

Two “Yehi Ratzon” Prayers

Repetition—or Two Different Ways of Facing the Day?

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Preamble: The Question

At first reading, the two *Yehi Ratzon* passages appearing back to back in the morning prayers seem almost repetitive. Both ask for protection from sin, evil influences, harmful people, and the evil inclination. Why are two such similar prayers needed? What is the recurring theme in both—and what is the significance not only of their repetition, but, importantly, of their differences?

A closer reading shows that the repetition is real, but it is not empty. The two passages look at the same human problem from different directions. The first asks for help in becoming the right kind of person. The second asks for protection once that person enters the world.

The Common Concern

Both prayers recognize the same basic truth: our moral direction is vulnerable.

It can be affected by what arises within us, by the people we choose as companions, and by people or circumstances we did not choose. Good intentions alone may not be enough to carry us safely through the day.

Three dangers appear in both prayers:

- the evil inclination;
- a bad person;
- a bad companion.

This repeated trio identifies three principal sources of moral danger: something within me, someone beside me, and someone or something confronting me from outside.

But this does not mean that the first prayer is only about internal dangers and the second only about external ones. Both cross that boundary. That may be one of their most important messages: the boundary between inner and outer influence is not nearly as clear as we like to believe.

The First Prayer: Form Me

The first passage begins:

“May it be Your will... that You accustom me to Your Torah and attach me to Your commandments...”

Its main direction is constructive. It asks God to help build a certain kind of person:

- accustom me to Torah;

- attach me to the commandments;
- keep me from sin and temptation;
- subdue my inclination;
- distance me from bad people;
- connect me with a good inclination and a good companion;
- grant me favor, kindness, and compassion.

The important verbs are *accustom*, *attach*, *subdue*, *distance*, and *connect*. These are not merely requests for rescue. They describe a process of moral formation.

Even “accustom me to Your Torah” is significant. The prayer does not ask only that I understand Torah or admire it. It asks that Torah become habitual—a regular part of how I think, choose, and act.

The first prayer therefore asks: **Help me become properly prepared for the day.**

The Second Prayer: Protect Me

The second passage begins:

“May it be Your will... that You save me today and every day...”

It then presents a broad inventory of dangers:

- brazen people and brazenness;
- an evil person;
- a harmful occurrence;
- the evil inclination;
- a bad companion;
- a bad neighbor;
- destructive spiritual forces;
- harsh judgment;
- a hostile opponent.

Here the central verb is different: *save me*.

The prayer assumes that even a morally prepared person remains exposed. We may try to choose good companions, but we cannot choose every neighbor. We may try to control our conduct, but we cannot control every encounter, accident, accusation, or opponent.

The second prayer therefore asks: **Once I enter the world, protect me from what I may not be able to manage alone.**

The Difference Between Control and Rescue

The treatment of the evil inclination illustrates the difference especially clearly.

In the first prayer, we ask God to subdue the inclination and make it serve a higher purpose.

This is a request for discipline and control.

In the second, we ask to be saved from the evil inclination. This is a request for rescue when discipline may fail.

The two requests are not contradictory. They recognize two levels of human reality. We are responsible for training and controlling ourselves, but we are also honest enough to admit that control is never absolute.

The same distinction applies to bad people and bad companions. The first prayer asks to be distanced from them and joined with good people. It concerns the direction of one's life and the relationships one forms. The second asks to be saved from them when they are already present and cannot simply be avoided.

The Curious Pair: Brazen People and Brazenness

The second prayer asks for protection from both *azei panim*—brazen or arrogant people—and *azut panim*—brazenness or arrogance itself.

The wording moves quietly from the person to the quality.

A brazen person is an external danger. Brazenness, however, is not confined to someone else. It is also a human characteristic that can enter our own conduct.

This small distinction reinforces the shared theme of both prayers: evil cannot be divided neatly into “what is inside me” and “what is outside me.” The people around us affect our character, and our own weaknesses influence the people and situations toward which we are drawn.

Why Repeat the Same Dangers?

If the first prayer has already mentioned the evil inclination, the bad person, and the bad companion, why name them again?

Because moral preparation does not eliminate moral danger.

The first prayer expresses intention: guide my development, my choices, and my relationships. The second expresses humility: after all of that, I may still need protection.

The repetition prevents us from becoming overly confident. It tells us that choosing the right path in the morning does not guarantee that we will remain on it throughout the day. In this sense, the second prayer tests the realism of the first. We may ask to be attached to Torah and good companions, but then the door opens and the actual world enters.

Two Independent Prayers Brought Together

The similarity also has a historical explanation.

The first passage comes from the Talmudic sequence of prayers associated with awakening and preparing for the day. It is connected to the blessing thanking God for removing sleep from our eyes ([Berakhot 60b](#)).

The second was originally a personal supplication recited by Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi after his regular prayer. It appears separately in the Talmud ([Berakhot 16b](#)).

They were therefore not originally composed as two coordinated sections. The prayer book preserved both traditions rather than merging them or removing their overlapping language.

Their placement together, however, gives the two ancient prayers a new relationship. Whether or not that contrast was consciously designed, the first now reads naturally as preparation and the second as protection.

There is even a small grammatical indication of the difference. The first commonly begins *Vih ratzon*—“**And** may it be Your will”—because it continues the preceding morning blessing. The second begins *Yehi ratzon*—“May it be Your will”—as a new, independent appeal. One grows out of awakening. The other stands as a direct request for protection.

A Complete Morning Position

Read together, the two prayers present a remarkably complete understanding of personal responsibility.

I must form good habits, but habits may be tested.

I must control my inclination, but I must recognize that control may fail.

I must choose good companions, but I cannot choose every person I encounter.

I must take responsibility for my conduct, but I must also acknowledge circumstances beyond my control.

The prayers therefore avoid two opposite mistakes. They do not allow us to blame everything on the world around us, because the first prayer directs attention toward our own character and choices. But they also do not pretend that everything depends on individual willpower, because the second recognizes the power of other people, harmful circumstances, and forces we cannot fully control.

Prepare Me—and Protect Me

The recurring theme of both prayers is the daily struggle to preserve one’s moral direction. Their repetition emphasizes the seriousness and persistence of that struggle. Their differences show its two dimensions.

The first prayer says:

Help me become the person I should be.

The second says:

Now protect that person as I enter the world.

Good intentions are necessary, but they are not sufficient. We ask first for the ability to choose the right path—and then for protection against everything, within us and around us, that may push us off it.