

# Prayer for the State of Israel What's There and What's not

Study Session  
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**KOACH**  
on campus



The United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism

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The following materials have been created by **KOACH** for the enhancement of your on-campus programming. They are designed to be adjustable based on your interests and the available time. This packet contains: a copy ready text sheet, background materials and a facilitator guide. The background materials and facilitator guide will help you build conversations around the text and create connections between the text and contemporary life.

Questions? Send them to: [estrin@uscj.org](mailto:estrin@uscj.org).

# Prayer for the State of Israel

## Original text

אָבִינוּ שְׁבַשְׁמִים, צוֹר יִשְׂרָאֵל וְגוֹאֲלוֹ, בְּרַךְ אֶת מְדִינַת יִשְׂרָאֵל רֵאשִׁית צְמִיחַת גְּאוּלְתָּנוּ. הֲגֵן עָלֶיךָ בְּאַבְרַת חֶסֶדְךָ וּפְרוּס עָלֶיךָ סֶפֶת שְׁלוֹמְךָ וּשְׁלַח אוֹרְךָ וְאַמְתָּךְ לְרֵאשִׁיךָ, שְׂרִיחַ, וְיוֹעֲצֶיךָ וְתַקְנִים בְּעֶצֶה טוֹבָה מְלַפְנֶיךָ. חֲזַק אֶת יָדֵי מְגִינֵי אֶרֶץ קְדֻשָׁנוּ וְהַנְחִילֵם אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְשׁוּעָה וְעֵטְרַת נֶצְחוֹן וְתַעֲטְרֵם, וְנִתֵּן שְׁלוֹם בְּאֶרֶץ וּשְׂמֵחַת עוֹלָם לְיוֹשְׁבֶיהָ.

וְאֶת אַחֵינוּ כָּל בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל פְּקַדְנָא בְּכָל אַרְצוֹת פְּזוּרֵיהֶם וְתוֹלִיכֶם מְהֵרָה קוֹמְמִיּוֹת לְצִיּוֹן עִירְךָ וְלִירוּשָׁלַיִם מְשָׁכֵן שְׁמֶךָ, כְּפָתוּב בְּתוֹרַת מֹשֶׁה עַבְדְּךָ "אִם יִהְיֶה נִדְחָךְ בְּקֶצֶה הַשָּׁמַיִם מִשָּׁם יִקְבְּצֶךָ אֱלֹהֶיךָ וּמִשָּׁם יִקְחֶךָ, וְהִבִּיאֶךָ אֶל הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר יָרָשׁוּ אֲבוֹתֶיךָ וִירְשֶׁתָּהּ." וַיַּחַד לְבַבְנוּ לְאַהֲבָה וְלִירְאָה אֶת שְׁמֶךָ וּלְשֹׁמֵר אֶת כָּל דְּבָרֵי תוֹרָתְךָ, וּשְׁלַח לָנוּ בֶן דָּוִד מְשִׁיחַ צְדָקֶיךָ לְפָדוֹת מַחְכֵי יְשׁוּעָתֶיךָ. הוֹפֵעַ בְּהַדָּר גְּאוֹן עוֹזֶךָ עַל כָּל יוֹשְׁבֵי תֵבֵל אֶרֶץְךָ, וַיֹּאמֶר כָּל אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁמָה בְּאַפּוֹ "יְיָ אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מְלֶךְ וּמְלִכוּתוֹ בְּכָל מְשָׁלָה." אָמֵן סְלָה.

Our Father who is in Heaven, Rock and Redeemer of Israel, bless the State of Israel, the beginning of our redemption. Defend her with Your wing of mercy/grace, and spread over her a shelter of Your peace; and send Your light and Your truth to her leaders, ministers and advisors, and help them with Your good counsel. Strengthen the hands of the defenders of our Holy Land, deliver it to them, God the savior, and crown them with a crown of victory. Give peace in the land and eternal happiness to its inhabitants.

And visit all our Brethren of the house of Israel, in all the lands where they are scattered, and bring them rapidly to Zion, Your city and to Jerusalem, where Your name lives, as it says in the Torah of Moses, Your servant: "Even if your dwelling is at the end of the sky, God will congregate you from there, and bring you from there, and will bring you toward the land that Your forefathers inherited and you will inherit it." Dedicate our hearts to love and worship Your name and to keep all that is in Your Torah, and send us the son of David, the Messiah of Your justice, to redeem those who wait for Your salvation. Appear with the glory and the pride of Your strength, in front of all the inhabitants of the Universe, and all those who have breath will say: "The God of Israel is the King, and He reigns over all". Amen.



# Prayer for the State of Israel

*Siddur Sim Shalom* text

אָבִינוּ שְׁבַשְׁמִים, צוּר יִשְׂרָאֵל וְגוֹאֲלוֹ, בְּרַךְ אֶת מְדִינַת יִשְׂרָאֵל רֵאשִׁית צְמִיחַת  
גְּאוּלְתָּנוּ. הִגֵּן עָלֶיךָ בְּאַבְרַת חֶסֶד וּפְרוּס עָלֶיךָ סֶכֶת שְׁלוֹמְךָ וְשַׁלַּח אוֹרְךָ וְאַמְתִּיךָ  
לְרֵאשִׁיךָ, שְׂרִיחַ, וְיוֹעֵצֶיךָ וְתִקְנָם בְּעֵצָה טוֹבָה מִלְּפָנֶיךָ. חֲזַק אֶת יְדֵי מְגִינֵי אֶרֶץ  
קְדְשֵׁנוּ וְהַנְּחִילֵם אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְשׁוּעָה וְעִטְרַת נְצַחוֹן תִּעֲטְרֵם, וְנִתֵּן שְׁלוֹם בְּאֶרֶץ וְשִׁמְחַת  
עוֹלָם לְיוֹשְׁבֶיהָ, וְנֵאמְרָאֵמֶן

Our Father in Heaven, Rock and Redeemer of the people Israel; Bless the State of Israel, with its promise of redemption. Shield it with Your love; spread over it the shelter of Your peace. Guide its leaders and advisors with Your light and Your truth. Help them with Your good counsel. Strengthen the hands of those who defend our Holy Land. Deliver them; crown their efforts with triumph. Bless the land with peace, and its inhabitants with lasting joy. And let us say: Amen. (translation from *Siddur Sim Shalom*)

## *Excerpts from Conservative Judaism: Our Ancestors to our Descendants*

Summary of Emet V'Emunah: Statement of Principles of Conservative Judaism. Pg. 203

3a. *The Central Role of Israel:* We rejoice in the reborn national homeland in Israel. We understand the State of Israel not only in political and military terms, but in religious terms as well, a product of God's promise to our ancestors and their descendants. Judaism, though, has been land-centered but never land bound, and through the centuries we have been able to survive creatively and spiritually in the Diaspora (Tfutzot) as well.

3c. *Various centers of Jewish life:* We view it as both a misinterpretation of Jewish history and a threat to Jewish survival to negate the complimentary roles of *Eretz Yisrael* and the Diaspora. Currently there are various important centers of Jewish life in the Diaspora. Israeli and Diaspora Jews must aid and enrich the other in every possible way.



# Prayer for the State of Israel

## Background Material

During the Babylonian exile from Jerusalem (586 B.C.E.), the prophet Jeremiah stated: "Seek the peace of the city where I have caused you to be exiled, and pray for it to God, for in its peace you shall have peace" (Jeremiah 29:7). With this statement begins our tradition to pray for the welfare of the state in which we reside, since it is upon this state and its rulers that we are physically, economically and politically dependent.

By the 14th century the practice of praying for our country of residence had become an established custom and began showing up in printed *siddurim* (prayerbooks).

With the establishment of the State of Israel, a people who had spent most of history under the control of others once again began to control their own lives, politics, and religious activities. For the first time since antiquity, Jewish religious leaders had the opportunity to compose a prayer for the Jewish leaders of a Jewish state.

The authorship of the prayer is unclear. Some say it was written in the late 1940s by Chief Rabbis Yitzhak Herzog and Ben Zion Uziel with the assistance of other rabbis. Others suggest that the prayer was revised by the rabbis after suggestions made by Israeli Nobel Laureate Shmuel Yosef Agnon, one of the pioneers of modern Hebrew literature. Still others are convinced that Agnon wrote the prayer himself and that it was later adopted by the Chief Rabbinate.

In *Siddur Sim Shalom*, the prayer for the State of Israel is found on page 416.

# Prayer for the State of Israel

## Facilitator Guide

The Facilitator Guide is designed to direct you through several options. Although it is designed as a progression, you need not follow from beginning to end. Use the packet in its entirety or choose components based on the time you have available and the students in your group.

### Getting Started

You might open your conversation by asking the students what they think about the concept of praying for the country in which we live and for the State of Israel.

Brainstorm with them: if they were to compose a prayer for Israel, what would it contain? Would they want their prayer to express the ideology, hopes, and aspirations of the Zionist movement? Or, should it be a prayer for the leaders of Israel, treating them like any other political leaders of any country?

### Section One – Prayer for the State of Israel

The *original text* is the prayer created in the 1940's. Since then, many versions have been developed to meet the needs of particular communities.

Have the students work in *hevruta* (pairs) or small groups to read and discuss the prayer. What are the central themes of the prayer? What does the prayer request from God? What questions, comments, or problems does it evoke?

Return to the large group and discuss. What do they think about the prayer? Are there things they feel are missing or, conversely, should not be included?

If the conversation gets stuck, sample discussion points are provided below.

This prayer states that the establishment of the State of Israel is a divine event and that this event is the fulfillment of God's promise to the Jewish people and part of the divine plan to redeem the world. It is understood by many that "the beginning of our redemption" represents the first step toward the Messianic Age. What do the students think about that concept?

Here are some objections to the prayer that you might bring up for discussion:

- o **The *haredim* (ultra-Orthodox)** hold that no matter where they live, redemption will not be brought by the establishment of a secular state, but by the observance of Torah. Although the vast majority in this community are deeply connected to the state and are proud of it in many ways, they do not see the state in Messianic terms.
- o **Liberals** object to the Messianic theme of the prayer, arguing that it can be used by Israeli hawks to justify the construction of Jewish settlements in the West Bank and Gaza. Some critics see the prayer - which asks God to "strengthen the hands of those who defend our holy land" and "crown their efforts with triumph" - as an unqualified endorsement of Israeli military maneuvers.
- o **Others** hold that belief in God's impending intervention in history is fine for the realm of the spirit, but have no place in the affairs of a sovereign state. They point to many examples in Jewish history when Messianic ideas caught the imagination of the people and led to disaster, such as the war against the Romans that ended in the destruction of Jerusalem.
- o **Others** find the victorious nature of the prayer problematic. Why do we need to ask for military victory in addition to peace, as if war is an inevitable, permanent part of living in Israel?

Jews in the Diaspora, who are quite comfortable in their homes, may not relate to a prayer that pleads with God to speedily return them to Israel. Such an idea may be acceptable in a spiritual, theoretical sense, but when tied to a prayer for the sovereign Jewish state, it may be difficult to accept. Why might these concepts have been included?

## Section Two – Conservative Version

This section looks at the version of the Prayer for the State of Israel adopted by the Conservative Movement and found in *Siddur Sim Shalom*. Note: the translation provided for the *original text* is as literal as possible. This translation is found in *Siddur Sim Shalom*, p. 417.

Return to *hevruta* or small groups and have the students compare the two versions of the prayer. Return to a large group and discuss. Utilize the excerpts from *Emet v'Emunah* as needed.

- What did the Conservative Movement remove?
- Why might these changes have been made?
- How do the students feel about this?
- Is it our obligation to make Aliyah? Why or why not?
- Have they ever considered Aliyah? Why or why not?
- What are other ways of “rising to Israel”?

Remember, Conservative Judaism stresses the centrality of Israel. It is the methods of celebrating that centrality that are up for debate.

*Todah* (thanks) to Sophie Fellman-Rafalovitz, *USY Shliha*, who suggested the concept for this month's study session.