

Rakevet USY

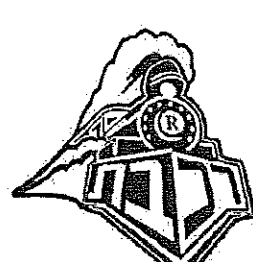
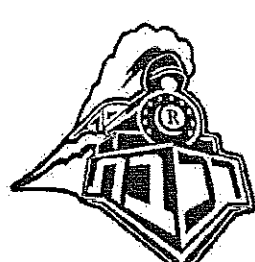
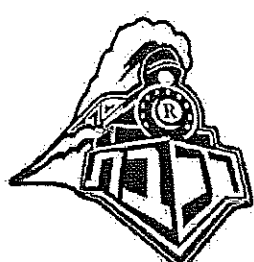
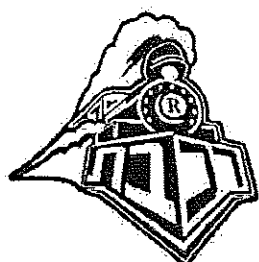
**V'ani Tefilati  
And I am My Prayer**

**ואני תפילתי**

Fall Kinnus 2008  
Dix Hills Jewish Center  
November 14-16, 2008  
Cheshvan 16-18 5769

**SOURCEBOOK**

**\*\*Please treat this book with respect as it  
contains sacred Jewish texts\*\***



## Lesson Plan

### Step One: Set Induction (20 minutes)

**Goal:** To present the issue of prayer in an interesting way to spark discussion of it's relevance, or lack, to us, as well as sharing everyone's name and so forth.

Start by saying the blessing before study, *la'asok b'divrey Torah*.

Note: This is just an introductory exercise, so please don't spend your whole time on this alone!

Pass out the pieces of paper with the quotations randomly to the USYers. Then go around in a circle and have each USYer share their name, grade, chapter, etc., read their quote aloud. The group will then raise their hands if they agree with the quote, and leave their hands down if they disagree.

Ask the USYers if they were surprised about their peers' feeling about prayer.

### Step Two: Development of Prayer (35 minutes)

**Goal:** To explain the origins of prayer, and then different ideas about it.

Ask the USYers to read the handout aloud in a circle, interspersing the reading with these section by section discussion questions:

Note: If you are running out of time, please skip "Prayer in the Legal Codes"

For "Biblical Worship"

1. Why is Isaiah angry? What are the people in this text doing?
2. Is Isaiah saying sacrifices and fasts are meaningless in general, or only if they are done by immoral people?
3. Do you think Isaiah would be angry today?

For "Worship Changes: The Transition from Sacrifice to Prayer"

1. Why was there a need for sacrifice to be replaced?
2. How is prayer like sacrifice? Was it an equal substitution?
3. How do you feel about sacrifice? Are you glad we don't do it anymore?
4. Would Isaiah prefer prayer to sacrifice? What kind of prayer?
5. Is reading the Torah is a kind of worship. Is it a kind of prayer?

For "Prayer in the Legal Codes"

1. What are the difference ways in which a person can show their service of the heart?
2. Do you think the prayer structure described leads to service of the heart? And if not, then why did the rabbis create this structure?
3. Could there be other ways to pray?
4. What are different ways in which you have seen or heard people praying?

For "Meaningful Prayer"

1. What is the point of the boy who whistles? What does he represent? Why does the Ba'al Shem Tov accept him?
2. How would Isaiah feel about the people in the story who yell at the boy?
3. What does Heschel mean when he says his legs were praying? (Note: this is often misquoted as "feet were praying")
4. Are the actions of Heschel legitimate prayer or a totally different kind of action?
5. Does true prayer require action?

### **Step 3: Summarize (5 minutes)**

**Goal:** To make sure USYers leave the sicha with a cohesive understanding of the lesson.

Remind the USYers that at first we read some quotations about prayer and either agreed or disagreed with them. We then talked about Isaiah's feeling about empty sacrifice, and the development from sacrifice to prayer when the Temple was destroyed. After that we read about prayer being proscribed by the Jewish legal system, and finally, some stories about less traditional ways of prayer.

Instead of a second normal sicha, Rabbi Buchler, who is the rabbi here at Dix Hills, will be teaching a second session to everyone on the subject of prayer and making it meaningful.

Before you dismiss them, wish the USYers a *yasher koach* for a great study session.

*To be recited before every text study:*

ברוך אתה יהוה אלוהינו מלך העולם,

אשר קדשנו במצותיו וצונו לעסק בדברי תורה.

*Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu Melech haolam,  
asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu la'asok b'divrei Torah.*

### **Biblical Worship**

During the time of the Bible, the main form of worship was sacrifice in the Temple. Many of our great profits were unhappy with the hypocrisy of Israelites who gave generous animal sacrifices, but were generally not good people. This complaint is most famously expressed by the profit Isaiah:

*To be sure, they seek Me daily, eager to learn my ways. Like a national that does what is right, that has not abandoned the laws of its God, they ask me for the right way, they are eager for the nearness of God: "Why when we fasted did You not see? When we starved our bodies, did You pay no heed?" Because on your fast day you see to your business and oppress all your laborers! Because you fast in strife and contention, and you strike with a wicket fist! Your fasting today is not such as to make your voice heard on high. Is such the fast I desire, a day for men to starve their bodies? Is it bowing the head like a bulrush and lying in sackcloth and ashes? Do you call that a fast, a day when the Lord is favorable? No, this is the fast I desire: to unlock the fetters of wickedness, and untie the cords of the yoke to let the oppressed go free; to break off every yoke. It is to share your bread with the hungry, and to take the wretched poor into your home; when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to ignore your own kin. Then shall your light burst though like the dawn and your healing spring up quickly. Your Vindicator shall march before you, the Presence of the Lord shall be your guard.*

From Isaiah 58:2-8

### **Worship Changes: The Transition from Sacrifice to Prayer**

Regular communal Jewish prayer began as a substitute for the sacrificial in the ancient Temple in Jerusalem. In the Temple, daily offerings were accompanied by the recitation of biblical passages. Perhaps some Psalms were sung in the Temple by choirs of Levites, who aided the priests with the temple service. These were merely trimmings though; the focus of worship was on animal sacrifices.

When the Temple was destroyed in the year 70 C.E. by the Roman Empire, there was a vacuum in religious worship. Without the Temple, there was no place for sacrifice, and no way to practice the primary form of Jewish worship. The rabbis, who became the religious leaders, needed to create a new system.

The formative period of Jewish prayer was during the time of the Mishnah (edited c. 200 C.E.). This liturgy consisted of three primary bodies: (1) the twice-daily recitation of the Shema--the central statement of Jewish monotheistic belief--and the formulaic blessings (*berakhot*) recited before and after it; (2) "The Prayer" of 18 blessings, also known as the Amidah--recited several times daily, and (3) the public recitation of the Torah in installments.

Adapted from [www.MyJewishLearning.com](http://www.MyJewishLearning.com)

## Prayer in the Legal Codes

One of the greatest scholars in the history of Judaism, Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon, known as Rambam in Hebrew and Maimonides in English, tells of the origin and development of our liturgy:

*It is a positive commandment to pray daily, as it says, "And you shall serve the Lord your God" (Ex. 23:25). Tradition teaches that this service is prayer, as it says, "And to serve Him with all your heart" (Deut. 10:12). Our Rabbis have taught that this service of the heart is prayer. And the Torah does not prescribe the number of prayers, nor the text of prayer, nor a fixed time for prayer.*

*...The obligation of this mitzvah is as follows: A person should supplicate and pray daily, and declare the praise of God, and afterwards ask for his needs, and afterwards give praise and thanks to God...*

*When Ezra and his court saw [the poor state of individual prayers] they arose and established eighteen blessings with a fixed order...And they established a fixed number and time of prayers, corresponding to the sacrifices.*

From Maimonides' *Law of Prayer*, 1:1-5

## Meaningful Prayer

But do those words on the page written by the rabbis of the Mishnah to replace sacrifice and mentioned by Maimonides mean anything to you? The founder of the Hasidic movement, the Ba'al Shem Tov, believed that prayer had to be intensely personal to be relevant, and was not very concerned with praying the proscribed times. Hasidim tell this story:

*One Yom Kippur a poor Jewish boy, an illiterate shepherd, entered the synagogue where the Ba'al Shem Tov was praying. The boy was deeply moved by the service, but frustrated that he could not read the prayers. He started to whistle, the one thing he knew he could do beautifully; he wanted to offer his whistling as a gift to God. The congregation was horrified at the desecration of their service. Some people yelled at the boy, and others wanted to throw him out. The Ba'al Shem Tov immediately stopped them. "Until now," he said, "I could feel our prayers being blocked as they tried to reach the heavenly court. This young shepherd's whistling was so pure, however, that it broke through the blockage and brought all of our prayers straight up to God."*

From Joseph Telushkin's *Jewish Literacy*

Another believer in the importance of prayer that was relevant to the prayer was Abraham Joshua Heschel, a modern day Hasid. When Heschel returned from participating in the Selma to

Montgomery civil rights march in 1965 with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., he wrote the following words in his diary:

*For many of us the march from Selma to Montgomery was about protest and prayer. Legs are not lips and walking is not kneeling. And yet our legs uttered songs. Even without words, our march was worship. I felt my legs were praying.*

He also wrote:

*Prayer is action; it requires complete mobilization of the heart, mind, and soul. What is the worth of attending public worship when mind and soul are not involved?...*

*From Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*

God punishes us mildly by ignoring our prayers and severely by answering them.  
--Richard J. Needham

When we pray to God we must be seeking nothing—nothing.  
--Saint Francis of Assisi

Prayer does not change God, but it changes him who prays.  
--Søren Kierkegaard

Trouble and perplexity drive me to prayer and prayer drives away perplexity and trouble.  
--Philip Melanchthon

Don't pray when it rains if you don't pray when the sun shines.  
--Satchel Paige

The value of consistent prayer is not that He will hear us, but that we will hear Him.  
--William McGill

Prayer may not change things for you, but it for sure changes you for things.  
--Samuel M. Shoemaker

Two hands working can do more than a thousand clasped in prayer.

Give a man a fish, and you'll feed him for a day; give him a religion, and he'll starve to death while praying for a fish.

I prayed for twenty years but received no answer until I prayed with my legs.  
--Frederick Douglass

Practical prayer is harder on the soles of your shoes than on the knees of your trousers.  
--Austin O'Malley

We have to pray with our eyes on God, not on the difficulties.  
--Oswald Chambers

when it's a glorious day  
I pray  
and  
it's a glorious day  
when I pray  
--Star Richés

Prayer is when you talk to God; meditation is when you listen to God.

Prayer is not merely an occasional impulse to which we respond when we are in trouble: prayer is a life attitude.  
--Walter A. Mueller

If we could all hear one another's prayers, God might be relieved of some of his burdens.  
--Ashleigh Brilliant

The trouble with our praying is, we just do it as a means of last resort.  
--Will Rogers

When you pray, rather let your heart be without words than your words without heart.  
--John Bunyan

I believe in prayer. It's the best way we have to draw strength from heaven.  
--Josephine Baker

Prayer must never be answered: if it is, it ceases to be prayer and becomes correspondence.  
--Oscar Wilde

Prayer is the soul's sincere desire,  
Uttered or unexpressed;  
The motion of a hidden fire  
That trembles in the breast.  
--James Montgomery

Certain thoughts are prayers. There are moments when, whatever be the attitude of the body, the soul is on its knees.

--Victor Hugo

Complaint is the largest tribute heaven receives and the sincerest part of our devotion.

--Jonathan Swift

I have been driven many times to my knees by the overwhelming conviction that I had nowhere else to go.

--Abraham Lincoln

It is of course possible to dance a prayer.

--Glade Byron Addams

Prayer requires more of the heart than of the tongue.

--Adam Clarke

God always answers our prayers, but sometimes the answer is no.

God speaks in the silence of the heart. Listening is the beginning of prayer.

--Mother Teresa

Most people do not pray; they only beg.

--George Bernard Shaw

Prayer draws us near to our own souls.

--Herman Melville

What we usually pray to God is not that His will be done, but that He approve ours.

--Helga Bergold Gross

Our prayers should be for blessings in general, for God knows best what is good for us.

--Socrates

Prayer is exhaling the spirit of man and inhaling the spirit of God.  
--Edwin Keith

Call on God, but row away from the rocks.  
--Indian Proverb

I don't always know what the right thing to do is, my Lord, but I think the fact that I want to please you pleases you.

Always let a man test himself: if he can direct his heart, let him pray; if he cannot, let him not pray.  
--Talmud, Berakot 30b

My words fly up, my thoughts remain below: Words without thoughts never to heaven go.  
--King Claudius in *Hamlet*

Don't live too much and forget about prayer.  
Don't pray too much and forget about life.  
God won't give you a straight answer so don't seek one.  
Seek the ways to find answers, not the answer itself.  
Be loyal but not blindly loyal.  
Be ready to grasp God's response in any shape or form.  
Don't forget about prayer, but don't forget about life.

The fewer the words, the better the prayer.  
--Martin Luther

A rocky vineyard does not need a prayer, but a pick axe.  
--American Indian Proverb

Prayer is our humble answer to the inconceivable surprise of living.  
-- Abraham Joshua Heschel

If the only prayer you said in your whole life was, 'thank you,' that would suffice.  
-- Johannes Meister Eckhart

A person needs to scream to his father in heaven with a powerful voice from the depths of his heart. Then God will listen to his voice and turn to his outcry. And it could be that from this act itself, all doubts and obstacles that are keeping him back from true service of Hashem will fall from him and be completely nullified.

--Rabbi Nachman of Bratzlav

Prayer is not an asking. It is a longing of the soul. It is a daily admission of one's weakness.

--Mahatma Gandhi

Humility provides everyone, even him who despairs in solitude, with the strongest relationship to his fellow man, and this immediately, though, of course, only in the case of complete and permanent humility. It can do this because it is the true language of prayer, at once adoration and the firmest of unions. The relationship to one's fellow man is the relationship of prayer, the relationship to oneself is the relationship of striving; it is from prayer that one draws the strength for one's striving.

-- Franz Kafka

The world stands upon three things: on Torah, worship and deeds of loving kindness.

--Pirke Avot

