

Rabbi's Column

Back to basics: Each blessing, where we indicate our proof of God's blessedness, has a formula. There are three basic formulas used, with either 3 words, 6 words or 10 words to introduce the reason for the blessing. The three word introduction is transliterated (Hebrew sounds in English letters) as Baruch Ata Adonai, where the "ch" is pronounced as in German Achtung, and not like the English word children. This translates literally as "blessed you God" and means "You are blessed, God." It is most often seen at the end of a paragraph in the Siddur (prayerbook) which summarizes the content of the paragraph. Many times another 3 words is added - eloheinu melech ha'olam which translates literally and meaningfully as "our god ruler of the universe." Stand alone blessings which are recited when we have or will experience something are the occasions upon which these six words are used. When we recite a blessing because we are about to do something which has been commanded, we add these four words: asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu which translates literally and meaningfully as "that/who has separated us out through his commandments and commanded us."

Fair to middling: Each Amidah has 6 paragraphs in common. Avot [ancestors] where we declare upon which grounds we are approaching God, Gevurot [strengths or powers] where we list many of the things God does which we attempt to emulate, Kedushat HaShem [the separateness of the name/reputation] in which we clarify how unique God is, R'tzei [accept] in which we hope that God will accept what we have said as well as make it clear that Israel is pretty important, Modim [acknowledge] in which we thank God for the providing an abundant number of reasons for us to be thankful, and Shalom [peace] in which we remind God that part of making a peaceful world is in God's hands. These are the first three paragraphs and the last three paragraphs. In the middle one will find anywhere from one paragraph (kedushat Hayom) to 7 (which used to be 6). Those will be discussed in a future week.

Beyond the beyond: Some of the divine sparks within the world are contained within melody. There are different melodies used throughout the year, both liturgically and for reading sacred text. In terms of sacred text, the melody most often heard is that of the Torah. The prophetic portions, Lamentations, Esther, and Ecclesiastes/Song of Songs/Ruth each have their own melody. There is also a special melody for the readings from the Torah on the High Holidays. When I read the final reading of the year on Simchat Torah, I encompass all of them, as that reading sort of summarizes and ties together all the learning we do throughout the year.

If you can make it to Laramie (UW at the Buchanan Arts Center) this Wednesday at 7 pm, I will be on a panel of clergy discussing issues relating to what the faith traditions have to say about dealing with people who are not us. (at least that is my current understanding of the topic being discussed).