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Introduction

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PRAYER AND OTHERNESS

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Whom do we address when we pray? What can we say about the "other" who is addressed? What justifies us in speaking at all? In what ways does the act of prayer implicate us in relations to other human beings? To ourselves? These and related questions will be the focus of this issue of the *Journal of Textual Reasoning*, which seeks to shed light on the theme of "Prayer and Otherness."

The issue opens with an essay of mine, which argues that the use of the word 'you' in rabbinic prayer differs significantly from its everyday use. Applying the linguistic concept of deixis the way in which certain words (e.g. 'him,' 'there,' 'now') derive their meaning and referent from the context in which they are uttered I explore the implications of uttering 'you' when, as it were, "no one is there." These odd circumstances of address lead to further complexities: How does the 'you' of prayer affect the meaning of the names and predicates that are attached to it? How and why does the 'you' of prayer demand existential concentration on the part of its speaker? Can the uttering of the 'you' of prayer be an ethicizing practice?

The issue's subsequent pieces take up and expand upon these themes, generating a wide range of perspectives. Adam Zachary Newton's essay, for instance, employs textual-historical, linguistic- grammatical, and

phenomenological methods to extend the analysis of the use of second-person address in rabbinic prayer. Seeking to examine the question "how do we pray?" he suggests that the act of prayer, ostensibly addressed to God, also points implicitly points to our human neighbor and to the community of prayer. In this way, prayer serves to break down the typical divisions among first-, second-, and third- persons, thereby forging a connection to the ethical Other. Steven Kepnes also provides insights into the relation between prayer, self, and community, as he narrates Hermann Cohen's account of the liturgical formation of the moral individual. Situating the essential existence of the "I" within a community of worship with a shared language, practice, and theology, Kepnes argues that Cohen provides resources for the philosophical recovery of the self as subject.

Other essays link the theme of "Prayer and Otherness" to the spheres of Jewish mysticism, empirical linguistics, and American politics. Shaul Magid provides a commentary on the Vilna Gaon's erotically-imaged interpretation of the prelude to the Amidah, "*Adonai*, open my mouth, and my mouth will declare your blessing." By looking at questions of speech, silence, and the identity of the one who prays, he is able to bring a seventeenth-century commentary on rabbinic liturgy into dialogue with contemporary philosophical investigations of prayer. Michael Dickey's piece draws on his training as an academic linguist, as he examines the ways in which my essay both accords with and departs from the treatment of deixis in traditional linguistics. He also extends the conversation with his use of empirical data, as he compares the grammatical forms used to address God in different languages from around the world. Claire Katz broadens the typical connotation of "prayer" by drawing a comparison between Jewish liturgy and the U.S. Pledge of Allegiance. After pointing to the ethical and political dangers that the Pledge may produce, she suggests that Jewish prayer contains helpful resources for guarding against the temptations of unthinkingness and the exclusion of "others."

William Plevan and Randi Rashkover provide strong counterpoints to my essay's treatment of the role of predicates and proper names in prayer. Drawing upon Martin Buber, Plevan presents an argument that highlights the importance of the original meaning of the Tetragrammaton, YHVH. In

this account, the rabbinic liturgical practice of pronouncing the specific and particular divine name simply as *adonai*, lord, has the effect of depersonalizing the addressee and thereby impeding the speaker's awareness of divine presence. Likewise, Rashkover criticizes any approach that conceives of the 'you' of prayer as "wholly other." Instead, she emphasizes the indispensability of explicit predicates (for example, "the one who brought you out of the land of Egypt") that serve to identify the prayer's 'you' and prevent it from becoming a semantically empty placeholder. Finally, Peter Ochs' essay points to ways in which my initial essay lends itself to multiple and seemingly contradictory readings. He ventures, in turn, postmodern, postliberal, and pragmatic readings of my essay, arguing that my account of the odd deixis of prayer's 'you' can give rise to both radical apophasis and radical cataphasis. This multiplicity, he suggests, may be intimately connected with the very project of theoretical reflection on the act of prayer.

The structure of the issue as a whole is as follows: after the lead essay, there is a series of six essays that were generated in response to my own. Next, we have a pair of independent essays that also address the issue's principal questions and motifs. Finally, as an afterword, I present some synthesizing reflections on the ways in which the various contributions have deepened and broadened the concept of "Prayer and Otherness." Taken together, the diversity of the pieces present a rich and challenging mosaic of thought that highlights the conceptual complexity inherent in the apparently simple act of prayerful address.