

Samuel Field Y Adult Center

Prayer During The Period Of The Geonim

Introduction To The Period Of The Geonim
Appx. 500 CE to 1100 CE

The Essential Talmud-Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz, Basic Books 1976. Page 64:

Even before the Talmud was completed, it was evident that this work was to become the basic text and primary source for Jewish law. It is actually the last book of source material in Jewish literature, since the works that followed were to a large extent based on it, derived their authority from it, and consulted it whenever necessary for elucidation of theoretical and practical problems.

Copies of the Talmud or of isolated tractates reached all the Jewish communities, including the remotest settlements in Asia, Africa, and Europe. But from the first it was a difficult subject of study even for the most gifted of scholars. Because of the Talmud's nonsystematic editing, each section demanded a certain degree of prior knowledge, and the background or basis of concepts was not always clearly explained. The material therein, reflecting as it did a specific way of life and the content of the debates held in the Babylonian academies, sometimes appeared to students in other countries or other ages to be disjointed or incomplete. The language also created problems; the Aramaic Hebrew jargon in which the Talmud was written remained the dialect of Babylonian Jewry for many generations, but in other countries the Jews spoke indigenous dialects. Even in Babylonia, Aramaic eventually yielded to Arabic, brought in by the Moslem conquerors in the mid-seventh century.

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Samuel Field Y Adult Center
Prayer During The Period Of The Geonim

Introduction To The Period Of The Geonim-2

The Essential Talmud-Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz, Basic Books 1976. Page 64-cont'.

Thus scholars in the various Diaspora communities encountered problems in the course of the studies and found it necessary to consult the commentaries on the Talmud. The natural authorities best equipped to clarify problems were the heads of the great Babylonian academies of Sura and Pumbedita. These scholars, known by the title of gaon (which initially meant head of a great academy, but changed in meaning after several hundred years of imprecise use), were the heirs of the amoraim and thus a primary source for explanation of the Talmud. The geonim continued to teach the Talmud in accordance with amoraite tradition. At the height of their achievement, disciples flocked to hear them from all over the Diaspora. But for the Jewish world as a whole, their influence was embodied in the responsa, of which only remnants have survived. The communities posed questions relating mostly to practical halakhah, but also of theoretical interest. In their letters of response, the geonim. would explain difficult words and terms and elucidate entire subjects (sugiyot). These letters were the first commentaries on the Talmud, neither systematic nor complete but composed in response to need. It was only the last of the geonim. who began to compose commentaries on whole tractates, and these, too, consisted mainly of interpretations of difficult words or phrases. Gaonic literature was mostly concerned with halakhic rulings and with the practical conclusions to be drawn from the talmudic text.

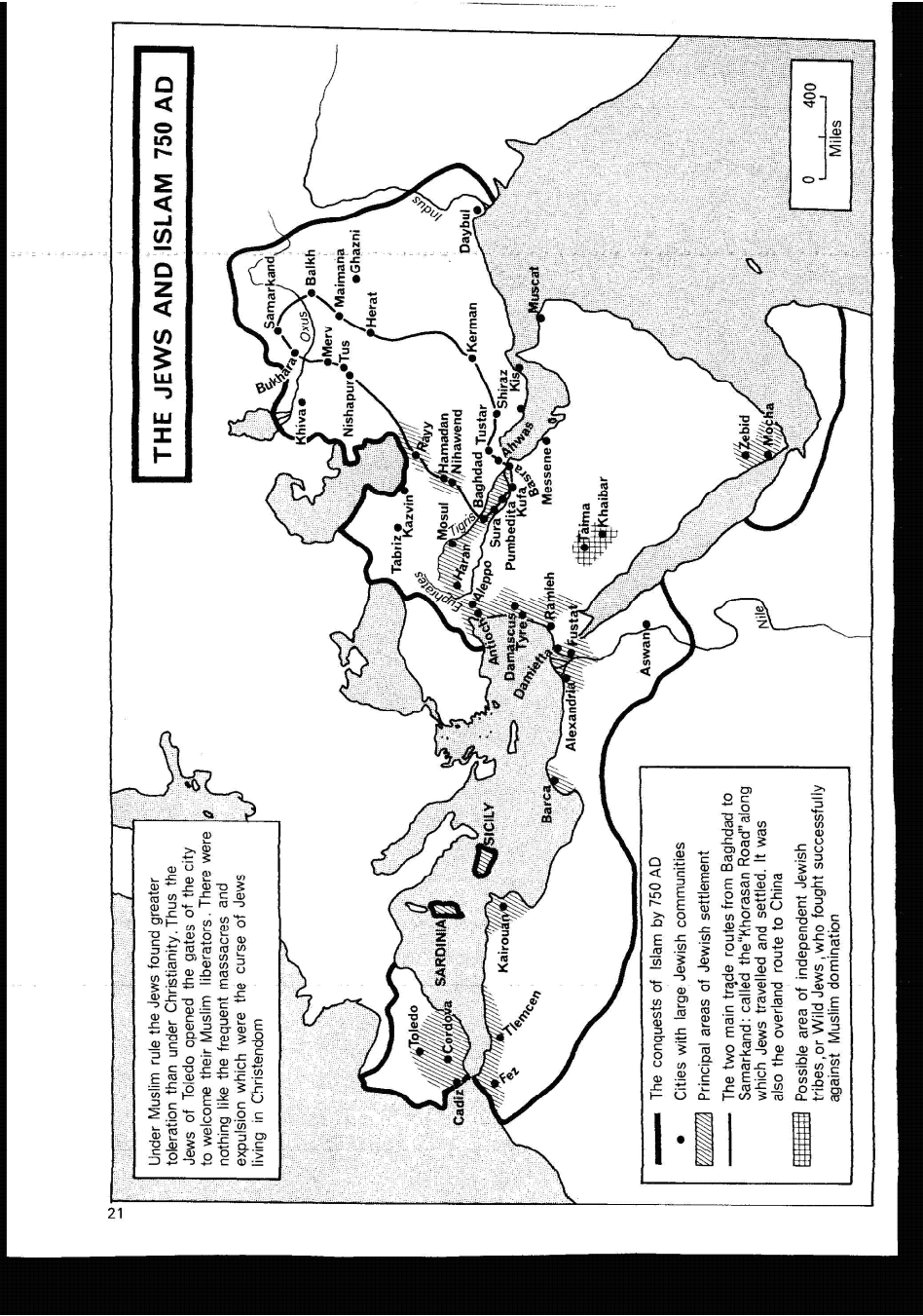
The need for more comprehensive interpretation of the Talmud was greatly intensified when the ties with the geonim were weakened for various political reasons. The great Moslem Empire disintegrated into a number of rival kingdoms which were not always easily accessible to one another. The center of the caliphate, Baghdad (where the large academies were located), also waned in importance, and various upheavals eventually led to the closing down of these institutions, bringing to an end the period of the geonim.. Certain Jewish communities, in Europe for example, were never able to maintain regular contact with the geonim. and were obliged to become culturally and spiritually self sufficient.

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Prayer During The Period Of The Geonim

Contributions Of The Geonim To Jewish Liturgy

1. The First Prayer Books
2. Responsa Of The Geonim
3. The Differences Between The Customs In Babylonia
And In Israel
4. The Reaction To The Karaite Movement

Samuel Field Y Adult Center
Prayer During The Period Of The Geonim



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Prayer During The Period Of The Geonim

First Page Of The First Siddur-1

Amrom son of Shashna, head of the Yeshiva in Masa Machsiya (suburb of Sura) responding to Rav Yitzchok son of the teacher and Rabbi, Rabbi Shimon, who is held dear, adored and honored in our eyes and in the opinion of the entire Yeshiva. Greetings of peace. May Heaven show compassion to you, your children and all the scholars, their students and our Jewish brethren who live there. Send greetings of peace from us and from Rav Tzemach head of the Jewish Court, from the officers, the scholars of the Yeshiva and the students of our Yeshiva and of the city of Machsiya. We, the teachers, the students and the Jewish citizens of this area are at peace. We are constantly concerned about your welfare and think of you favorably at all times. We pray for you and ask that G-d show compassion to you; that G-d bestow abundant mercy upon you, protect you, save you from troubles and difficulties, from sickness and affliction, from oppressive governments, from destructive actions, and from all the troubles that can occur in life. May G-d demonstrate compassion in granting you all that you ask for yourselves. Rabbi Yaakov, son of Rav Yitzchok, delivered ten gold coins that were sent for the benefit of the Yeshiva; five for the leadership of the Yeshiva and five for the Yeshiva itself. We have commanded that you be blessed with Brachos and that they come to fruition for you and for your descendants.

The order of prayers and Brachos for the entire year that you requested, that has been shown to us by Heaven, we deem appropriate to set forth and lay out in the manner in which the tradition was passed down to us, as compiled by the Rabbis during the period of the Mishna and of the Gemara. And so we learned: Rabbi Mayer said: a person is obligated to recite 100 Brachos each day. In the Jerusalem Talmud we learned: it was taught in the name of Rabbi Mayer; there is no Jew who does not fulfill one hundred Mitzvos each day, as it was written: Now Israel, what does G-d your G-d ask of you? Do not read the verse as providing for the word: “what” (Mah); instead read it as including the word: “one hundred” (Mai'Eh). King David established the practice of reciting one hundred Brachos each day. When the residents of Jerusalem informed him that one hundred Jews were dying everyday, he established this requirement. It appears that the practice was forgotten until our Sages at the time of the Mishna and at the time of the Gemara re-established it.

Samuel Field Y Adult Center

Prayer During The Period Of The Geonim

First Page Of The First Siddur-2

The order of the 100 Brachos was set forth by Rav Natroni son of Hil'Ai, head of the Yeshiva at Masa Machsiya, in correspondence with the community in Lucena, Spain through Rav Yosef, the elder. Rav Natroni provided as follows: it is no longer possible to recite each Bracha at its correct time because today we awake each day with unclean hands, hands that inadvertently came in contact with unclean parts of our bodies during the night. Instead when a person wakes, he should first wash his face, hands and feet as is appropriate. That is how a Jew fulfills the directive in the following verse: Prepare, Jews, for meeting with the Almighty. Every person is obligated to do so. The following represents the custom among Jews in Spain, which is Hispania: in synagogue, the prayer leader recites the morning blessings on behalf of those present so that they may fulfill their obligation by answering: Amen to the Brachos that the prayer leader recites, as Rav Natroni son of Hil'Ai provided.

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Prayer During The Period Of The Geonim

Responsa Of The Geonim

The Origin Of Kaddish As Part Of The Prayer Services

Responsa Of The Geonim-Concerning the origin of Kaddish that you asked, we can not trace the practice to a clear and definitive source found among our ancestors' writings. However, those who followed them based their recitation of Kaddish upon this verse (Leviticus 22, 32) And I will be sanctified within the people of Israel and upon what our Rabbinic leaders extrapolated from the verse: that any prayer which results in the sanctification of the name of G-d must be recited only in a group of ten men. From these teachings we can conclude that when ten men congregate to perform a mitzvah, whether it be for prayer or for the study of Torah, they must recite a prayer in which they sanctify the name of G-d. As a result, at the conclusion of the first section of the morning prayer, Pseukei D'Zimra, after reciting the Bracha in Yishtabach, those congregated should recite Kaddish because they have completed the mitzvah of reciting Pseukei D'Zimra and they are about to perform an additional Mitzvah, the recital of Kriyat Shma and its blessings before and after . . . And they should recite Kaddish after Shmona Esrei because it too is an independent Mitzvah and it is not connected with that which is recited after it. And another Kaddish should be recited after the Torah Reading because in order to read from the Torah, ten men must congregate together. And another Kaddish after reciting the Kedusha in OO"Vah L'Tzion because it too is a Mitzvah unto itself and it is a Prayer of Sanctification of G-d's name and requires the presence of ten men.

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Prayer During The Period Of The Geonim

The Origin Of Kaddish As Part Of A Funeral Service

The prayer “Tzadok Hadin” that is recited at a burial is a Mitzvah that is the responsibility of the community to perform, as it is written in Tractate Megilah, page 3, side 2, that one must take time away from studying Torah to accompany the casket to the cemetery and to accompany a bride to her wedding, and it is therefore necessary to recite Kaddish at the burial. A minority of Gaonim hold that one should not recite Kaddish at a burial simply because Tzodak Hadin has been said. Instead, Kaddish should be recited only after a different Mitzvah was performed (i.e. learning Torah). Other Gaonim hold that the burial itself is the Mitzvah that triggers the recitation of Kaddish. Now, this line of reasoning may prompt you to be troubled by the following question: why is not also our custom to recite Kaddish at a wedding? Is not the performance of a wedding the type of Mitzvah that requires the presence of ten men? It is not appropriate to recite Kaddish at a wedding because the congregation is coming only to honor the couple; they do not say a word nor perform any act, so for what reason should those present recite Kaddish? Kaddish is not recited unless those present have said some words that are part of a Mitzvah or consist of words of praise.

Samuel Field Y Adult Center

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Differences In Practice Between The Jews Of Babylonia And The Jews Of Israel-1

The Number Of Brachot In Shemona Esrei

The Jews of Babylonia recited nineteen Brachot as part of Shemona Esrei (the Prayer of 18 Benedictions) while the Jews in Israel recited only eighteen.

Reciting Kedushah On Weekdays

The Jews of Babylonia recited Kedushah as part of the repetition of the Prayer of 18 Benedictions each day while the Jews of Israel recited Kedushah only as part of the Shabbat morning prayer service.

Congregation rises.
When the Reader repeats the Amidah, the following is said:
We will sanctify Thy name in the world even as they sanctify it in the highest heavens, as it is written by the hand of Thy prophet
And they called one unto the other and said,
Congregation:
Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of His glory. Those over against them say blessed.
Congregation:
Blessed be the glory of the Lord from His place.
Reader:
And in Thy Holy Words it is written, saying,
Congregation:
The Lord shall reign forever, thy God, O Zion, unto all generations. Praise ye the Lord.
Reader:
Unto all generations we will declare Thy greatness, and to all eternity we will proclaim Thy holiness, and Thy praise, O our God, shall not depart from our mouth for ever, for thou art a great and Holy God and King. Blessed art thou, O Lord, the holy God.

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Prayer During The Period Of The Geonim

Differences In Practice Between The Jews Of Babylonia And The Jews Of Israel-2

Taking Two Loaves To Break Bread on Shabbat

Babylonian Jews break bread on the Sabbath using two loaves of bread based on their deriving that two loaves are necessary to mark the fact that G-d would provide the Jews with a double portion of Manna on Fridays to make up for the absence of manna on the Sabbath. The Jews of Israel would break bread on the sabbath using only one loaf. They believed that taking two loaves was an attempt to commemorate an act that took place on a weekday and commemorating it would trespass on the honor of Shabbos.

Giving A Ring As Part Of The Jewish Wedding Ceremony.

Babylonian Jews held that a groom giving a bride a ring as part of the Jewish wedding ceremony did not constitute adequate consideration while the Jews of Israel held that a ring given by a groom to a bride was appropriate consideration .

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Reactions To The Karaite Movement

1. Reciting A Bracha Before Lighting candles Before the Sabbath and the Holidays.
 2. Reciting The Chapter Of Mishna That Deals With the appropriate fuels to use for providing lights on the Sabbath
 3. Reciting a chapter from the book: Ethics Of The Fathers each Shabbat after the afternoon service.
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Brief History Of The Karaite Movement

A Book Of Jewish Concepts by Dr. Philip Birnbaum, Hebrew Publishing Company, 1964-pages 546-548

KARAITES

קראים

THE Karaite sect, founded by Anan ben David in the middle of the eighth century, regarded itself as an integral part of the Jewish people, though it was read out of the Jewish fold by the adherents of rabbinic Judaism. The struggle between the Karaites and the Rabbanites was both constant and arduous for more than four centuries. It is true that the Karaite movement weakened the Jewish people numerically, but it had a leavening effect on the development of Jewish learning throughout the Arabic-speaking countries, where Karaism flourished for some time and created a variety of controversial issues based on a new, more literal interpretation of the Bible.

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Prayer During The Period Of The Geonim

Brief History Of The Karaite Movement-2

Anan ben David was often quoted by his followers as having said: "Make a thorough search of the Torah and do not rely on my opinion." The Karaites, then, rejecting talmudic-traditional authority and basing themselves on individual interpretation of the biblical teachings, frequently attacked rabbinic methods of interpretation and thus compelled great scholars like Rav Saadyah Gaon and Moses Maimonides to devote more time to the study of the Bible according to its literal sense (*peshat*). The Karaite writers, like Yefet ben Ali and Salmon ben Yeruham of the tenth century, considered themselves as the intellectuals (*maskilim*) of the time and used their Bible commentaries, each according to his style, to ridicule what they termed Rabbanite superstitions and misinterpretations.

Writing in his Arabic commentary on Isaiah, Yefet ben Ali digresses as follows: "This section refers to the people of the Diaspora and to the best among them as well. They are at present divided into four classes: 1) the exilarchs who pretend to be the possessors of knowledge; 2) the common people who neither desire wisdom nor think about it; they know no more about religion than to go to the synagogues from Sabbath to Sabbath and to say *Amen* and *Shema Yisrael*; 3) the studious among the common people, whom the exilarchs teach the nonsense of the Talmud, and sorcery, instead of what might profit them; 4) the *maskilim* (Karaite teachers) who, endowed with the knowledge of the Torah, are generous with the dissemination of their wisdom, in return for which they accept no recompense."

The Karaites failed to realize that the talmudic-traditional teachings stemmed from the need of adjusting Jewish living to changing conditions. Their watchword "back to the Bible" came to be purely a theoretical one, after all, when they developed a tradition of their own and called it "yoke of heritage" (*סבל הירושה*). In the course of time, the Karaites held as binding the doctrines and the usages which were regarded as obligatory by their community (*edah, kibbutz*), even though these could not be traced directly to the Bible.

Originally, the Karaites were known as Ananites, from the name of their founder Anan of Baghdad, Babylonia. In his *Book of Precepts* (*Sefer ha-Mitzvoth*), Anan extended the idea of forbidden work on Sabbath by making it unlawful, for example, to light on a Friday a candle that would keep burning on Sabbath eve. His adherents were therefore told to sit in darkness on Friday nights. He forbade them to leave their homes on the Sabbath, except to attend congregational services of their own.

According to Anan, the Jews of the Diaspora were forbidden to eat meat, since such food depended on the existence of a Temple and a sacrificial system. A strain of gloom pervaded Anan's injunctions; bad results followed when he had discarded the traditional prayers in use, substituting for them the recitation of isolated psalms and biblical verses newly put together.