**An Essay on the Obligation of Prayer**

Whereas the roots and intentions of prayer indicate a deep secret,

therefore I shall copy the essay by the Rabbi, of blessed and holy memory,  
regarding the obligation of prayer.

Since I have had the initiative to put together a prayerbook, let me indicate a bit that is appropriate for a person, regarding this matter. It is obligatory for people to prepare themselves when they stand in front of the king of kings, and to be aware of all the ways [ishurim] of the words that are issuing from their mouths, and not to sin; because, just as one receives reward for having the right meaning in reciting praises, so does one receive punishment when one’s mental direction is not the right one. Two causes make this work obligatory: understanding, and the Torah. The established [postures of prayer] as alluded to in the words of the prophets: standing, sitting, bowing, prostrating, kneeling; and also: spreading out one’s hands, stretching one palms, lifting up one’s eyes, crying with one’s eyes, and aligning one’s legs – along with the other conditions and names [of prayer positions] that are said and mentioned by each prophet and seer; collectively, they are called “action” [pe‘ulla], and work in honor of God [melekhet shamayim], to be done in accordance with its conditions, of which the prime fulfillment is an undivided heart, and for the person to be aware of the three foundational pillars, on which every foundation is based:

First: There are divided ways [ishurim]: some of them pertain to substance, others pertain to causes, and still others pertain to both. If one mixes them up, it is impossible not to stumble. But when one declares [God’s] unity twice [a day, in the Shema‘], one will understand that that the accident of unity is not accidental regarding [God, but rather it is his substance]; and similarly regarding the various descriptions that are mentioned about him.

Second: a proof of the unity, from one’s other knowledge, and one’s understanding of how things will emanate when one’s mental direction [kavvana] is absent. For [God] will not vindicate a liar, so how could he vindicate someone that stands without understanding whether one’s words are in fact a lie?

Third: the obligations of [prayer], without which the institutions that ascend have not been written or completed. Let us not look to the customs that are practiced in most places, where they call upon children and fools to do this work. For how is it possible for them to be the ones to institute the prayers that teach of God’s unity and recount his deeds, and mention our sins and beg for them to be pardoned, and all the way through (?), without a way (?), again and again (? – or: God forbid!); this is known to the wise. Also, shame on the people that confuse letters, such as hē with ḥet, or resh with dalet, and the like; they destroy the world. But whether one prays with brevity or at length, as long as one does so in a well-constructed way, either is good.