Tzvee Zahavy, "Political and Social Dimensions in the Formation of Early Jewish Prayer: the Case of the Shema`," from the Proceedings of the Tenth World Congress of Jewish Studies, Jerusalem, Division C, Vol. 1, pp. 33-40, Jerusalem, 1990.

Prayer services do not emerge spontaneously or arbitrarily in a vacuum. They are the public pronouncements of the central values and concepts of the religious leaders who initially propounded them and are social rituals that often emerge out of intense conflict and hard-fought compromise. Once established as standard within a given community, prayers are not easily changed because their rituals must be accountable on a regular basis to a community of pious devotees.

Specific historical, social and political conditions contributed to the distinct origin of two major rabbinic services. In the crucial transitional period after the destruction of the Temple, the *Shema`* emerged as the primary ritual of the scribal profession and its proponents. The Amidah at this formative time was a ritual sponsored mainly by the patriarchal families and their priestly adherents.

Compromises between the factions of post-70 Judaism later led to the adoption of the two liturgies in tandem at the primary core of public Jewish prayer. But this came about only after intense struggles among competing groups for social and political dominance over the Jewish community at large and concomitantly for the primacy of their respective liturgies.

It is indisputable that the development of classical Judaic liturgy was a communal affair. The synagogues and other gathering places for public ceremony of Israel and the diaspora were places of regular public gathering, where factions of late antique Judaism met and where community leaders competed for the support of the Jewish citizens of the villages of the Hellenistic Mediterranean world. The political, social and even, economic dimensions of the religious life of the synagogues were crucial to the formation of nascent rabbinic Judaism.

One of the most prominent historians of Jewish Liturgy, Joseph Heinemann forcefully proposed a creative and provocative methodological model for the study of early rabbinic liturgy based on distinctions of social settings.[1] However despite the breadth and depth of his

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[1]Heinemann's study, *Prayer in the Talmud: Forms and Patterns*, Berlin and New York, 1977, begins this analysis but rapidly loses track of the historical implications of prayer because of his mistaken assumption that prayer was spread through adoption in one or another institutional *sitz im leben* such as synagogues and study halls in early rabbinism. He errs in his basic assumptions that these were mature institutions in the first and second centuries. Evidence to the contrary abounds. He moreover misreads the prayers themselves, missing the main distinction between national and political ideology on the one hand, and the enunciation of scribal ideals on the other. Much of the evidence he assembled must be analyzed more aggressively within the historical and social spectrum. Others have posited infiltration of political forces into the early formation of the liturgy. See for instance, C. Roth, "*Melekh*

studies his form-critical theories were based on questionable assumptions. Some of what he posits is counterintuitive as for example, "At first many different forms of the same basic prayer grew up in a somewhat haphazard fashion, and that only afterwards, gradually in the course of time, did the rabbis impose their legal norms on this vast body of material."[2] Heinemann does not provide firm evidence to establish an historical basis for a loose populist process of development of prayer.

Heinemann furthermore neglected the essential role of the leadership of the elite in propagating liturgy to serve their political and social interests. He too frequently employed the unspecified passive voice to describe the growth of liturgical ritual. Moreover, he naively accepted the mistaken notion of a normative pan-rabbinic halakhah.

We are now more aware of the influence of conflict and differentiation internal to rabbinism in its historical development. Rabbinic traditions tersely report aspects of what must have been bitter and prolonged political battles over liturgical compromise in an early formative stage. Talmudic sources recount that Gamaliel II of Yavneh was deposed from the Patriarchate at the turn of the second century on account of a dispute over the regulation of prayers.[3] Other incidents reported in early rabbinic compilations indicate that prayer had much more than merely spiritual and theological ramifications for late antique rabbinism and that diversity and conflict characterize the formulation of its liturgy.[4]

Additional evidence reinforces the association of liturgy and conflict. New Testament pericopae depict confrontations between Jesus and Paul and the Jews of various synagogues.[5] Richard Horsely's recent research into early Christianity[6] explains that, "In traditional historical societies there was no separation of life into different areas such as `religion' and

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HaOlam: Zealot influence in the Liturgy," *Journal for Jewish Studies* 11 (1960), pp. 173-5. Also see the work of Finkelstein, "The Development of the Amidah," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 16 (1925-6), pp. 142-169, regarding Zealot influence on the Amidah.

[2]*Prayer in the Talmud*, p. 7.

[3]B. Berakhot 27b-28a, Y. Berakhot 4:1, and see my *The Traditions of Eleazar ben Azariah*, Missoula, 1977, pp. 146-159.

[4]Confrontations involving prayer include those instances related in M., such as the castigation of Tarfon in M. Berakhot 1:3 for not reciting the *Shema`* in the proper posture (bowing in public ritual may have been suggestive of the priestly rite of the Temple on the Day of Atonement); the suspicion that Aqiva and Eleazar b. Azariah were not reciting the morning *Shema`* (T. Ber. 1:2); the reference to Roman concern over the recitation of the *Shema`* in Aqiva's house of study (T. Ber. 2:13), and the tradition that the Aqiva, a martyr of the Bar Kokhba war, recited the *Shema`* at the time of his death (B. Ber. 61b).

[5]See for instance, Luke 4:16, Acts 9:2, 20; 13:5, 14; 14:1; 16:13; 17:1, 10-11, 17; 18:4, 19; 19:8.

[6]*Jesus and the Spiral of Violence*, San Francisco, 1987. See also A. Saldarini, *Pharisees, Scribes and Sadducees*, Wilmington, 1988, pp. 163-173.

`politics' and `economics.'" He remarks regarding the Gospels that, "The intensity and variety of conflict that runs through the gospel tradition is still overwhelming. The situation in which Jesus heals and preaches is pervaded by conflict, some of it explicit, much of it implicit in stories and sayings."[7] Rabbinism in this era must be viewed in the same manner.

Given these supposition let us turn to the contents, motifs and forms of the standard formulation we possess of the two main liturgies, the *Shema`* and the Amidah. They reflect even after centuries of use, strikingly disparate characteristics and identities. And because these services have resisted change, as do most liturgies, they thereby preserve for us useful historical seams through which we may penetrate back into the development of the community of formative Judaism in the first centuries of the common era. Through examination of these components of early Jewish liturgy at their origin and in the nascent stages of their development one deduces a progression in liturgical formulation summarized in three phases:

> 1. **The *Shema`*** became the primary rite of the scribal brotherhoods, propounding the essential scribal themes. In this perspective the Exodus motif in the *Shema`* functions as a polemic of scribal triumphalism.
> 2. **The Amidah** by contrast originated as the main liturgy of the deposed priestly aristocracy and was adopted by the patriarchate as a central ritual. Priestly and aristocratic themes are central to the Amidah. In this perspective the Kingship motif serves as a justification of priestly and patriarchal authority as post-destruction client rulers of the community implicitly for Rome, and explicitly for God.
> 3. Later, as the rabbinic leadership amalgamated its social forces in the post-deposition era and in the wake of the defeats of the apocalyptic aristocracy in the Bar Kokhba revolt, they merged the formerly distinct liturgical rituals in a single service.

Since we deal here with the first phase, the institutionalization of the *Shema`* in Israel in the first and early second centuries, a few words are in order regarding the social definition of the scribes in Israel. Matthew Black says the scribes, "Represented a distinctive class in the community. They practiced their legal profession throughout Palestine (and as certainly in the dispersion)."[8] Saldarini's fresh and more complex definition proposes, "Scribes do not seem to be a coherent social group with a set membership, but rather a class of literate individuals drawn from many parts of society who filled many social roles and were attached to all parts of society from the village to the palace and Temple."[9] We take note primarily of the struggle of the scribal faction within rabbinism for recognition in the composite social world of Hellenistic Israel.

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[7]Horsely, *Op. cit.*, pp. 152, 156.

[8]S.v. "Scribe," *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, Nashville, 1962, vol. 4, pp. 246-8.

[9]Saldarini, *op. cit.*, p. 275.

This social group promulgated its liturgy to advance its ideas and influence. The *Shema`* expressly emphasizes several dominant theological themes [e.g. love of God; unity of God; centrality of Torah] and gives priority to these ideas out of a rich repertoire of possible alternative biblical motifs.

The scribes' support of this prayer derives from their social realities. Saldarini discusses the overlapping roles of scribes who served in the Temple, and were involved in the wisdom and apocalyptic movements of the time. Scribes, he says, served both in the village as copyists, teachers and low level functionaries, and in middle level bureaucratic official capacities in the government structures in Jerusalem and the Galilee.[10] It is likely that the scribal faction most active in rabbinic society derived its livelihood as teachers of the law and from the accompanying need for copies of the Torah, and on the widespread use of phylacteries, mezuzot and, other required religious articles. The verses of the *Shema`* stated plainly that Torah-study and the observance of selected commandments were among the highest values in Israelite life.

The period of origin of the *Shema`* as a popular scribal rite may be traced to the time of the Houses of Hillel and Shammai, wisdom fellowships commonly thought of as the immediate precursors of some rabbinic associations of the late first century and thereafter. A number of rabbinic traditions associate rules and practices for reciting the *Shema`* with the Houses.[11] Early Christian evidence in Mark 12:29-30 depicts Jesus reciting the first two verses of the *Shema`* in the context of a debate with a group of scribes, and as an opponent of the Temple hierarchy.[12] The scriptural verses of the *Shema`* appear in the earliest phylacteries found at Qumran.[13] Of course, some of the values promoted by the *Shema`* may be located even further back in Israelite history in the wisdom movements of the Hellenistic age.[14] Israelite sages and scribes commonly emphasized Torah and commandments as primary motifs of religious life.[15]

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[10]See Saldarini, *op. cit.*, pp. 241-297 for a full discussion of the social roles of scribes in Jewish society.

[11]See e.g. M. Ber. 1:3.

[12]Regarding the role of scribes in the Gospel traditions, see Saldarini, pp. 159-166.

[13]See Y. Yadin, *Tefillin from Qumran*, Jerusalem, 1969.

[14]The Nash Papyrus, c. 150 B.C.E., from Fayyum, contains the decalogue and the first two verses of the *Shema`*.

[15]See James Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom*, Atlanta, 1981, pp. 27 ff. for a discussion of some aspects of the sage as a member of a professional class. Crenshaw briefly reflects on the exodus motif in the Wisdom of Solomon. Also see his prolegomenon to *Studies in Old Testament Wisdom*, New York, 1977, where he deals with the importance of the theme of creation in the wisdom circles. I. Elbogen claims that the *Shema`* and its benedictions constituted the earliest form of the "synagogue service." See *Studien zur Geschichte des judischen Gottesdienstes*, Berlin, 1907, pp. 38-44.

Both the inclusions and exclusions of the contents of the standard text of this liturgy clearly define its focus and original intent. The primary motifs of the national cult in Jerusalem are noticeably *missing* from both the *Shema`* and from the frame of blessings which surround it.[16] Such ideas and institutions as the Temple, the priesthood, Jerusalem, and Davidic lineage, all prominent motifs in the Amidah, are not primary concerns of the framers of the *Shema`*.

Conspicuous evidence of revision in the *Shema`* indicates that some disagreement arose over time among various subsequent sponsors of the liturgy. Mention of the patriarchal motif of Kingship was added, intruding after the first biblical verse[17] and in the framing blessings. Mishnah Ber. 1:5 cites a dispute over the legitimacy of mentioning the Exodus in the evening *Shema`*. Rabbinic pericopae indicate that there was significant disagreement over some main themes of the *Shema`*-liturgy.[18] It is fair to conclude that such materials probably reflect divisions between the local scribal brotherhoods, who sought independent authority over their adherents, and the national priestly-aristocratic leadership, who likely served as part of the client governance of Israel on behalf of imperial Rome and accordingly advocated alternative values.[19]

Admittedly the case for the origination of the *Shema`* in a scribal social context appears to be contravened by an oft-cited Mishnah pericope (Tamid 5:1) which projects the recitation of the *Shema`* back to the priests in the Temple in Jerusalem. One might argue that this evidence is secondary at best and may be suspected as a means to artificially link the *Shema`* with ancient priestly authority. Priests in the Temple could hardly have been expected to sponsor and perpetuate a liturgy with the limited range of content and themes of the *Shema`*.[20] It would be natural for a group sponsoring its own liturgical rite to seek legitimacy by establishing post facto a fictitious account of the antiquity and broad authority of the ritual. But this pericope is not a simple projection of a later ritual back to an earlier context. It conveys a confusing picture of an unfamiliar melange of liturgies, supporting the supposition that we have there an authentic tradition. Fictitious or not, the Mishnah describes at best a variant precursor to the

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[16]Even if we place the formalization of these blessings late in the second century, these expressions undoubtedly evoke the main themes of the earliest formulations of the *Shema`*, see below.

[17]"Blessed be the name of his glorious Kingdom for ever and ever," and cf. T. Ber. 1:10.

[18]See the discussion in T. Ber. 1:10 of whether reference to sovereignty (a patriarchal theme) must be removed when reference to the Exodus (a scribal motif) is inserted in the *Shema`*. The pericope makes good sense when understood as an encoded dispute of political or social dimensions, rather than as a strictly theological debate.

[19]See Martin Goodman, *The Ruling Class of Judea*, Cambridge 1987, and *State and Society in Roman Galilee, A.D. 132-212*, Oxford, 1983.

[20]Josephus provides a more obvious exaggeration by associating the *Shema`* with Moses in *Antiquities*, IV, vii, 13, and he avers it was part of the daily morning service in the Jerusalem Temple.

ritual "recitation of the *Shema`*" which subsequent historical and social forces adopt as a primary liturgical institution.[21]

A more subtle and possibly contrived association with the Temple is present in the first pericope of Mishnah. Berakhot 1:1 goes out of its way to link the *Shema`* with the Temple and with the sons of Rabban Gamaliel the Patriarch.[22] Other rabbinic evidence more firmly attests to the scribal provenance of the *Shema`*, outside of the control of the Temple hierarchy. So for instance a Tosefta passage in Berakhot rules that scribes only interrupt their professional duties when the time comes for the recitation of their main liturgy, the *Shema`*. Tosefta adds, they need not stop their tasks to recite the prayer of the Patriarchal aristocracy, the Amidah.[23]

Let us turn back to the content of the texts of the *Shema`*. The blessings which became standard in later rabbinism for framing the *Shema`* may have been established as late as the second century.[24] Still, they continue to focus on the scribal agendum and omit direct mention of major Israelite themes: the Temple, the Priests, Jerusalem, David, and the related concepts within these constellations of discourse, crucial to the fostering of priestly and aristocratic ideals, as I said. The framing-blessings do make prominent reference to several subjects: cosmic motifs, suggesting the mystical dimensions of religious discourse; the Exodus and the promise of future redemption; the Torah and the commandments, the value of the study of Torah, all essential thematic concerns of the scribal factions in post-70 Israel, as follows.

The standard blessings before the morning *Shema`* make reference to cosmic-mystical dimensions of the world, make mention of the love of God, and refer to the return to the Land of Israel, but interestingly, not to Jerusalem.[25] The blessing recited in the morning after the Scriptural passages of the *Shema`*, mentions the cosmic dimension and refers to the Exodus and the ultimate messianic redemption. The mention of the kingship of God appears only as a theme subsidiary to the Exodus.

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[21]My thanks to Professor Israel Knoll, Hebrew University for helping me clarify this point.

[22]In M. Berakhot 1:1. Gamaliel's children defy him by making reference to the *Shema`*. By proposing to regulate their liturgy, Gamaliel asserts his authority over his rebellious sons:

> G. Once [Gamaliel's] sons came from the banquet hall.
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> H. And they said to him, "We have not [yet] recited the *Shema`*."

I. He said to them, "If the day has not yet broken, you are obligated to recite [the *Shema`*]."

> Political conflict and social circumstances help explain the artificiality and awkwardness of this anecdote as part of this initial pericope of the Mishnah.

[23]T. Ber. 2:6.

[24]See my *Mishnaic Law of Blessings and Prayers*, Atlanta, 1987, pp. 20-28.

[25]This distinction may be too subtle. But consider that some modern anti-Zionist spokesmen insistently as an articulation of their political views employ the phrase "Land of Israel" rather than "State of Israel" in referring to modern Israel.

The blessings before the Scriptural passages in the evening reiterate the cosmic references, rehearse the value of Torah study. After the passages the blessing in the evening returns to the theme of the Exodus, to a generalized statement of redemption and to references to God as protector of Israel, apropos of the dangers of the night. This scribal liturgy builds its dramatic tension towards a promise of messianic redemption, in alternation with reiteration of the miracles of the Exodus from Egypt.

The invocation of the Exodus may have conjured a broader ritual complex, namely the Seder, through which participants reenacted the Exodus in the long-standing Israelite Springtime ritual. Scribal political interests had much to gain by persistently recalling this theme. The rabbinic Passover, observed with a Seder, was essentially a banquet for Torah study. It previously was the most popular of Israelite festivals, celebrated through the cultic offering and feast of the Paschal lamb. As the festival evolved it became a primary means of annually reinforcing scribal social solidarity. The scribes promoted the Seder as a ritual occasion to substitute for the sacrifice, and a vital way to promote their political and social aims.

These factions prior to the emergence of rabbinic Judaism, and later within rabbinism renovated the festival and transformed the feast into an occasion for Torah-study, and a deft means of usurping the authority for controlling ritual formerly claimed to be exclusively in the domain of the priesthood.[26] Those who recognized the Seder as the authentic means to celebrate Passover, participated in the annual ritual, which must have been a humiliation for the priests and their allies and avowed successors, the patriarchal houses. These constituencies felt the loss of the Temple and its the sacrificial cult most acutely at the time of the Passover festival.

The rabbinic-scribal Seder was blatantly anti-cultic. Instead of describing the Paschal sacrifice and its rite, the crux of the ritual was a recitation of questions and answers and rabbinic midrashim on the ten plagues and on various historical scriptural verses.[27] The Seder mentions the Paschal offering only reluctantly in the context of a statement ascribed to the Patriarch Rabban Gamaliel. The passage arbitrarily insists that it be mentioned along with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. "Rabban Gamaliel said, `Anyone who has not said these three things on Passover has not fulfilled his obligation: Paschal Offering, Matzo, and Bitter Herbs." Note well that the unit concludes, " The Paschal Offering -- on account of God having passed over the houses of our ancestors in Egypt. . ." and not on account of the Paschal Offering brought to the Temple by generations of Israelite families from all corners of the Land.[28] This attitude persists as undertone throughout the fellowship ritual.[29]

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[26]See Bokser, *The Origins of the Seder*, Berkeley, 1984. In parallel developments, the early Christians appropriated the Seder in their own way.

[27]For a discussion see L. A. Hoffman, *Beyond the Text*, Indiana, 1987, pp. 86-102.

[28]E.D. Goldschmidt in *The Passover Haggadah*, Jerusalem, 1977, p. 51, n. 1, cites Alon's view that this passage be attributed to Gamaliel II at Yavneh, and refers to alternative

Another suggestive component of early traditions associated with the Seder indicates the close linkage between the scribes, Seder and *Shema`*. A passage describes the arrival of the students in the morning after the Seder who find that the rabbis have been discussing the exodus from Egypt all through the night and declare, "Masters, the time has come for the morning recitation of the *Shema`*." They make no mention of the recitation of the Amidah. This omission may be simply dismissed by assuming that the rabbis first would have recited the *Shema`*, thereafter followed by the Amidah. But if we take this anecdote at its simple face value, the students remind their masters of the *Shema`*, the rite of the scribes, not the Amidah, the priestly ritual.[30]

To summarize, I have posited that liturgies within rabbinic Judaism arise out of competing social circumstances. I have argued that the scribes promoted the *Shema`* together with particular motifs, such as the Exodus,[31] to foster their authority over Israelite society. Others seeking dominance employed their own forms of liturgy to compete with the scribes for prominence in the community and leadership of the Jewish people.

What Stefan Reif has written regarding the general characteristics of Jewish liturgy applies here, "The essence of Jewish liturgy is that it carries within it all these competing tendencies and successfully absorbs them all."[32] Our reconstruction briefly examined the development of one major liturgical ritual of early rabbinism as it progressed through several probable stages. During the initial transition after the destruction of the Temple, from about 70-90 C.E., the

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opinions on the interpretation of this passage.

[29]The folk song, the *Chad Gadya*, appended to conclude the Seder, though it may be a later addition, may be viewed as a cynical reference to the Pascal Offering, mocking the two zuzim, the monetary interest, that the priests had in the sacrifice, and reinforcing their indignity in the wake of the destruction of the Temple.

[30]A version in T. Pes. 10:12 has Rabban Gamaliel and the sages dealing with the laws of Passover all through the night. See Goldschmidt, pp. 19-21. Also consider the role of Eleazar in the deposition narrative. In the main action of the story, Eleazar b. Azariah, a priest descended from a scribe, and himself an aristocrat, takes the place of Gamaliel after he is overthrown. Eleazar, despite his aristocratic pedigree, elsewhere in rabbinic traditions upholds a value of the scribal agendum, avowing that he understands why the exodus must be mentioned at night. Eleazar thereby accepted and promoted practices of the scribes (M. Ber. 1:5), as reflected in the next passage in the Haggadah, Eleazar b. Azariah's statement on mentioning the Exodus from Egypt at night.

[31]Regarding a dispute over the dominance of the theme of sovereignty over the exodus as a liturgical subject, see T. Ber. 1:10.

[32]From his forthcoming chapter, "The Early Liturgy of the Synagogue," in *The Cambridge History of Judaism*, which summarizes the state of scholarship in the area. Also see his articles "Some Liturgical Issues in the Talmudic Sources," *Studia Liturgica* (1982-83), pp. 188-206, and his "Jewish Liturgical Research: Past, Present, Future," *Journal of Jewish Studies*, 34 (1983), pp. 161-70.

priests promulgated the Amidah to reinforce their authority and the Scribes promoted the *Shema`*. At this time it would have been natural for the scribes to associate the *Shema`* with the Temple Service. Elsewhere I argue that in the second phase of development, from about 90-155 C.E., the patriarchate sponsored the Amidah to counter a growing scribal faction within the rabbinic movement. Scribes countered by rallying popular support, deposed Gamaliel, and effectuated a lasting compromise. Both liturgies were adopted in tandem and made obligatory rabbinic rituals.[33]

The rabbis in the era from about 155-220 C.E. consolidated the compromise which lead to the shape of the composite rabbinic service that survives down to the present day. The leadership within rabbinism amalgamated *Shema`* and Amidah into a compound liturgy with varied rules and prescribed mannerisms. As probable results of this process of internal conflict the *Shema`* was revised to include the theme of Kingship. The Priests in this era were relegated to figurehead status in rabbinic communities. The Patriarch continued to observe the conventional boundaries of his authority established after the deposition, and was excluded from most internal rabbinic affairs. In effect the scribal faction triumphed in the internal rabbinic power struggle and they severed rabbinic ritual from meaningful national political structures.

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[33]In a longer study I shall discuss at greater length the subsequent stages of development.