

# ASK THE RABBI

**Question:** In the prayer of Alienu our siddur has one line that is in parentheses. The line is ...להבל. מהם משתחוים להבל. What is the story behind that line, how did it get into parentheses, and should we say it?

**Answer:** This line was written into the original Alienu and taken out in the year 1400. The line, referring to idolaters, means "They bow to emptiness and pray to a deity that will bring no salvation." In the year 1400 an apostate Jew claimed that the numerical value of the Hebrew words of emptiness equaled "yesha." Taking offense at a misinterpreted slight at whom they thought was god, the Catholic Church killed many Jews for this prayer. The Rabbis at the time felt it prudent to omit this line.

As time passed, and the danger subsided, the line was rewritten into the text, albeit with parentheses to reflect its centuries of not being said. Today when there is no danger we should all recite this line.