

“THE BREATH OF LIFE”

We have lost the art of prayer. Prayer is not only something organized and routinized, but spontaneous, uncalculated, constant. One midrash, Perek Shirah, depicts the entire world singing out to God, beginning with the heavens and the earth, moving on to the animals, birds, plants -- all things, animate and inanimate.

The Hebrew writer Micah Joseph Berdechevski wrote: "It is not you alone, or we, or those others who pray; all things pray, all things pour forth their souls. The heavens pray, the earth prays, every creature and every living thing prays. In all life, there is longing. Creation itself is but a longing, a kind of prayer to the almighty."

In the Bible, as the scholar Moshe Greenberg has shown, prayers are not offered at set times, but rather outbursts of need and closeness. Greenberg invites us to consider that just as a child's question can strip away the pretence of her elders, so the Bible reminds us that beneath the grand achievements of civilization stands "the human being, a frail needy creature whose happiness still depends on discovering what it is, and why -- without having had any say in the matter -- it has been called into being." It is prayer, as Greenberg teaches, as our sages knew, that connects us to our Source, to the chorus of the world and to the deep, subtle currents in our own souls.