:19

THE RASHI

"קעצרת כסף". מנין אותיותיו
בגימטריא תתק"ל, כנגד שנותיו של
אדם הראשון.

"שלשים ומאה משקלה". על שם
שכשעמיד תולדות לקיום העולם
בן ק"ל שנה הנה.

"מזרק אחד כסף". בגימטריא
תק"ך, על שם נח שכשעמיד תולדות
בן ת"ק שנה, ועל שם עשרים שנה
שנגזרה גזרת המבול קדם
תולדותיו.

"שבעים שקל". כנגד שבעים אמות
שיצאו מבניו.

"One silver bowl." The numerical value of these two words amounts to 930, corresponding to the years of Adam's life.

"Weighing 130 shekels." This alludes to Adam being 130 years old when he began raising a family to sustain the world's existence.

"One silver sprinkling basin." The numerical value of these three words is 520. This alludes to Noah, who was 500 years old when he began raising a family. [The additional twenty] alludes to the fact that G-d enacted the decree of the great flood twenty years before Noah started to raise his family.

"Seventy shekels." These correspond to the seventy nations that descended from Noah's sons.

THE INAUGURAL OFFERING

A gold spoon.



TEXT 2A

Numbers 7:14

כַּף אֶחָת עֲשָׂרָה זָהָב מְלֵאָה קְטֹרֶת.

One gold spoon weighing ten [silver]
shekels filled with incense.

TEXT 2B

Rashi, Numbers 7:20

THE RASHI

"כֶּף אַחַת". כְּנֶגֶד הַתּוֹרָה שֶׁנִּתְּנָה מִיָּדוֹ שֶׁל הַקָּדוֹשׁ
בָּרוּךְ הוּא.

"מְלֵאָה קֶטֶרֶת". גִּימַטְרִיָּא שֶׁל קֶטֶרֶת תְּרִי"ג מִצְוֹת.

"One spoon." This corresponds to the [one] Torah given by the hand of G-d.

"Filled with incense." The numerical value for *ketoret* [incense] is 613, corresponding to the 613 *mitzvot*.



THE INAUGURAL OFFERING

A bull, ram, and a lamb.

TEXT 3A

Numbers 7:15

פֶּרֶךְ אֶחָד בֶּן בָּקָר, אֵיל אֶחָד, כֶּבֶשׂ אֶחָד
בֶּן שָׁנָתוֹ לְעֹלָה.

One young bull, one ram, and one lamb in
its first year for a burnt offering.

TEXT 3B

Rashi, Numbers 7:21

THE RASHI

"פר אחד". כנגד אברהם, שנאמר בו: "ויקח בן בקר" (בראשית יח, ז).

"איל אחד". כנגד יצחק, "ויקח את האיל" (שם כב, יג).

"כבש אחד". כנגד יעקב, "והכשבים הפריד יעקב" (שם ל, מ).

"One young bull." This corresponds to Abraham, of whom it says, "He took a young bull" (Genesis 18:7).

"One ram." This corresponds to Isaac, of whom it is written, "And [Abraham] took a ram [and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son]" (Genesis 22:13).

"One lamb." This corresponds to Jacob, about whom it is written, "Jacob separated the lambs" (Genesis 30:40).

THE INAUGURAL OFFERING

A goat.



TEXT 4A

Numbers 7:16

שְׁעִיר עֲזִים אֶחָד לְחַטָּאת.

One young goat as a sin offering.

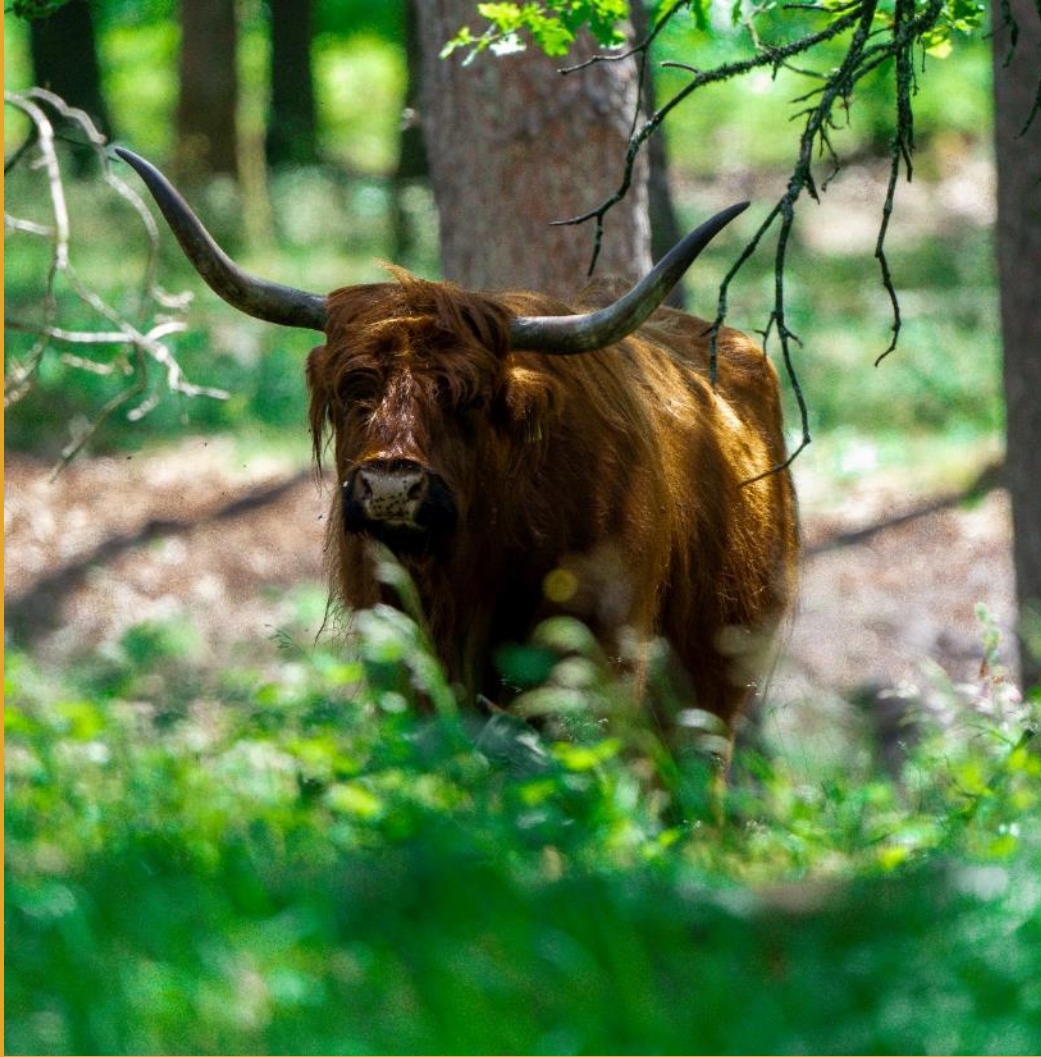
TEXT 4B

Rashi, Numbers 7:22

THE RASHI

"שְׁעִיר עֲזִים". לְכַפֵּר עַל מְכִירַת יוֹסֵף, שְׁנֹאֵמַר
בָּהּ: "וַיִּשְׁחָטוּ שְׁעִיר עֲזִים" (בְּרֵאשִׁית לז, לא).

"One young goat." This is to atone for the sale of Joseph, about which it is written, "And they slaughtered a young goat" (Genesis 37:31).



THE INAUGURAL OFFERING

Oxen, rams, he-goats,
and lambs.

TEXT 5A

Numbers 7:17

וּלְזֶבַח הַשְּׁלָמִים בָּקָר שְׁנַיִם, אֵילִם תְּמִשָּׁה,
עֲתוּדִים תְּמִשָּׁה, כִּבְשִׁים בְּנֵי שָׁנָה תְּמִשָּׁה. זֶה
קָרְבַּן נַחֲשֹׁן בֶּן עַמִּינָדָב.

And for the peace offering, two oxen, five rams,
five he-goats, [and] five lambs in their first year.
This was the offering of Nahshon, the son of
Amminadab.

TEXT 5B

Rashi, Numbers 7:23

THE RASHI

"וּלְזֶבַח הַשְּׁלָמִים בָּקָר שְׁנַיִם." כְּנֶגֶד
מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן, שֶׁנִּתְּנוּ שְׁלוֹם בֵּין
יִשְׂרָאֵל לְאַבְיָהֶם שְׁבַע־שָׁמַיִם.

"אֵילִם . . . עֵתֵדִים . . . כִּבְשִׁים."
שְׁלֹשָׁה מִיָּנִים, כְּנֶגֶד כֹּהֲנִים וְלוֹוִיִּם
וְיִשְׂרָאֵלִים, וְכֶנֶד תּוֹרָה נְבִיאִים
וְכַתּוּבִים.

שְׁלֹשׁ חֲמִשִּׁיּוֹת, כְּנֶגֶד חֲמִשָּׁה חֲמִשִּׁין,
וְחֲמִשָּׁת הַדְּבָרוֹת הַכְּתוּבִין עַל לוח
אֶחָד, וְחֲמִשָּׁה הַכְּתוּבִין עַל הַשֵּׁנִי.

עַד כָּאן בִּיסוּדוֹ שֶׁל רַבִּי מֹשֶׁה
הַדְּרָשׁוֹן.

"Two oxen." This corresponds to Moses and Aaron, who established peace between Israel and their Heavenly Father.

"Rams . . . He-goats . . . Lambs." These three species represent the three types of Jews: *Kohanim*, Levites, and Israelites. They also represent the three sections of the Torah: the Pentateuch, the Prophets, and the Holy Writings.

Five of each represent the five books of the Pentateuch and the five commandments inscribed on each of the two tablets.

Up until this point [my comments were] in the name of Rabbi Moshe Hadarshan [the Preacher].

ITEM

SIGNIFICANCE

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A silver bowl • Weighed 130 shekels 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The numeric value of the Hebrew words for “a silver bowl” is 930—the years of Adam’s life. • Adam was 130 when he began to raise a family.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • one silver sprinkling basin • Weighed seventy shekels 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The numeric value of the Hebrew words for “One silver sprinkling basin” is 520: • Noah was 500 when he had his first child. • Twenty years earlier, G-d decreed the great flood. • Noah’s descendants established seventy nations.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One gold spoon • Weighed ten shekels • Filled with incense 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One Torah • Ten Commandments • The numeric value of the Hebrew words for incense is 613, symbolizing the 613 <i>mitzvot</i>.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One bull • One ram • One lamb 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Abraham • Isaac • Jacob
One young goat	The brothers claimed Joseph was mauled and dipped his shirt in goat’s blood as proof.
Two oxen	Moses and Aaron, who made peace between the Jews and G-d
Rams, goats, and lambs	<i>Kohen</i> , Levite, and Israelite Torah, Prophets, and Scriptures
Five of each	Five Books of Moses Five commandments on each tablet

QUESTIONS ON RASHI

1. Why does Rashi explain the symbolism behind each offering?
2. What difficulty in the text forces Rashi to use Midrash in his explanations?

NATIONAL OR TRIBAL?

Were the Jews acting as a unified nation or as individual tribes?

If it was a national offering, why does the Torah repeat it 12 times instead of listing it once? And if it was a tribal offering, why didn't each tribe personalize their sacrifice to reflect their unique connection to G-d?

TEXT 6A

*Rashi, The Rebbe,
Rabbi Menachem
Mendel Schneerson,
Likutei Sichot 8, p. 44*

אין מדרש רבה [זיינען] פאראן צוויי דיעות
בנוגע דער כוונת הנשיאים ביים אויסקלייבן
דוקא די קרבנות וואס זיי האבן געבראכט:
איין דיעה איז, אז "כל אחד ואחד הקריב לפי
דעתו", און א צווייטע דיעה איז, אז אלע
נשיאים האבן דערביי געהאט די זעלבע כוונה.

אבער ווי גערעדט פריער, זיינען ביידע דיעות
שווער אין דרך הפשט: לויט דער ערשטע
דיעה איז שווער . . . פארוואס האבן אלע
מקריב געווען די זעלבע קרבנות . . . און לויט
דער צווייטער דיעה איז שווער: פארוואס
חזר'ט איבער דער פסוק צוועלף מאל דעם
זעלבן ענין? . . .

The Midrash offers two opinions about why the princes selected the offerings they did. One says they each had a different reason; the other says they all did it for the same reason.

As discussed, both are problematic. If the former, why did they all bring the same offerings, [and] . . . if the latter, why does the Torah repeat the offerings twelve times?

TEXT 6B

*The Rebbe, Rabbi
Menachem Mendel
Schneerson, Ibid.*

און דעריבער איז פארשטאנדיק אז טראץ דעם וואס
אלע נשיאים האבן מקריב געווען די זעלבע קרבנות
. . . האט אבער יעדערער געהאט דערביי אן אנדער
כוונה פרטית.

This leads to the conclusion that though they
brought the same offerings . . . they each had a
unique reason.

Sometimes, a
single event means
different things to
different people.



ANSWER

The offerings were tribal, and though they looked the same, their *meanings* differed. They expressed different sentiments for each tribe. For this reason, the Torah presents each one separately.

MULTIPLE MEANINGS IN EACH OFFERING

- The silver bowl represents Adam's life. Each prince connected to aspects of his life they related most to.
- The bowl weighed 130 shekels, symbolizing Adam's age when he had children. Every tribe identified with a different one of Adam's offspring, which reflected their tribal characteristics.
- The silver basin represents Noah's age at fatherhood and the flood's decree. Each tribe focused on different aspects of his story.



ITEM

SIGNIFICANCE

MULTIPLE MEANINGS

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One gold spoon • Weighed ten shekels • Filled with incense 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. One Torah 2. Ten Commandments 3. 613 <i>mitzvot</i> 	<p>The one Torah has many facets: 10 Commandments 613 <i>mitzvot</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One bull • One ram • One lamb 	<p>Abraham Isaac Jacob</p>	<p>Each is one father, but they spawned many tribes and children.</p>
One young goat	The brothers claimed Joseph had been mauled to death and dipped his shirt into goat's blood to prove it.	Nine brothers sold him, but each had a different relationship with him. Then there was Benjamin, who was entirely innocent.
Two oxen	Moses and Aaron, who made peace between the Jews and G-d	Each brought peace in their own way, and each Jew necessitated a different approach.
Rams, goats, and lambs	<i>Kohen</i> , Levite, Israelite Torah, Prophets, Scriptures	There are many people and details in each group and book.
Five of each of the above	Five Books of Moses Five commandments on each tablet	Each of these books and tablets contains many details.

ANSWER ON RASHI

Rashi chose these midrashic explanations because they allow for elasticity and flexibility.

TEXT 7A

Talmud, Berachot 6A

וּמַנִּין לַעֲשׂוֹתָהּ שְׂמֵתָּפֶלְלִין שְׁשִׁינָה עִמָּהֶם?
שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: "אֱלֹקִים נֹצֵב בְּעֵדֹת קָל" (תְּהִלִּים פב, א).

How do we know that G-d is present when ten men pray? It is written, "G-d stands in the congregation of the L-rd" (Psalms 82:1).

TEXT 7B

Talmud, Berachot 8A

מַנִּין שְׂאִין הַקָּדוֹשׁ בָּרוּךְ הוּא מוֹאֵס בְּתַפִּלָּתוֹ
שֶׁל רַבִּים? שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: "הֵן קָל כְּבִיר וְלֹא יִמָּאָס"
(אִיּוֹב לו, ה).

How do we know that G-d never despises the prayers of a group? The verse states, "Behold, G-d will not despise the prayer of the mighty [the community]" (Job 36:5).



Our sages emphasized collective prayer because group prayer is the most meritorious and effective form of prayer.

TEXT 7C

Talmud, Ibid.

מֵאֵי דְּכָתִיב: "וְאַנִּי תַּפִּלַּתִּי לָךְ ה' עֵת רְצוֹן"
(תהלים סט, יד)? אֵימָתִי עֵת רְצוֹן? בְּשָׁעָה
נִשְׁהַצְבוֹר מִתְפַּלְלִין.

What is the meaning of the passage, "And as for me, my prayer to You, G-d, is at a time of goodwill" (Psalms 69:14)? When is the time of goodwill? When the congregation prays.

TEXT 7D

Talmud, Berachot 6a

אבא בִּנְיָמִין אוֹמֵר: אֵין תְּפִלָּה שֶׁל אָדָם נִשְׁמָעַת אֶלָּא בְּבֵית הַכְּנֶסֶת, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר:
"לִשְׁמֹעַ אֶל הָרִנָּה וְאֶל הַתְּפִלָּה" (מְלָכִים א ח, כח). בְּמָקוֹם רִנָּה, שָׁם תִּהְיֶה
תְּפִלָּה.

אָמַר רַבִּין בַּר רַב אָדָא, אָמַר רַבִּי יִצְחָק: מִנֵּין שֶׁהַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא מְצוּי
בְּבֵית הַכְּנֶסֶת? שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: "אֱלֹקִים נֹצֵב בַּעֲדַת קָל" (תְּהִלִּים פב, א).

Aba Binyamin said, "A person's prayer is only heard when articulated in a synagogue, as the verse states, 'To listen to the song and the prayer' (I Kings 8:28). Prayer must take place where there is song."

Ravin, son of Ada, said in the name of Rabbi Yitzchak, "How do we know that G-d is present in the synagogue? The text states, 'G-d stands in the congregation of G-d'" (Psalms 82:1).

TEXT 8A

Siddur Tehilat
Hashem, *Annotated
Edition* (New York:
Merkos L'inyonei
Chinuch, 2006), P. 12

נכון לומר קודם התפילה: "הריני מקבל עלי
מצות עשה של 'ואהבת לרעך כמוך'" (ויקרא
יט, יח).

Before one prays, it is appropriate to say, "I hereby accept upon myself the positive commandment of 'And you must love your fellow as you love yourself' (Leviticus 19:18)."

TEXT 8B

*Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak
Schneersohn, Sefer
Hasichot 5700, p. 157*

האט הוד כבוד קדושת אדוני אבי מורי הרב הקדוש מיר געענטפערט: "ווען א טאטע האט א סך קינדער, איז דער עיקר התענוג זיינער ווען ער זעט אז אלע זיינען זיי באחדות, און האבן זיך איינער דעם אנדערן ליב.

"תפלה איז דאך בקשת צרכיו, הן צרכים גשמיים און הן צרכים רוחניים, איז קודם הבקשה דארף מען מאכן א נחת רוח לאבינו שבשמים. און דעריבער האט מען קובע געווען דעם לקבל מצות עשה פון אהבת ישראל קודם התפלה דוקא".

My saintly father and teacher, Rabbi Shalom Dovber, the Rebbe Rashab, explained that a parent of many children gains tremendous pleasure when seeing their children unified in love.

In prayer, we beseech G-d for our material and spiritual needs. Before we pray, we must give our Heavenly Father pleasure. For this purpose, before prayer we accept the *mitzvah* to love our fellow Jews.

In prayer, we always
include ourselves as part
of the larger community.



TEXT 9A

Talmud, Berachot
29A–30B

אָמַר אַבֵּי: לְעוֹלָם לִישְׁתַּף אִינָשׁ נִפְשִׁיהָ בְּהֶדֶי צְבוּרָא.
הֵיכִי נִימָא? "יְהִי רָצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ שְׁתּוּלִיכֵנוּ
לְשָׁלוֹם".

Abaye said: We must always associate ourselves with the congregation.

How should we pray? "May it be Your will, G-d our G-d, that You lead us to peace."

TEXT 9B

Rashi, ad loc.

שמתוך כך תפלתו נשמעת.

This way, our prayers will be heard.



Is prayer just for the collective, or also for the individual? Is there room for personal expression in collective prayer?

TEXT 10

*Rabbi Adin Even-Israel
Steinsaltz, Hasiddur
Vehatefilah, p. 27*

כאשר הוא מתפלל ואינו אך קורא או ממלמל מלים סתם, הריהו מרגיש הרגשות וחושב מחשבות של עצמו. גם כאשר אין אדם גורר עמו לתוך התפילה את כל הנושאים המעסיקים אותו כל היום כולו, מכל מקום, בתפילתו יש לו דברים שהוא רוצה לבטא ולהרהר בהם.

מצד אחר, לנוסח התפילה יש מהלך של מחשבה, נושאים ומושגים הבאים מבחוץ, מן התפילה אל המתפלל . . .

כל אחד מן המרכיבים הללו מטה ומושך את התפילה לכיוון שונה, ברב או במעט, ותפילתו של אדם היא תוצאה של השתלבות המרכיבים השונים הללו. המתפלל, מצד אחד אומר את הדברים הכתובים בסידור התפילה, משתדל להבין אותם ולכוון את דעתו עליהם.

When we pray (as opposed to reading or mumbling words), we experience many personal feelings and contemplate many thoughts. Even if we don't drag all the day's concerns into our prayers, there are always specific themes we seek to express and contemplate.

On the other hand, the prayer text has an internal thought process. Subjects and concepts spring to our mind from the outside—from the prayer text to the person praying.

Each of these components inclines and draws the prayer in a slightly different direction, and our prayer is the product of the blend of these many components. On the one hand, we chant the words published in the prayer book, strive to understand them, and direct our minds to them.

TEXT 10

*Rabbi Adin Even-Israel
Steinsaltz, Hasiddur
Vehatefilah, p. 27*

אולם, גם אם הוא מצליח לעשות זאת כראוי,
מכל מקום, מחשבותיו ורגשותיו שלו נותנים
משמעות נוספת לדברים הכתובים לפניו . . .

תפילת היחיד המתפלל בסידור עם הציבור היא
מעין מעשהו של מנגן אומן. התווים שלפני
המנגן הם הקובעים מה היא המוסיקה שהוא
מנגן, ואת המהלך והלך הרוח של הנגינה.
ואולם המנגן עצמו הוא הנותן למנגינה כולה
את הפרשנות שלו. את האופן בו הוא מבין וחש
בנגינה, ואת ההטעמה המיוחדת הקשורה
לאישיותו . . . כלומר, אותה מוסיקה קבועה
וכתובה משנה את אופיה ואת מבעה. פעמים
שבגלל המנגן אין הנגינה אלא חזרה מכנית של
תווים. ופעמים שהיא מתרוממת לשיאים רמים.
ולמרות הקביעות, היא מבטאת את המנגן כשם
שהיא מבטאת את יוצרה של המוסיקה.

However, even if we succeed and do this properly, our thoughts and feelings invest the words on the page with additional meaning. . . .

The individual's prayer from the prayer book in a congregation can be likened to a professional singer. The notes before the singer guide the melody, order, and pace. Still, the singer invests the music with personal interpretation and emotion—how the singer understands and feels the song and the distinctive flavor tied to the singer's personality. . . . Thus, the character and expression of fixed, printed music can vary greatly. It can be a mechanical repetition of notes or rise to exalted, inspiring heights. Despite its fixed nature, music expresses its singer as much as its composer.

TEXT 10

*Rabbi Adin Even-Israel
Steinsaltz, Hasiddur
Vehatefilah, p. 27*

המתפלל היחיד גם הוא מתפלל לפי הכתוב
בסידור התפילה. אולם, באותה שעה מחשבתו
ודיבורו נותנים לכל מילה את הפרשנות
וההבנה שלו, ואת מכלול ההשלכות של
אישיותו הפרטית על התפילה הקבועה
והמנוסחת שלפניו. מהותו כאדם, ומצב רוחו
באותה שעה, מגיעים לידי ביטוי למרות
הצמידות לטקסט הכתוב.

When you pray, your prayer is fixed by the printed words in the prayer book. However, simultaneously, your thoughts and words invest each word with your interpretation and understanding. You color the fixed prescribed prayer with all the elements of your personality. Your nature and mood in the moment achieve full expression despite your adherence to the written text.

Prayer is both collective and personal. Its structure connects us to communal merit, yet it serves as a portal for our individual thoughts, yearnings, and needs.



KEY POINTS

1. The twelve tribal princes each brought a set of offerings to inaugurate the altar in the Tabernacle.
2. Each tribe brought the same offerings, but found a unique meaning consistent with their character and sensibilities.
3. For example, one of the offerings symbolized the children of Adam. Adam had many children. Thus, each tribal prince connected with the child that they were most drawn to.
4. The same concept applies to communal prayer. Our sages were highly focused on the value of collective and congregational prayer.
5. Nevertheless, they left room for expressing the individual's needs and feelings. We each invest our prayers with our unique passions and concerns.

