



Service / Avodah

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The fifth blessing in the Shabbat amidah is known as the עֲבֹדָה / **avodah** blessing. This Hebrew word implies service, work, and prayer. The related Hebrew word עֶבֶד / 'eved can mean both "servant" and "slave" – two English terms with very distinct valances that their shared Hebrew seems to blur. Is service the same as serving or servitude? What do we serve? Who or Whom do we serve? How do we serve? Ancient temple sacrifice was known as *avodah*; so now is the holy work we call *avodah she-ba-lev*, the "service of the heart." Is service the same as prayer? Is all work a form of service? How do we (want to) serve today? These questions, and others, animate our collective offering on the theme of *avodah*. We hope that our offering serves to open up your deep questions, too.

The Avodah Blessing

רָצָה, יְהו"ה אֱלֹהֵינוּ, בְּעַמְּךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל, וְלִתְפִלָּתָם שְׁעָה,
וְהָשִׁב אֶת הָעֲבוּדָה לְדָבִיר בֵּיתְךָ,
וְאֲשִׁי יִשְׂרָאֵל, וְתִפְּלָתָם מִהֲרָה בְּאַהֲבָה תִּקְבַּל בְּרָצוֹן,
וְתִהְיֶה לְרָצוֹן תָּמִיד עֲבוּדַת יִשְׂרָאֵל עִמָּךְ.
וְתַחֲזִינָה עֵינֵינוּ בְּשׁוּבְךָ לְצִיּוֹן בְּרַחֲמִים.
בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהו"ה, הַמְּחַזֵּר שְׂכִינְתּוֹ לְצִיּוֹן.

R'tzeih, יהו"ה Eloheinu, b'amkha Yisrael, v'lit'filatam sh'eih,
v'hasheiv et ha-avodah lidvir beitekha,
vishei Yisrael, ut'filatam m'heirah b'ahavah t'kabeil b'ratzon,
ut'hi l'ratzon tamid avodat Yisrael amekha.
V'tehezzenah eineinu b'shuv'kha l'Tziyon b'rahmamim.
Barukh atah, יהו"ה, hamachazir Sh'khinato l'Tziyon.

Accept, יהו"ה our God, the prayers of Your people Israel;
find favor in us and accept our prayers / service in love.
May our prayers / service always ascend to You in love.
And help our eyes to behold Your return to Zion with compassion.
Blessed are You, יהו"ה, whose Presence returns always to Zion.

Seek, Sing...Serve



Joanne Fink



I serve today

I serve today by turning off the news.
I serve by refusing to blame everyone or anyone.
I serve by re-training myself not to check
to find out what terrible thing has happened
in the last fifteen minutes. I serve by affirming
it's okay to feel joy even in times like these.
By taking teenagers to the nursing home
and afterward praising the adolescent boy
who answered the repeated questions kindly
as though each time were the first.
I serve by admitting I don't have the answers.
By promising I'm here for what you need
and meaning it. By reminding us to focus
on the horizon, the fixed point, our hope for better
that we may not live to reach. And that's okay.
Judaism was here long before we were.
Someday our childrens' childrens' children
might cross the border into promise –
into lions lying down with lambs, into vines
and fig trees and enough water to grow them,
and no one ever again will take our rights away,
no one ever again will make us afraid.

R. Rachel Barenblat



Accept My Prayers

Ruach Ha Olam,
Davening Avodah,
Accept my prayers
For work, worship, and service.

It is work
Each time we gather
To find meaning in liturgy and
The old official words
Of patriarchy and violence,
Slavery and war—
So I rewrite in my head
To tell the stories I hear underneath,
Stories of theological doubt
And social obligation.

It is worship
But I hate that word.
I don't worship man-god kings,
It's absurd.
I don't worship anything since The Beatles
broke up
(I'm that old).
Is this a cult?
I enjoy doubt
Yet I am in awe of the unknowable Whole.
I want to absorb and be absorbed.

It is service
To others
That perhaps is the answer to the fear
And the struggles
Of survival and freedom
Of peoplehood and gender.
I offer talk, comfort, questions
To those who offer their bodies
And their time.
It will have to do, for now.

Ruach HaOlam, accept my prayers for
My work, my worship, my service
With meaning and doubt and struggle
And love.

Amen.

Trisha Arlin

Avodah - עבודה

מה־תִּצַּעַק אֵלַי דָּבַר אֶל־בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל וְיָסֵעוּ...

Mah titzak aylie dabayr el b'nai Yisrael v'eesaru

The Holy One said to Moses,

“Why pray to Me?

Tell the children of Israel,

“go forward!”

Heschel marched with King and said

“I felt my legs were praying.”

He too learned what Moses learned –

Legs that pray are words that work.

It's how we serve when at our best.

Or else we toil enslaved by fear –

our prayers are weighted down.

As for me I choose my words

in steps I take toward You I'll come.

And as I pray this Avodah

may it be in joy I serve

עֲבָדוּ אֶת יְהוָה בְּשִׂמְחָה

l'vdu et Hashem b'simcha

serving G-d in joy.

Not a slave to grief or fear

this time I walk my song –

each step a note toward You.

R. David Zaslow

Note: the word עבודה in Hebrew has the multiple meanings of service, work, prayer, and slave. The Holy One's words to Moses are from Exodus 14:15. The Psalmist's instruction to serve in joy is from Psalm 100:2.



In Your House

In Your house,
I try to walk carefully
Among the plants and the especially the trees,
Among the animals and the fossils,
The invisible movements of mountains and molecules,
The smells of thyme and sand dunes,
And the tastes of olives and grain.

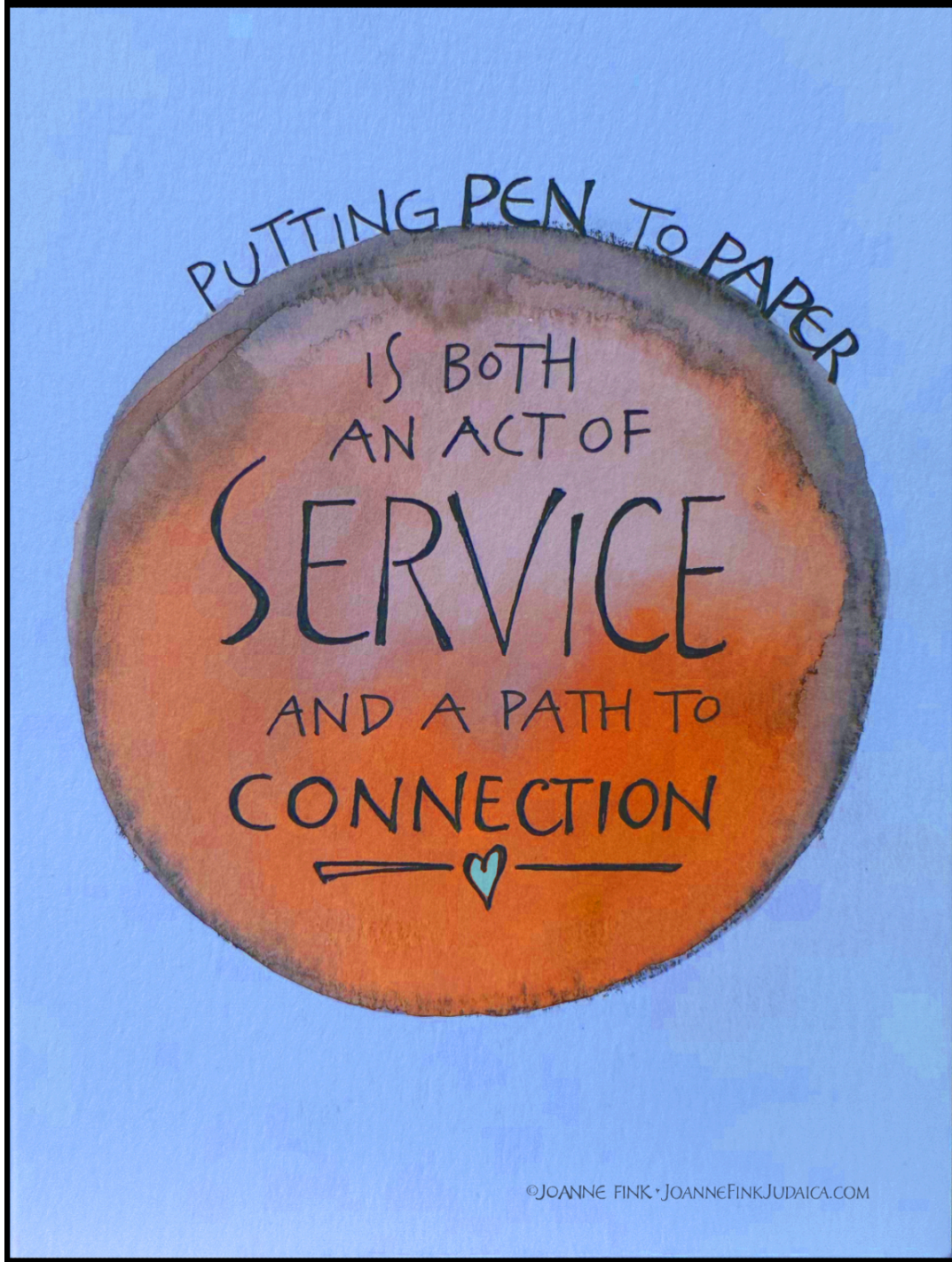
In your house, I try to bless,
Whomever I encounter,
I am trying to listen to the myriad of messages
Brought to me as my days increase,
As I live in this palace
You gifted to me.

I feel shy and humbled,
Often touched by despair,
As I try to discern,
Where to walk,
What to say,
What to buy,
And how to travel my roads.

I pray that you may see my efforts,
Some of which I am sure are misplaced,
To live my life rightfully and for the right purpose,
Breathing in,
Breathing out,
An everlasting effort,
To walk with care in Your house.

Rabbi Sonja K. Pilz, PhD

Connection



Joanne Fink

Return

וְתִזְכֶּנָּה עֵינֵינוּ בְּשׁוּבָךָ לְצִיּוֹן בְּרַחֲמִים.

V'tehezenah eineinu b'shuv'kha l'Tziyon b'rah_hamim.

And help our eyes to behold Your return to Zion with compassion.

Near the end of my first week-long retreat
of study and meditation, drunk on prayer
and feeling little sparkles on my skin
every place tefillin might someday go
I said, "It's good to be on speaking terms
with You again. I wish I didn't have
to leave." I meant on Sunday,
when I would trudge to my dusty car
and return to the real world. And You said
you're not leaving Me. I was always here.
Or at least that's what I heard, standing
suddenly stock-still in an August meadow
of cornflowers and Queen Anne's lace.
I held my tallit tight around me
like an embrace and I wept. Your Presence
was always here, but I -- I hadn't known.
We plead to see Your return to Zion; we *feel*
like You're gone, but You're always there.
And You're always here, even on days
when the world feels upside-down and broken.
When we take care of each other
we make Your Presence real, each of us
made in Your image when we let our light shine.
Help me serve by remembering how to reveal
the You that is always in this place
wherever we are.

R. Rachel Barenblat

עֲבָדֵי ה', עֶבֶד-יְהוָה – Ovadiah, Slave of G'd

Our prophet Ovadiah's
mother named him
"Slave of G'd"¹
so that as he grew to serve
he'd not be a slave to fear.

"You gotta serve somebody"
our prophet Dylan sings,
"You're gonna
have to serve somebody.
Well, it may be the Devil
or it may be the Lord
But you're gonna
have to serve somebody."

Moses, Jesus, Rumi too –
were all called slaves of G'd
to teach us that when
called to serve
it better be to G'd.
As David sings,
"I'd rather be a slave to G'd
than a free man on my own."

R. David Zaslow

¹ The Hebrew name עבדיה / Ovadiah can be translated both as "servant of God" and as "slave of God." This prayer-poem sits at the intersection of those two translations. What does it mean to be an 'eved?



Bless The Workers

Bless us, the workers:
Those who grow food,
Those who cook,
Those who clean,
Those who protect,
Those who teach,
Those who heal,
Those who raise children,
Those who organize,
Those who fix the plumbing,
Those who make art,
Those who build,
Those who distribute goods,
Those who entertain,
Those who administer,
And those who put themselves in danger
whether out of choice or out of necessity.

Bless us, the workers:
May we be paid fairly for our labor,
May we find pleasure in our work,
May we be appreciated for our sacrifices,
May our we receive full credit for our contributions,
May we have room to recover ourselves,
May we have choices throughout our lives,
May we not be sickened or injured in our jobs,
May we be free from sexual harassment,
May we have laughter and pleasure every day,
May we organize ourselves successfully in unions,
May we have time for spiritual exploration,
May we defy racist discrimination,
May we have responsible and ethical leaders,
May we have dignity in our employment
And may we all get enough of what we need,
whatever that looks like for each one of us.
Amen

Trisha Arlin

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- 2 - [All This Power / Gevurot](#)
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- 4 - [This Day / Kedushat HaYom](#)

About Us



Co-created by members of Bayit's Liturgical Arts Working Group, 2024.

At Bayit, we empower Jewish community by developing innovative tools and resources that foster spiritual connection, education, and growth. Together our visionary teams of clergy, liturgists, artists, game designers, and educators create, test, refine, and share tools for a Jewish future always under construction.

Find our collaborations here: [Liturgical Arts Working Group](#)

And our bios here: [Builder Biographies](#)