



## Avodah Lesson 3

### Amidah Section 1: *B'rachot* of Praise

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#### INTRODUCTION

This lesson helps students take a deeper look at the themes of the three blessings of praise in the opening section of the *Amidah: Avot v'imahot, G'vurot, and K'dushah*. Students will rotate through stations that enable them to personalize the themes. Students will also have an opportunity to explore liturgical changes made by the Reform Movement that reflect the movement's views on egalitarianism and the messianic age.

The first three blessings in the *Amidah*, the blessings of praise, are based on the talmudic quote, "A person should always utter the praises of God before offering one's petitions" (*B'rachot* 32a). These prayers help us to focus on our individual relationships with God by recalling our ancestors and their unique, individual relationships with the Divine (*Avot v'imahot*). Then, by delineating God's power (*G'vurot*) and uniqueness/holiness (*K'dushah*), we bring our focus to our own relationship with God.

The first prayer, *Avot v'imahot* אָבוֹת וְאִמָּהוֹת, reminds us that we are part of a family with a unique, historical relationship with God. That the prayer mentions the individual names of all the matriarchs and patriarchs reminds us that each individual has his or her own distinct relationship with God.

The second prayer, *G'vurot* גְּבוּרוֹת, which means power or strength, delineates all that God does for humanity, showing our respect and awe. This prayer reflects significant theological changes in its Reform version. In traditional versions, God's strength is most boldly manifested in resurrection, so the prayer calls God "the One Who gives life to the dead" (*m'chayeh hameitim* מְחַיֶּה הַמֵּתִים). In a Reform *siddur*, the text reads, "Who gives life to all" (*m'chayeh hakol* מְחַיֶּה הַכֹּל). The Reform Movement has long believed in the coming of a messianic time, rather than an individual messiah, and has rejected the idea of bodily resurrection. (See <http://ccarnet.org/platforms/pittsburgh.html>.) Time and history, however, propel us in different directions, and new prayers reflect this. While the text that students will look at today only addresses God as the Giver of life to all, the new Reform prayer book, *Mishkan T'filah*, scheduled to be published in 2005 by the Central Conference of American Rabbis, includes versions that refer to God as the Giver of life to all and as the One who gives life to the dead. In a personal conversation, Rabbi Jan Katzew describes the new changes this way: "I understand that people are seeking to demonstrate the theological struggle within Reform Judaism to make informed choices, not to be doctrinaire rationalists. The balance of *m'chayeh hakol* and *m'chayeh hameitim* is supposed to represent that balance. There are Reform Jews who believe that God is capable of resurrecting the dead, and *Mishkan T'filah* is trying to express this ambivalence."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Jan Katzew, conversation with author, January 2003.

The third prayer, *K'dushah* קְדוּשָׁה, reminds us that God is holy, which really means set apart. It describes God in distant yet poetic terms, reminding us that while we can strive to be near to God, in truth, we can never be like God.

## ENDURING UNDERSTANDINGS

- *Avodah* is the work we do to find sacred connections to God, community, and self.
- Engaging in the work of *avodah* can bring order, beauty, meaning, and insight to our lives.
- The practice of prayer can help me grow through personal reflection, can increase my connection to the Jewish people, and can strengthen my relationship with God.

## ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

1. How is striving for a connection to God, *avodah*, like work?
2. What can I learn about what it means to be a Jew through the practice of prayer?
3. How can I develop a personal practice of prayer?
4. How can I experience *kavanah* and feel moments of connection to God?
5. How does the practice of prayer keep my relationships with myself, with God, and with the Jewish people in good shape?

## QUESTIONS TO BE ADDRESSED

1. How can understanding the themes of the three blessings of praise help me feel a greater sense of *kavanah* when I pray the *Amidah*?
2. How can these three blessings help me feel a greater sense of connection to God?

## EVIDENCE OF UNDERSTANDING

- Students will analyze and identify themes in the first section of the *Amidah* and make personal connections.
- Students will explore liturgical changes made by the Reform Movement in the *G'vurot* prayer and describe how those changes affect their personal relationship with God.

## LESSON OVERVIEW

- Set Induction (5–10 minutes)
- Station Rotation (30 minutes)
- Looking at Changes in Reform Liturgy (15 minutes)
- Conclusion (5 minutes)

## MATERIALS NEEDED

- Copies of prayers (pages 155–157 or in any *siddur*)
- Student instructions and worksheets for each station (pages 158–163)
- Markers or crayons
- Torah book or *Chumash*
- Dictionary
- *G'vurot*: God's Great Powers (page 164)

## READING RESOURCES FOR TEACHERS

Fields, Harvey J. *B'chol Lvavcha: A Commentary* (rev. ed.), New York: UAHC Press, 2001.

Grishaver, Joel Lurie. *Shema Is for Real Lab Book*. Los Angeles: Torah Aura Productions, 1994.

Hoffman, Lawrence A. *My People's Prayer Book, Volume 2: The Amidah*. Los Angeles: Jewish Lights Publishing, 1998.

Kadden, Barbara Binder, and Bruce Kadden. *Teaching Tefilah*. Denver: A.R.E. Publications, 1994.

Rowe, Debi. *Introduction to Siddur*. Vol. 3. Los Angeles: Torah Aura Productions, 1992.

Strassfeld, Michael. *A Book of Life: Embracing Judaism as a Spiritual Practice*. New York: Schocken Books, 2002.

## LESSON VOCABULARY

אָבוֹת וְאִמּוֹת  
*Avot v'imahot*

The first blessing in the *Amidah*. The name literally means “fathers and mothers,” and refers to the patriarchs and matriarchs of Judaism. The blessing is also known as *Avot*, as the names of the matriarchs were added by the Reform Movement in the 1970s.

גְּבוּרוֹת  
*G'vurot*

The second blessing in the *Amidah*. The name literally means “mighty deeds,” reflecting the theme of the blessing, which lists the many things God is able to do.

קְדוּשָׁה  
*K'dushah*

The third blessing in the *Amidah*. The name literally means “holiness,” and the blessing refers to God's otherworldly presence, beyond our understanding.

resurrection

The return of the dead to life.

## LESSON PLAN

### SET INDUCTION (5–10 MINUTES)

1. Together, brainstorm a list of all the amazing things we know God is capable of doing: making sunsets, creating mountains, healing, etc. (If students question their belief in God, ask them to list those things around them that they think are amazing.)
2. When the brainstorming slows, prompt students by asking them to think about biblical stories, stories of the holidays, or maybe even stories of their own lives, and amazing things God has done for them. Ask: How does looking at this list make you feel?
3. Ask students to raise their hands if anything on the list is something they have seen or experienced from God themselves. Ask: Are you more aware of miracles God performed for our biblical ancestors than for yourselves? Why do you think this is the case?
4. Explain to students that today we will be studying the first section of the *Amidah*, known as the section of praise. Ask them to think back on last week's lesson and note that we begin the *Amidah* with this section because, according to the Talmud, "A person should always utter the praises of God before offering one's petitions" (*Brachot* 32a). Today we will be learning more about the three blessings that make up this section: *Avot v'imahot*, *G'vurot*, and *K'dushah*.

### LEARNING ACTIVITIES

#### Station Rotation (30 minutes)

1. Prior to class, read through and familiarize yourself with the station instructions and worksheets (pages 158–163). At each station, post the instructions clearly and make sure there is space for students to write. It is recommended that instructions be enlarged and posted on poster board with spaces left open so that students can write their responses on the poster board. These posters can be left up for the next two weeks while study of the *Amidah* continues.
2. Set up the stations with the following materials:
  - For the *Avot v'imahot* station: copies of prayers, student worksheet (page 159)
  - For the *G'vurot* station: copies of prayers, markers or crayons (you may also want to have construction paper so that students can draw their super heroes to be posted in the room), student worksheet (page 161)
  - For the *K'dushah* station: copies of prayers, copy of *Torah/Chumash*, dictionary, student worksheet (page 163)

Make sure there are enough copies of the appropriate prayers at each station so that students may each take one, and make sure all students have pencils or pens to write with.

3. Divide the class into three groups who will travel from station to station together on a timed basis, or simply assign students to a station at which to begin, then allow them to move at their own pace. If your class is small, you may simply want to visit the stations together as a class.

4. Have the groups visit each station, following the directions for each. Circulate among the groups and answer any questions students might have. After thirty minutes, bring the class back together and discuss the following questions:
  - Do you agree with the teaching from the Talmud that a person should always praise God before asking for something? Why or why not?
  - Do you think that the blessings of praise—*Avot v'imahot*, *G'vurot*, and *K'dushah*—do a good job of praising God? Is there anything you would personally add that isn't already there?

#### Additional teacher information on *Z'chut Avot* concept in *Avot v'imahot* prayer

- *Z'chut* זְכוּת is translated as merit. When we recall the names of our ancestors in this prayer, we are not only relying on God's unique relationship with them to help us find favor in God's eyes, but we are saying we are part of a people, a family with a unique, shared history.
- "The Jewish tradition teaches that an individual's relationship to God is personal and historic . . . and that Jewish people have a unique relationship which is rooted in the covenant between God and Abraham. In a real sense, God is an old family friend. When we try to use prayer to make a connection with God, our heritage as children of great Jews of previous generations is an important advantage."<sup>2</sup>

### Looking at Changes in Reform Liturgy (15 minutes)

1. Explain to students that our movement, the Reform Movement, has made some changes to the traditional liturgy, based on our evolving understanding of our relationships with God and with each other. Ask if students are aware of any of these changes.
2. Explain that there are two significant changes, one in the *Avot v'imahot* and one in the *G'vurot*. Tell students that the traditional *Avot* blessing is just that, a blessing that talks about the merit of our patriarchs and only mentions their names (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob). Ask students: Why do you think our movement added the names of the mothers (Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah) as well? Share that this addition points out that each of us, like our ancestors, male and female, has a unique relationship with God.
3. Hand out copies of *G'vurot: God's Great Powers* (page 164). Ask one student to read the traditional version, and another student to read the Reform version.
4. Tell students to listen as the Reform version is read and to underline anything that is different. Give them a few minutes to complete this task.
5. Have students share what they have underlined. (Lines related to God's power to revive the dead should be underlined.)
6. Share with students this explanation from Rabbi Harvey Fields:

When Reform Judaism came into existence in the early nineteenth century, it rejected the concept of resurrection and substituted the belief in the "immortality of the soul." The Reformers argued

<sup>2</sup>Joel Lurie Grishaver, *19 out of 18* (Los Angeles: Torah Aura Productions, 1991), p. 25.

that when a person died, that person was dead and their body could not be revived. They did, however, agree with the traditional Jewish belief that each person is given a נֶפֶשׁ [nefesh, soul]. This נֶפֶשׁ is not physical, but spiritual. It is a spark of God and it is eternal, just as God is eternal.<sup>3</sup>

7. Give students a few minutes to answer the question on the bottom of the page (How does the Reform version of the prayer teach us that a part of us, given by God, is eternal?), then take a few minutes for students to share their responses.

## CONCLUSION (5 MINUTES)

Remind students of the Structure of the *Amidah* worksheet they used last week and that the three blessings they studied today represent the section of praise as we approach God, the heavenly Ruler, to make requests of God. Ask students to share what new insights about praising God they have gained from exploring these blessings and how they might now feel differently about approaching God to make requests. Have them write their answers on page 19 of their workbooks.

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<sup>3</sup>Harvey J. Fields, *B'chol L'vavcha: A Commentary* (rev. ed.) (New York: UAHC Press, 2001), p. 116.

**Amidah Section 1: B'rachot of Praise**

GOD OF ALL GENERATIONS

אָבוֹת וְאִמָּהוֹת

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי, אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ וְאִמּוֹתֵינוּ: אֱלֹהֵי  
 אַבְרָהָם, אֱלֹהֵי יִצְחָק, וְאֱלֹהֵי יַעֲקֹב. אֱלֹהֵי שָׂרָה, אֱלֹהֵי  
 רִבְקָה, אֱלֹהֵי לֵאָה וְאֱלֹהֵי רָחֵל. הָאֵל הַגָּדוֹל הַגְּבוּר  
 וְהַנּוֹרָא, אֵל עֲלִיּוֹן, גּוֹמֵל חַסְדִּים טוֹבִים וְקוֹנֵה הַכֹּל,  
 וְזוֹכֵר חַסְדֵי אָבוֹת וְאִמָּהוֹת, וּמְבִיא גְאֻלָּה לְבָנֵי בְנֵיהֶם,  
 לְמַעַן שְׁמוֹ בְּאַהֲבָה. מְלֶכֶךְ עוֹזֵר וּמוֹשִׁיעַ וּמַגֵּן.  
 בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי, מְגִן אַבְרָהָם וְעִזְרַת שָׂרָה.

Praised be our God, the God of our fathers and our mothers: God of Abraham, God of Isaac, and God of Jacob; God of Sarah, God of Rebekah, God of Leah, and God of Rachel; great, mighty, and awesome God, God supreme. Ruler of all the living, Your ways are ways of love. You remember the faithfulness of our ancestors, and in love bring redemption to their children's children for the sake of Your name. You are our Sovereign and our Help, our Redeemer and our Shield. We praise You, O God, Shield of Abraham, Protector of Sarah.



## GOD'S POWER

## גבורות

אֶתְּהָ גְבוּר לְעוֹלָם, אֲדַנִּי, מְחַיֶּה הַכֹּל אֶתְּהָ, רַב  
 לְהוֹשִׁיעַ. מְכַלְכֵּל חַיִּים בְּחֶסֶד, מְחַיֶּה הַכֹּל בְּרַחֲמִים  
 רַבִּים. סוֹמֵךְ נוֹפְלִים, וְרוֹפֵא חוֹלִים, וּמַתִּיר אֲסוּרִים,  
 וּמְקִיִּים אַמוּנָתוֹ לְיִשְׁנֵי עֶפְרָי. מִי כַמוֹךְ בַּעַל גְּבוּרוֹת,  
 וּמִי דוֹמֶה לָּךְ, מֶלֶךְ יִמְחִית וּמְחַיֶּה וּמְצַמֵּחַ יְשׁוּעָה?  
 וְנֶאֱמַן אֶתְּהָ לְהַחְיֹת הַכֹּל. בְּרוּךְ אַתְּהָ יי, מְחַיֶּה הַכֹּל.

Eternal is Your might, O God; all life is Your gift; great is Your power to save! With love You sustain the living, with great compassion give life to all. You send help to the falling and healing to the sick; You bring freedom to the captive and keep faith with those who sleep in the dust. Who is like You, Mighty One? Who is Your equal, Author of life and death, Source of salvation? We praise You, Eternal God, Source of life.





## SANCTIFICATION

## קְדוּשָׁה

נְקַדֵּשׁ אֶת-שִׁמְךָ בְּעוֹלָם, כְּשֵׁם שִׁמְךָ יְשִׁים אוֹתוֹ בְּשָׁמַי  
 מְרוֹם, כְּכַתוּב עַל-יַד נְבִיאֶיךָ: וְקָרָא זֶה אֶל-זֶה וְאָמַר:  
 קְדוֹשׁ, קְדוֹשׁ, קְדוֹשׁ יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת, מְלֵא כָּל-הָאָרֶץ כְּבוֹדוֹ.  
 לְעַמְתָּם בְּרוּךְ יְאִמְרוּ:  
 בְּרוּךְ כְּבוֹד-יְהוָה מִמְקוֹמוֹ.  
 וּבְדַבְרֵי קְדֻשָּׁךָ כְּתוּב לְאִמֹר:  
 יְמִלֶךְ יְהוָה לְעוֹלָם, אֱלֹהֶיךָ צִיּוֹן, לְדֹר וָדֹר. הַלְלוּיָהּ!  
 לְדֹר וָדֹר נְגִיד נְגִיד גְּדֻלָּךְ וּלְנִצְח נְצַחִים קְדֻשָּׁתְךָ נְקַדֵּישׁ.  
 וְשִׁבְחְךָ, אֱלֹהֵינוּ, מִפִּינוּ לֹא יִמוּשׁ לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד.  
 בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי, הָאֵל הַקְּדוֹשׁ.

We sanctify Your name on earth, even as all things, to the ends of time and space, proclaim Your holiness, and in the words of the prophet we say:

Holy, holy, holy is the Eternal One, God of the Hosts of Heaven! The whole earth is ablaze with Your glory!

All being recounts Your praise:

Praised be the glory of God in heaven and earth.

And this is Your sacred word:

The Eternal One shall reign for ever; your God, O Zion, from generation to generation. Halleluyah!

To all generations we will make known Your greatness, and to all eternity proclaim Your holiness. Your praise, O God, shall never depart from our lips. We praise You, Eternal One, the holy God.



## *Avot v'imahot*—Our Ancestors

The *Avot v'imahot* prayer is about God's unique relationship with our ancestors. When saying this prayer, we attempt to draw nearer to God by asking God to recall the *z'chut avot* זְכוּת-אֲבוֹת, the merit of our ancestors. This prayer reminds us (and God) that our relationship is personal (as it lists all the individual names of our ancestors) and that it is historic, in that we have a special relationship accorded to us by our ancestry, our family.

Instructions:

1. Take a moment to read over the text of the prayer.
2. The names of our ancestors are all said in the prayer. Underline them. You should find seven: three patriarchs (forefathers) and four matriarchs (foremothers).
3. Of course, each of us has our own special merit, our own unique qualities. List at least one talent that you have, one thing that makes you special and earns you merit.
4. Think of your personal family history. Is there a particular relative that has earned *z'chut* זְכוּת, merit? Share his or her story.
5. Answer the final two questions on your worksheet.



## Student Worksheet for *Avot v'imahot*

Take a moment to read over the text of the prayer. Then answer the questions.

- Each of us has our own special merit, our own unique qualities. List at least one talent that you have, one thing that makes you special and earns you merit.

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- Think of your personal family history. Is there a particular relative that has earned *z'chut* זְכוּת, merit? Share his or her story here.

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- Why do you think this prayer belongs in the section of blessings of praise?

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- How do you think it prepares us to make requests of God?

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## *G'vurot*—Mightiness: Hero-Like Qualities

The *G'vurot* prayer is about God's hero-like qualities. It says God is forever mighty, then goes on to list ways in which we experience God's might. Rather than talk about how God's might wins victories or builds the world, the prayer expresses how God uses God's might to make our lives better. Ultimately, we are called to imitate God in using our might for the good of humanity, too.

Instructions:

1. Take a moment to read over the text of the prayer.
2. What do you think the phrase “forever mighty” means?
3. Go through the prayer and underline all the examples of God's might. Are there other examples of God's might that you would add?
4. Imagine you are a *gibor* גִּבּוֹר—a superhero who possesses the qualities of greatness to improve the human condition. What would you look like? Draw a picture of yourself as a superhero. Describe your abilities and what things you need to do your work.
5. Answer the final two questions on your worksheet.



## Student Worksheet for *G'vurot*

Take a moment to read over the text of the prayer. Then answer the questions.

- What do you think the phrase “forever mighty” means?

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- Go through the prayer and underline all the examples of God’s might. Are there other examples from your own life that you would add? Write them here.

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- Imagine you are a *gibor* גִּבּוֹר—a superhero who possesses the qualities of greatness to improve the human condition. What would you look like? Draw a picture of yourself as a superhero on the back of this page. Describe your abilities and what things you need to do your work.

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- Why do you think this prayer belongs in the section of blessings of praise?

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- How do you think it prepares us to make requests of God?

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## ***K'dushah*—Holiness**

The *K'dushah* prayer is about God's holiness. It is recited in the present tense, meaning that God is holy for us, right now. Not only do we declare God's holiness with this prayer, we say it to sanctify God and to make God's holiness known to all.

Instructions:

1. Take a moment to read over the text of the prayer.
2. Write your own definition for holiness.
3. List two examples of God's holiness. For ideas, see Leviticus 19.
4. According to Rabbi Moses Maimonides, a twelfth-century Spanish rabbi, we are commanded to sanctify God. (Leviticus 22:32: "I shall be sanctified among the children of Israel.") Look up the word *sanctify* in the dictionary. Write the definition on your worksheet.
5. What can you do to sanctify God's name?
6. Answer the final two questions on your worksheet.



## Student Worksheet for *K'dushah*

Take a moment to read over the text of the prayer. Then answer the questions.

- Write your own definition for holiness.

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- List two examples of God's holiness. For ideas, see Leviticus 19.

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- According to Rabbi Moses Maimonides, a twelfth-century Spanish rabbi, we are commanded to sanctify God. (Leviticus 22:32: "I shall be sanctified among the children of Israel.") Look up the word *sanctify* in the dictionary. Write the definition here.

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- What can you do to sanctify God's name?

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- Why do you think this prayer belongs in the section of blessings of praise?

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- How do you think it prepares us to make requests of God?

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## G'vurot: God's Great Powers

### Traditional *G'vurot*

אתה גבור לעולם, אֲדֹנָי, מְחַיֶּה מֵתִים אֶתָּה, רַב  
 לְהוֹשִׁיעַ. מְכַלְכֵּל חַיִּים בְּחַסֵּד, מְחַיֶּה מֵתִים בְּרַחֲמִים  
 רַבִּים. סוֹמֵךְ נוֹפְלִים, וְרוֹפֵא חוֹלִים, וּמַתִּיר אֲסוּרִים,  
 וּמְקַיֵּם אֲמוּנָתוֹ לִישְׁנֵי עֶפֶר. מִי כְמוֹךָ בְּעַל גְּבוּרוֹת,  
 וּמִי דוֹמֶה לָּךְ, מְלֹךְ מַמִּית וּמְחַיֶּה וּמְצַמִּיחַ יְשׁוּעָה?  
 וְנֶאֱמָן אֶתָּה לְהַחְיֹת מֵתִים. בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי, מְחַיֶּה  
 הַמֵּתִים.

Eternal is Your power, O God. You revive the dead, and You are mighty to save. In loving-kindness You sustain the living. With abundant mercy You revive the dead. You uphold the falling, heal the sick, free the captive, and keep faith with those who sleep in the earth. Who is like You, almighty God, and who can be compared to You, the Author of life and death, and the Source of salvation? You are faithful to revive the dead. We praise You, O God, who revives the dead.

What idea does the traditional version of the prayer use to teach us about God's great powers? What idea does the Reform version use? What does the difference mean to you?

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### Reform *G'vurot*

אתה גבור לעולם, אֲדֹנָי, מְחַיֶּה הַכֹּל אֶתָּה, רַב  
 לְהוֹשִׁיעַ. מְכַלְכֵּל חַיִּים בְּחַסֵּד, מְחַיֶּה הַכֹּל בְּרַחֲמִים  
 רַבִּים. סוֹמֵךְ נוֹפְלִים, וְרוֹפֵא חוֹלִים, וּמַתִּיר אֲסוּרִים,  
 וּמְקַיֵּם אֲמוּנָתוֹ לִישְׁנֵי עֶפֶר. מִי כְמוֹךָ בְּעַל גְּבוּרוֹת,  
 וּמִי דוֹמֶה לָּךְ, מְלֹךְ מַמִּית וּמְחַיֶּה וּמְצַמִּיחַ יְשׁוּעָה?  
 וְנֶאֱמָן אֶתָּה לְהַחְיֹת הַכֹּל. בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי, מְחַיֶּה הַכֹּל.

Eternal is Your might, O God; all life is Your gift; great is Your power to save! With love You sustain the living, with great compassion give life to all. You send help to the falling and healing to the sick; You bring freedom to the captive and keep faith with those who sleep in the dust. Who is like You, Mighty One, Author of life and death, Source of salvation? We praise You, O God, the Source of life.