

From The Rabbi



I believe there is a great deal of wisdom embedded in the observances of Jewish tradition. However, I would like to ask the following questions:

What is so wise about the requirement to devote so much time to prayer on a regular basis?

Below is a table of approximate time devoted to prayer throughout the year by an individual who is observant of Jewish tradition

6 Days A Week	1 hour each day
Shabbat	5 hours each week
10 Festival Days	3 hours each day
Rosh Hashanah	10 hours
Yom Kippur	10 hours
Other Special Days	13 hours

This adds up to approximately 635 hours a year devoted to prayer.

Does God really need to hear from us that much?

Is this a relevant, productive and good use of time that is so precious?

With these questions in mind and with an interest in bringing greater meaning and relevance to the services conducted within our congregation, I, together with Cantor Shron and two members of the congregation took some time this summer to search the pages of several contemporary siddurim and prayer commentaries. At the Shabbat Morning Experience on August 20, a preliminary edition of a supplemental booklet to enhance our Shabbat services was introduced. This booklet contains:

New definitions of the purpose of prayer to refocus the prayer experience
An engaging alternative to the silent Amida
Additional contemporary prayers to supplement the service
Personal meditations to be recited at the conclusion of the silent devotion

The following passages from the first page of the supplement have already begun to transform the prayer experience for me. I invite you to read them and let me know what you think.

A fulfilling encounter with Jewish prayer should help you to:

- Experience God in terms that are emotionally and spiritually compelling as well as intellectually satisfying.
- Feel a unity with all Jews, everywhere, past, present and future.
- Gain a sense of inspiration from Jewish tradition.
- Understand yourself as an individual, as a Jew and as a human being.
- Open pathways to joy.

Prayer Is...

- Prayer is a step on which we rise from the self we are, to the self we wish to be.
- Prayer affirms the hope that no reality can crush; the aspiration that can never acknowledge defeat.
- Prayer seeks the power to do wisely, to act generously, to live helpfully.
- Prayer is the search for silence amidst the noise of life.
- Prayer takes us beyond the self.
- Joining our little self to the selfhood of humanity, prayer gives our wishes the freedom to grow large and broad and inclusive.
- Our prayers are answered not when we are given what we ask, but when we are challenged to be what we can be.

This preliminary edition of the prayer supplement is available in the synagogue lobby and can be accessed on our website on the Synagogue Services page.

Rabbi Gordon Yaffe