

Prayer for the Country A Short History

I became interested in the history of the prayer for the country for several reasons:

a copy of the Koren Siddur in the Chapel includes a prayer for the Prime Minister of Canada (it is a Canadian edition), and it is a different prayer from the one we recite;

David Link has pre-World War I siddurim with prayers for various European monarchs, with essentially the same prayer as in the Koren;

our Sim Shalom siddur has prayers for "the country" (unspecified) and for Israel, mentions no names;

my grandfather's machzor, printed in Warsaw with Yiddish commentaries, doesn't mention any prayer of this sort.

How old is the tradition of a prayer for the rulers, the government, or the country?

What form has the prayer taken?

How has it evolved over the centuries?

I found several interesting articles to help answer these questions. They are by:

Rabbi David Golinkin, of the Schechter Institute in Jerusalem;

Rabbi Barry Schwartz, who wrote his dissertation at Hebrew Union College on this topic;

Prof. Jonathan Sarna of Brandeis, who focused on the prayer in America;

Prof. David Roskies of JTS, whose family published Jewish books and had to deal with praying for governments that were changing during World War I and the Russian Revolution.

We all know the lines from Fiddler on the Roof:

"Rabbi, is there a proper blessing for the Tsar?"

Of course! May God bless and keep the Tsar -- far away from us."

The earliest mention of such a prayer is in Jeremiah (29:4-7), during the Babylonian exile.

Jeremiah calls on the people to pray for the welfare of Babylon, since if the city prospers so will

the Jewish exiles. This is dated to 594 BCE. After the Jews returned from exile, under the rule of Darius, Ezra (6:6-10) writes that the people were permitted to rebuild the Temple and should pray for the life of the king and his sons.

There are similar references in I Maccabees (7:33) and in the Dead Sea Scrolls, where the prayer is for a Jewish king, and later in Josephus and the Mishna, where the king is the Roman emperor. In the Middle Ages, the Kol Bo (a 14th-century compilation of ritual and laws, probably from Provence) says that in some places on Shabbat after the Haftarah reading, they would bless the king and the congregation.

The text was apparently not fixed at first, but starting in the 15th century one particular text became popular. It begins with the words “*HaNoten Teshua la-m'lakhim u-memshala la-n'sikhim*” — He who gives salvation to kings and dominion to princes. The earliest known appearance of this prayer was in Spain, in Aragon. In translation, it begins “He who gives salvation to kings and dominion to princes” and continues to say “may He strengthen, bless, and uplift higher and higher our Lord King Don Ferando ... and may He incline his heart to do good to Israel and to speak good of them wherever they are, and let us say Amen.” Don Ferando is apparently King Ferdinand of Aragon, who married Queen Isabella of Castile, and with her completed the reconquest of Spain from the Muslims, expelled the Jews, and financed Columbus’s voyage, all in 1492.

A siddur manuscript that dates to around 1565 contains the *HaNoten Teshua* prayer with the name of the Ottoman sultan written in, the way names are written into a ketubah today. This suggests that the text was already well-known and could be recited for any ruler. The sultan in this case may be Selim II, one of whose foreign policy advisors was Yosef Nasi, a Portuguese Jew who settled in Constantinople (perhaps called Istanbul by then).

Gutenberg had invented moveable type for printing around 1450, and this helped spread *HaNoten Teshua* throughout Europe and to the Near East (Turkey and Yemen), to become the predominant

prayer for the government. It was apparently carried along Sephardic trade routes, especially after the expulsion from Spain and later Portugal.

In 1655, *HaNoten Teshua* was translated into English as part of an effort to allow Jews back into England. They were expelled in 1290 and were allowed to return in 1657 by Oliver Cromwell.

In 1760, Cong. Shearith Israel (the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue) in New York, the oldest Jewish congregation in what is now the United States, published an English translation naming King George II, members of the royal family, and New York officials. In services, the prayer was recited in Hebrew and the names were read out in Portuguese (which few congregants understood by that time).

On July 11, 1776 A letter was circulated calling for the elimination of prayers for the royal family. In 1782, at the dedication of a synagogue in Philadelphia, George Washington's name was substituted for the king. Later on, the emphasis would be on the office, so the blessing would be for the President without mentioning him by name.

In the early 1800's, the blessings at Shearith Israel were for the President and Vice President, the Senate and House, and New York officials. But the Senate and House were excluded when Congress was in recess, again as a way of emphasizing the office rather than the individuals.

Before the Revolution, congregants stood for *HaNoten Teshua* while they blessed the king and royal family. After the Revolution the congregation sat during the prayer, to symbolize that they were not subservient to the President.

American Jews did not rush to revise the Hebrew text of *HaNoten Teshua* to be more democratic and universal in nature, although French Jews did. But starting in 1830, some American siddurim (Reform and some Orthodox) began replacing *HaNoten Teshua* with prayers that eliminated obsequious or deferential references to government leaders and instead stressed their need for divine guidance. The Conservative prayer in Sim Shalom and in the old Silverman siddur first

appeared in 1927 and is due to Louis Ginzberg (no relation to Alix!). The Orthodox Birnbaum siddur kept *HaNoten Teshua* with some modification. Some Orthodox siddurim dropped the prayer entirely, e.g., the ArtScroll siddur, in the place where the prayer would appear, just says that in some congregations the hazzan recites a prayer for “the government”.

By the way, the prayer for the State of Israel dates to 1948, shortly after the establishment of the state in May. It was drafted by the Sephardic and Ashkenazic Chief Rabbis, revised by the writer Shai Agnon, and published in September 1948. Agnon went on to win the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1966 (not for this prayer!). Sim Shalom contains the first paragraph of the original prayer.

The attached handout shows a few examples of how *HaNoten Teshua* appeared:

- 1854, Prague: after the closing blessings for the Haftarah and (if Shabbat) before *yekum purkan* and returning the Torah to the ark, it says to read the prayers for the Kaiser’s family that are at the end of the volume (this was convenient for reprinting with different names):

Franz Joseph I of Emperor of Austria and King of Hungary, his wife, uncle (his predecessor), and aunt. Franz Joseph died in 1916, during World War I.

- 15th century, Spain: the text of the blessing that names Ferdinand of Aragon
- 1909, Vilna (in the Russian Empire at the time): it appears after the Haftarah and (if Shabbat) after *yekum purkan*, in the main text rather than at the end. The prayer is for tsar (ha-Keysar) Nikolai Aleksandrovich and his wife, mother, and son. He was the tsar at the time of the 1917 Russian Revolution.

My grandfather’s machzor is undated, but probably from the 1920’s or 1930’s. It says it’s a Vilna edition, but also says it was published and printed in Warsaw — both cities were Polish between the wars. The monarchs were gone by then and there is no mention of a prayer for the government.

Shabbat shalom!

Machzor for Pesach 1854 Prague

תפלה בעד שלום המלך
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 תפלה בעד שלום המלך
 כנפיד תסתורם מקל-צרה ונגון. וארץ ימים תשביעם.
 מלא כל-משאלותיהם לטובה. וארשת שפתותיהם בל-
 המנע סלה:
 ברכת שמים מעל תשפיע ותעלה לראש אדונינו
 הקיסר פֶּרְדִּינַאנד הטוב,
 ותן ברכה גם להמלכה הטעטירה
 מַאֲרִיא אַנְנָא קַאֲרֹלִינָא
 והאר פגיה על כל-צאצאי גנע נחמד מטע האבסבורג.
 שלח עזרה מקנש על כל-הסנגים והפקידים הטתעוררים
 להחזיק טובת המדינה הנקרה.
 הרעיפו שמים ברכות מטעל עלינו ועל כל-יושבי
 אסטערייך. והארין תפלה ישע וכל-נתיבותיה שלום.
 וכו' לעיון גואל וכן יהי רצון ונאמר אמן:
 Wohnung, dieg' Sie unter dem Schatten Deiner Flügel vor jedem
 Nebel und vor allen Leiden; erfreue Sie durch ein hebes und glück-
 liches Alter, laß alle Ihre heilsamen Wünsche in Erfüllung gehen,
 und verlege nie, was Ihre Lippen regen!
 Segne und erhalte Se. glorieiche Majestät
Kaiser Ferdinand den Gütigen,
 und die erlauchte Kaiserin
Maria Anna Karolina,
 und laß Dein Antlitz leuchten über alle Zweige des glorieichen Kaiser-
 stammes Habsburg.
 Verleihe auch Deinen heiligen Befehl den hohen Ministern
 und allen Staatsbeamten zum Wohl des theuern Vaterlandes.
 Träufelt, ihr Himmel! euren Segen über uns und über alle Be-
 wohner dieses Kaiserthums! Seinem Vorden entseime Wohlstand, und
 das ganze Reich beglücke Frieden. — Amen!

תפלה
 בעד שלום המלך והמלכה ירה.
 שלום משפחתו. ויעזרו. ושלום ארצות ממשלתו.
 הנותן תשועה למלכים וממשלה לנסיכים. מלכותו
 מלכות קל-עולמים. הפועה את-דוד עבדו מחרב רעה.
 הנותן בים ים ויבנה. הוא יקרה וישמור
 וינצור ויעזור וירומם ויגדל וינשא למעלה את-אדונינו
 פֶּרְאֲנִץ יֹאזֶעֶף הַרְאִשׁוֹן
 קיסר מלכות אסטערייך ירום הודו!
 ותנבחה המפוארה המלכה
 עֲלִיזָאבֶטָה אַמַּלִיעַ אֵיִיגֶעֶנִיעַ
 ירום הודו!
 מלך מלכי המלכים. השקפה עליהם טמעון קדשך. בצל

Gebet
 für das Wohl
 für das Wohl
 Sr. Maj. des Kaisers, Ihrer Maj. der Kaiserin, des ganzen
 Kaiserhauses, der Behörden und des Vaterlandes.
 Herr des Weltalls! der Du den Königen Sieg, den Fürsten
 Herrschaft verleihst; Du, dessen Reich aller Welten Reich ist, der Du
 Deinen Knecht David von dem Schwerte des Verderbens errettet hast;
 der Du durch das Meer einen Weg, einen Pfad durch reizende Ströme
 gebahnt hast, o segne unsern erhabenen Kaiser
Franz Joseph den Ersten!
 und Seine erlauchte Gemahlin, die erhabene Kaiserin
Elisabeth Amalie Eugenie.
 König aller Könige! Schau' herab auf Sie von Deiner heiligen

Kaiser Ferdinand the Good

הוא היה אחראי על גירוש יהודי ספרד בשנת 1492. התפילה נתחברה אפוא כנראה בין
 1479 ל-1492.
 לראשונה מצאתי את 'הנותן תשועה' במחזור אראגון הספרדי מהמאה ה-15. כאן
 התפילה היא לפני הקטע "על הכל" (= "הקול" 16), כלומר, לפני קריאת התורה. אף
 בתפילה זו נזכר שם המלך: דון פירננדו. נראה שהכוונה לאותו פרנאנדו ה-5, כלומר:
 אף תפילה זו נתחברה כנראה בין 1479 ל-1492. אם זהו הנוסח הראשון של 'הנותן
 תשועה', הרי שהמלך הראשון שזכה שיתפללו היהודים לשלומו תפילה 'הנותן תשועה'
 הוא זה שהיה אחראי לגירוש גדול של יהודים. להלן נוסח התפילה כפי שהוא
 במחזור זה:

15th century Spain
 Don Fernando
 = King Ferdinand

הנותן תשועה למלכים ומלכותו כל העולמים ברוך שם כבוד מלכותו
 לעולם ועד הוא יאמץ ויברך וינשא וירומם למעלה למעלה אדונינו המלך דון
 פֶּרְנַנְדוֹ, מלך מלכי המלכים ברחמיו יברכהו ויגדלהו וינשאהו וישמרהו מכל
 צער ונזק אין שטן ואין פגע רע, מלך מלכי המלכים יפדה נפשו ממות ובמלחמה
 מידי חרב, ככתוב (איוב ה' כ) ברעב פדך ממות ובמלחמה מידי חרב, ויטה לבו
 לעשות טוב לישראל ולדבר אלהם טובות בכל מקום שהם וכן יהי רצון ונאמר
 אמן.

1909 Vilna
 Machzor for Yom Kippur
 Tsar Nikolai Aleksandrovich
 Aleksandra Feodorovna
 Maria Feodorovna
 Aleksei Nikolaevich

תפלה בעד שלום הקיסר ירה עם שלום משפחתו הרבה
 הנותן תשועה למלכים וממשלה לנסיכים. מלכותו מלכות קל-עולמים. הפועה את-דוד עבדו
 מחרב רעה. הנותן בים ים ויבנה. הוא יקרה וישמור ויעזור וינצור ויעזור וירומם
 ויגדל וינשא למעלה את-אדונינו הקיסר נִיקֹאֲלַי אֵלֶכְסַנְדֵּרֶאֲוִיטְשׁ, עם אשתו
 הקיסרית הקבורה. אֵלֶכְסַנְדֵּרָא פֶּעֶאָדֶאֲרֹאֲוִנָא, וגם אמו הקיסרית הקבורה
 מַאֲרִיא פֶּעֶאָדֶאֲרֹאֲוִנָא, ואח יריש הארץ, אֵלֶכְסַנְדֵּרֶאֲוִיטְשׁ, ואח קד בית
 טלכטו קדם, ירום הודם. מלך מלכי המלכים, ברחמיו וחסדו וישקרהו, ויגדל ארץ ויגון נקמ
 וינבחה. ויגדל וינשא וירומם ויגדל וינשא למעלה את-אדונינו הקיסר ונאמר אמן.