

WILLING, LEARNING, STRIVING

**Emet V'Emunah:
The Principles of Conservative Judaism**

אמת ואמונה

**HANEFESH REGION
UNITED SYNAGOGUE YOUTH
1994 ENCAMPMENT**

**AUGUST 22-28, 1994
CAMP KESHET  WINDSOR, CT**

USYER ACTIVITY BOOK

THE NAMES OF GOD

Since our relationship with God lies at the heart of prayer, the nature of our conceptions of God plays a vital role in our willingness to pray and in our attempt to increase our participation in prayer. Often, we are not comfortable with the image of God in many prayers, or else we never think very seriously about the various images presented to us. Below is a long list of names, appellations, and descriptions of God found in our tradition. They are gathered from the Siddur, other Jewish literature, and the writings of theologians. The list is not complete, but is very comprehensive (although other translations could have been used for many of the names).

Find a quiet place and take from this list those names which describe God as you believe in Him (Her). Your list need not be long--just sincere. Share your preferences with others in the group. Then make a tally of the most often selected designations.

1. Adonai, "My Lord"
2. King
3. Lord
4. The True God
5. The Divinity
6. The Fear of Isaac
7. Mighty One of Jacob
8. El, The God of (the Patriot) Israel
9. Most High
10. Everlasting God
11. God Almighty
12. God of Vision
13. God of the Covenant
14. Everlasting King
15. Everlasting Rock
16. Ancient God
17. Everlasting Arms
18. Everlasting Life
19. YHWH, "He Causes to Be"
20. I am That I am
21. Lord of Hosts
22. Creator of Heaven and Earth
23. Holy One
24. Holy One of Israel
25. Shepherd of Israel
26. The Rock
27. King of Israel
28. The God of Truth
29. Former of All
30. Praiseworthy God
31. Guardian of Israel
32. Shield of Abraham
33. Rock of Israel
34. King of Kings
35. The Name
36. The Holy One, Praised be He

- | | |
|--|----------------------------------|
| 37. Heaven | 38. Peace |
| 39. I | 40. Judge of the Earth |
| 41. The Awesome One | 42. My Rock |
| 43. Eternal One of Israel | 44. Ever-living God |
| 45. Lover of His People Israel | 46. The Ransomer |
| 47. The Redeemer | 48. The Guide |
| 49. Our God, God of Our Ancestors | 50. God of Abraham |
| 51. God of Isaac | 52. God of Jacob |
| 53. The Mighty One | 54. The Heroic One |
| 55. Acquirer of All | 56. The Living Lord |
| 57. Rescuer | 58. Reviver of the Dead |
| 59. Father of Mercy | 60. The Merciful One |
| 61. The Merciful | 62. The Holy One |
| 63. The Place | 64. The Might |
| 65. The Faithful One | 66. Lord of the Universe |
| 67. He Who Spoke and the Universe Came Into Being | 68. Our Father in Heaven |
| 69. The Infinite | 70. The Possessor of Will |
| 71. Hosts | 72. King of Compassion and Mercy |
| 73. Rock of Our Lives | 74. The Good One |
| 75. He Who is Merciful | 76. Maker of Peace |
| 77. Thankworthy God | 78. The Holy King |
| 79. Master of All | 80. The Creator |
| 81. He Who Caused His Name to Dwell in this House | 82. Our Father, Our King |
| 83. Our Shepherd | 84. Mighty One of Israel |
| 85. Our Healer | 86. Mentor |
| 87. The Living God of Majesty | 88. Sovereign |
| 89. The Compassionate One | 90. The Patient One |

- | | |
|---|--|
| 91. The Bountiful One | 92. The One Who is Forgiveness |
| 93. The Generous One | 94. The Eternal |
| 95. The First Cause | 96. World-Soul |
| 97. Absolute Spirit | 98. Absolute Rest |
| 99. The Power That Makes for Salvation | 100. The Power That Makes for The Fulfillment of All Valid Ideals |
| 101. Lord, Man of War | 102. The Lord Who Hides His Face |

After reading this list it should become obvious that in our tradition there are many images of God and no one need accept all of them.

Based on Robert Blinder, "What's in a Name?" Genesis--A Synagogue of Our Times, St. Louis, Missouri. Taken from *Higher and Higher* by Steven M. Brown.

I BELIEVE

| | Yes | No |
|---|-------|-------|
| 1. I believe that God created the world and directs the happenings in it. | _____ | _____ |
| 2. I believe that God has no power to interfere in the affairs of people. | _____ | _____ |
| 3. I believe that the world came into being by accident. | _____ | _____ |
| 4. I believe that God is aware of what I do. | _____ | _____ |
| 5. I believe that God can answer prayer. | _____ | _____ |
| 6. I believe that God punishes evil. | _____ | _____ |
| 7. I believe that God intended us never to understand certain things about the world. | _____ | _____ |
| 8. I believe that my concepts about God differ from the Torah's concept of God. | _____ | _____ |
| 9. I believe that even if there were no people, God would still exist. | _____ | _____ |
| 10. I believe that God decided what is good and what is evil. | _____ | _____ |
| 11. I believe that God gets involved in human affairs when He wants to. | _____ | _____ |
| 12. I believe that God rewards good. | _____ | _____ |
| 13. I believe that God exists independently of, and outside of people. | _____ | _____ |
| 14. I believe that prayer is an attempt to talk to God. | _____ | _____ |
| 15. I believe that the the Torah is the word of God. | _____ | _____ |
| 16. I believe that God listens to prayer. | _____ | _____ |
| 17. I believe that "God" is a term that people use to describe their best hopes for humanity. | _____ | _____ |

18. I believe that God exists only inside of people.

19. I believe that praying can benefit the person who prays, even if God doesn't listen.

20. I believe that "God" is an idea people use to describe those things beyond human understanding.

21. I believe prayer can have an effect on people's lives regardless of what they think about God.

What else do you believe about God?

From Howard Wasserman, Ellen Z. Charry, Diane King, Jerome Ruderman, eds., *Idea Cookbook* (Philadelphia: Board of Jewish Education, United Synagogue of America, 1976).

FAITH INTERVIEW

One problem many people face is a kind of loneliness in regard to their feelings and questions regarding faith and God. Too often we believe that because we have questions, we are, therefore, non-believers and write ourselves out of our religious tradition. Nothing could be further from the truth. Religious people of all times have had deep and fundamental questions. That's what being religiously alive is all about. The problem today is that we don't share our questions and doubts with each other. Be as honest as possible in answering the following questions. If you do this exercise with another person, after one person has been the "interviewer," switch roles.

1. If there is a God, how do you picture God?
2. Do you talk to God yourself?
3. Have you ever felt God talking to you, or have you ever felt God's presence?
4. What are some of your doubts about God?
5. If God is good, how can God permit evil in the world?
6. Do you know of any differences between the Jewish conceptions of God and Christian conceptions of God?
7. Is there anything that makes you angry about God?
8. Has God ever answered any of your prayers?
9. Why don't you think or talk about God more than you do?
10. Does God still function in the world as described in the Bible?
11. What is a miracle? Do you believe in miracles?
12. Do you believe in life after death? What form does it take?
13. Do you believe God punishes the sinners and rewards the righteous?
14. Do you think that the Jewish people has been chosen by God for something special?
15. If you were God, what would you do differently?
16. Do you pray to God more when you are sick and in trouble? Do you think more about God when someone you love is in trouble or in danger?
17. Do you thank God for the good things in your life as well as relating God to the bad things that happen?

Adapted from *Higher and Higher* by Steven M. Brown.

I. Rabbi Isaac said: It is similar to a person who was traveling from one place to another. He saw a castle all lit up and exclaimed:

"Is it possible that this castle has no master?"

At that moment the master of the castle looked out upon him and said:

"I am the master of this castle."

It was similar in the case of Abraham our father. He exclaimed:

"Is it possible that this world has no master?"

God looked out upon him and said to him:

"I am the master of the universe."

(Bereshit Rabbah 39)

II. A heretic approached Rabbi Akiva and challenged him.

"Who created this world?"

"The Holy One, Blessed Be He."

"Give me clear proof," said the heretic.

"Come to me tomorrow."

The next day the heretic appeared. Rabbi Akiva said to the heretic:

"What are you wearing?"

"A coat."

"Who made it?" asked Rabbi Akiva.

"The weaver."

Rabbi Akiva responded, "I don't believe you. Show me clear proof."

"What can I show you? Don't you know that a weaver made it?"

"And don't you know that the Holy One, Blessed Be He created His universe?"

The heretic died. Rabbi Akiva's students asked him,

"Where was the clear proof?"

Rabbi Akiva said to them:

"My sons, just as the house testifies that there is a builder, a coat that there is a weaver, the door that there is a carpenter, so the world testifies that the Holy One, Blessed Be He created it."

(Midrash Temurah)

III. Man was created alone for a reason:

-- to teach you that all who destroy an Israelite life are considered by the Torah as if they had destroyed the whole world; that all who sustain an Israelite life are considered by the Torah as if they had sustained the whole world.

--For the sake of peace amongst humanity so that one person will not say to another "my father is greater than yours."

--In order to declare the greatness of the Holy One, Blessed Be He:

When a human mints a coin, he mints many coins with one form and each of the coins is similar one to another. The King of Kings, the Holy One, Blessed Be He minted all human beings from the cast of the first man, but none are similar to the other.

(Sanhedrin 38)

IV. God appeared to Israel at the Red Sea, as a war hero, fighting battles; at Sinai, as a scribe teaching Torah; at the time of Solomon as a young man; at the time of Daniel, as an old man full of mercy. Therefore God said to them: Even though you see me as many images, do not imagine that there are many divine beings, for it is I at the sea and it is I at Sinai. I am in every place - "I am the Lord your God" (Exodus 20:2).
(Tanhuma Yitro)

Other selections:

| | | | |
|------|-----------|--------------------------|---|
| I. | Ashrey | page 80-81 page 76-77 | <i>Siddur Sim Shalom Sabbath and Festival Prayerbook, Silverman</i> |
| II. | Adon Olam | page 7 page 162 | |
| III. | Psalm 14 | page 61-62 page 66 | (opening verses) |
| IV. | Psalm 8 | | |
| V. | Psalm 23 | | |
| VI. | Psalm 121 | | |
| VII. | Psalm 130 | | |

MY OWN "ANI MAAMIN" (I Believe) ?

Our Rabbis taught:

"As He is called gracious so shall you be gracious;
 As He is called merciful so shall you be merciful;
 As he is called Holy, "so shall you be holy."

(Talmud Shabbat 137b)

In other words, our notions of what God is imply that we live our lives in certain ways. If we believe God shows mercy, then we should show mercy. Moreover, Jewish tradition has taught that a person's belief or faith in God is best evidenced in the way that person treats others.

Fill in the chart below and see what your beliefs imply for the way you act in the world:

| IF I BELIEVE THAT: | THEN I SHOULD: |
|--|---|
| God is just. | Work to insure that people are treated justly. |
| God created a beautiful world for me to enjoy. | Show my appreciation by saying "thank you" and preserving the environment |
| God is present everywhere. | Realize all my actions count everywhere, all the time. |
| God doesn't care about the world. | Not worry about anyone but myself (or I have no choice but to care!) |
| (Now you continue.) | |
| | |
| | |

ORTHODOX

The Orthodox affirm that God revealed His will at Sinai in both a Written and an Oral form. The Oral tradition was ultimately written down in the Talmud. It consists of the way in which God wanted the Written Law (the Torah) to be interpreted and applied. Consequently, the meaning of any given verse of the Bible is what the Talmud, Midrash and later commentaries say it is. Moreover the texts of the Bible and Talmud that we have in hand must be understood as the exact word of God because if a human being wrote down God's word, the record of it that we have may be in error.

CONSERVATIVE I

- a. God in fact dictated His will at Sinai and at other times.
- b. These revelations were written down by human beings, however, and hence the diverse sources of biblical literature.
- c. Since the revelation to Moses was by far the clearest and most public, it is the most authentic recording of God's will.
- d. From Sinai on, Jewish law and theology are to be identified with the ways in which the rabbis of each generation interpreted and applied the laws of the Torah.
- e. Hence the authority of Jewish law is based upon the fact that it is God's will, as stated first in the Torah and then by rabbis of each generation. Rabbis are authorized to modify the law for their time, but only with extreme caution.

CONSERVATIVE II

- a. Human beings wrote the Torah at various times and places. Hence the diverse documents, laws and ideas in the Torah.
- b. These people were, however, divinely inspired, and therefore their words carry the insight and authority of God.
- c. Jewish laws and ideas may be changed for two reasons. First, since the Torah is a combination of divine inspiration and human articulation, we must distinguish the divine and human elements in the tradition and change the latter when circumstances require it. Second, divine inspiration did not happen once and for all at Sinai. The Torah is the document on which Judaism is based, and it therefore has special importance for us; but divine inspiration continues on in the form of new interpretations of the Torah in each generation.
- d. When changes are made, they must be made by the community in two ways -- through rabbinic decisions and communal custom. Only in that way can there be both tradition and change.

CONSERVATIVE III

- a. Revelation is the disclosure of God Himself. It is not the declaration of specific rules or ideas, but rather a meeting between God and man in which they get to know each other.

b. The Torah is the record of how human beings responded to God when they came into contact with Him.

c. Jewish law has authority for the Jew both because it represents the attempt of the Jewish people to spell out God's will, as revealed in the ongoing encounter with Him, and also because Jews are members of a covenanted community and have obligations under that covenant to God and to the Jewish community of past, present and future. The divine and communal aspects of Jewish law make it a series of *mitzvot* (commandments), and not just *minhagim* (customs). For Conservative III, both God and the Jewish community command a Jew to act in accordance with Jewish law as it is interpreted in each generation, and the Jew renews his own personal contact with both in so acting.

d. However, since the Torah was written by human beings, if we want to learn about the origins and meaning of the Bible, we must use the techniques of biblical scholarship as thoroughly and honestly as we can.

e. Moreover, because the Bible is the human recording of the encounter between man and God during times past, the specific ideas and laws contained therein reflect the practices, values and attitudes of those times. They may no longer be an adequate expression of our own understanding of what God demands of us now. We in our day have not only the right, but the responsibility, to make appropriate changes in the tradition that has come down to us so that it will reflect God's will as accurately as possible and accomplish it as effectively as possible in the contemporary world.

f. While every person may have his own relationship with God, it is God's encounter with the Jewish people as a whole that is of primary importance. The communal character of revelation is, in fact, a distinguishing feature of Judaism. Consequently, changes in the laws of Judaism must be made by the rabbis on behalf of the community, as the tradition requires, and not by individuals on their own. But the entire body of Jewish law, as interpreted by the rabbis of our times, is binding on every Jew as a member of the community covenanted with God and with generations of Jews, past, present, and future.

CONSERVATIVE IV (=Reconstructionist tendency)

a. Human beings wrote the texts of the tradition.

b. Those texts and the patterns of life and thought that they created are neither better nor worse than those of other cultures. Hence no divinity is ascribed to them, and all talk of a Chosen People is in error and dangerous.

c. Nevertheless, Jewish law has authority for us as the "folkways" (*minhagim*, customs) of our People. In general, it should be observed in order to give our people continuity and coherence. If particular laws become offensive or fall into disuse, however, they should be changed.

d. If the Jewish community succeeds in organizing itself into a cohesive, active group as the Kehillah was in medieval Europe, then communal methods for deciding issues in Jewish law and communal sanctions for it would make sense. Until such time, the individual Jew will make these decisions. That is as it should be in an area of ritual practices, but it is not a desirable situation in the realm of moral norms, and we must strive to create a Jewish community with real initiative and authority in such matters.

REFORM

For the Reform Movement, the essence of Judaism is morality and belief in God, a combination demonstrated most clearly in the literature of the Prophets. The legal developments during the talmudic period and the Middle Ages were temporary measures designed for those periods only; they have no authority today, when Jews no longer need laws to enable them to survive under governments hostile to Jews. On the contrary, the governments of Western Europe and America are fair to all because of the Enlightenment ideas on which they are based. We should respond in kind, taking an active role in modern society and embracing the Enlightenment emphasis on the individual and on reason. Many of the rituals of Judaism should be disbanded because they hinder the integration of Jews into modern society.

The theory of revelation which accompanied that interpretation of history is called "progressive revelation." According to that doctrine, God reveals His will to mankind through the use of human reason and moral striving. Each individual can be the recipient of revelation (in that sense) if he will only pay attention to the evidences of God in the natural and moral orders of the universe and deduce from that what the Lord requires of him. (You can see strong Enlightenment influences here in the emphasis on the individual and on morality.) Moreover, as humanity has more and more experience on this earth, human knowledge of what is and ought to be grows and so the scope and accuracy of revelation progresses as time goes on (hence the name "progressive revelation"). This, then, explains why Jewish law of previous eras is not binding, and why it is the individual who decides what to observe in Reform Judaism.

Selections taken from *Conservative Judaism: Our Ancestors to Our Descendants* by Elliot Dorff. Department of Youth Activities of United Synagogue of America. pg. 116-155.

Why should Jews observe the *mitzvot*? The Bible gives several answers to that question, but by far the most common one is simply that God commanded us at Sinai to do so. There He revealed (showed) His will to us, and so philosophers say that "revelation" occurred there. The Bible is careful to describe that event in impressive terms: there was lightning, thunder (Ex. 19:16), and the whole group of 600,000 Israelites witnessed what happened there (Ex. 12:37).

More importantly, that event made the law binding on Jews for all generations to come:

It was not with our fathers that the Lord made this covenant, but with us, the living, every one of us who is here today. Face to face the Lord spoke to you on the mountain out of the fire.

(Deuteronomy 5:3-4)

Know, therefore, that only the Lord your God is God, the steadfast God who keeps His gracious covenant to the thousandth generation of those who love Him and keep His commandments, but who instantly requites with destruction those who reject Him -- never slow with those who reject Him, punishing them instantly. Therefore observe faithfully the instruction, the laws, and the norms with which I charge you today.

(Deuteronomy 7:9-11)

As the above citations indicate, there are two reasons why the Law that God gave at Sinai is eternally binding. First, our forefathers made a covenant (agreement) with God in which the Israelites were promised the land of Israel and the status of being God's Chosen People in return for observing His commandments, and so we must observe the *mitzvot* because we promised to do so. You might say to yourself that it is not fair that you should be bound by what your ancestors promised, but that would not be right: you should understand the event at Sinai as if you yourself were there and participated in the promise. As the Haggadah of Passover phrases it:

In every generation one must look upon himself as if he personally had come out from Egypt, as the Bible says: "And you shall explain to your child on that day, 'It is because of what the Lord did for me when I went free from Egypt'" (Ex. 13:8). For it was not alone our forefathers whom the Holy One, praised be He, redeemed, but He redeemed us together with them, as it is said: "He freed us from there to bring us to, and give us, the land that He promised on oath to our forefathers."

(Deuteronomy 6:23)

(Incidentally, the same is true for secular law. The constitution of the country in which you live is binding upon you even though you were never asked whether you approve of it. Simply identifying as one of its citizens and reaping the benefits of citizenship obligate you to obey it. You may never have promised obedience to it in words, but your actions indicate "tacit [silent] consent," as the political philosopher Thomas Hobbes said. Similarly, international agreements do not have to be renewed with each new government or generation: they bind both parties forever unless there is a specific time limit in the original agreement or unless both parties agree to renegotiate the agreement.) Secondly, the Law of Sinai is eternal because God, who gave it and enforces it, is eternal.

A person might "voluntarily" commit himself to the authority of the halakhic system, when there are overwhelming pressures to do otherwise. Among the reasons for such commitment, some are intellectually respectable, and others less so:

1. Superstition, resulting from the fear of what might happen if God is not properly propitiated.

2. Familial pressure, such as the desire to please one's parents, or conversely, "far die kinder," in order to provide one's own children with some religious mooring.

3. Conviction that this is a good method of maintaining one's Jewish identity, far less superficial than organizational involvement alone.

4. Creation of a satisfying life style, there being good evidence that observant Jews enjoy lower incidences of such undesirable events as divorce and drug abuse.

5. Habit. Do not downplay this reason, since life would be incredibly complex if we had to analyze each situation afresh, never relying upon habituated responses to recurring situations.

6. A belief that halakhic responses are what God demands of Jews. We have listed this possibility last, since it is the least likely response to be given by most modern Jews. Yet Divine Imperative is the reason implicit in the *berakhah* recited before the performance of most *mitzvot*.

See: blessing on lighting candles, lulav, etc.

POSITION AGAINST USE OF ELECTRICITY ON SHABBAT

1. Just because something new comes along is no reason to change--for three thousand years Jews didn't use electricity on Shabbat, no reason to start now, Shabbat is fine as it is.
2. Since the use of electricity is something relatively new and its use on Shabbat has not been approved by *Klal Yisrael*--i.e., the community of observant Jews is not decided on what is appropriate--electricity should not be used on Shabbat.
3. The Bible clearly states: "You shall not burn fire in your dwellings on the Sabbath day." Electricity is a form of fire which is expressly prohibited in the Torah. Torah law is the most important and binding and cannot be contradicted even by the rabbis. Moreover, the filaments of bulbs, for example, do burn out, so they must be consumed by electricity just as wood is consumed when on fire.
4. The use of electricity leads to the violation of other rules of Shabbat -- e.g., we may not create something new, so putting on a light is creating something that wasn't there before; we may not change the state of a substance, so opening a door to the house triggers the thermostat to bring heat leading to the burning of fuel and opening a refrigerator door results in a rise in temperature which leads to the compressor going on and converting the freon gas back to a liquid to cool the refrigerator.
5. Use of electricity on Shabbat will lead people to violate the spirit and peace of Shabbat by playing radios and television, records and tapes, using the telephone for business purposes or making audio and video recordings.
6. Use of electricity will make it easier for people to violate other Shabbat laws such as not cooking and baking, not shaving (with an electric or any other razor), not using a washing machine or lawn mower.

POSITIONS SUPPORTING THE USE OF ELECTRICITY ON SHABBAT

1. Throughout Jewish history innovations in technology were often met with initial resistance, then gradual acceptance -- *e.g.*, the change from the ancient Hebrew script (called *k'tav ashuri*) to the newer script with which we are familiar today took centuries before people would accept it; although oil lamps were approved in mishnaic times for use as *ner Shabbat* (lit before Shabbat to provide light on Shabbat), the use of candles once they were invented was at first questioned, opposed, and only accepted generations later.
2. Though the use of electricity is something relatively new, its use in our society is so pervasive that we simply cannot avoid its use at any time even on the Shabbat.
3. Our reading of Halakhah teaches us that fire is something that is *soref*--*i.e.*, The substance itself is consumed in the process of burning and is turned to charcoal or ashes. Therefore, anything which is not *soref* (does not consume) is not *esh* (fire).
4. Halakhah also characterizes fire as producing a flame. (Incidentally, the Rabbis declared a glowing coal made of wood as fire for the purposes of roasting a Paschal Lamb, but a glowing metal coal is not considered fire; thus the Paschal Lamb could not be legally roasted over metal coals.)
5. It therefore follows that by both tests, electricity does not qualify as fire from the standpoint of the Halakhah:
 - a. A filament of an electric light, when it becomes incandescent and gives off light, is undergoing no combustion, and
 - b. it gives off no flame.
- 5a. Even the Maharam, a great recent Orthodox scholar, wrote: "I shall not conceal that I doubt whether lighting electricity can be considered work which is biblically prohibited, since there was no similar type of burning in the Tabernacle (the criterion used by the Rabbis for defining 'work'). For it is not fire and does not consume the filament. It is only like fire."
6. Scientists consider fire one form of energy and electricity another.
7. Even the most stringent people in our day and age no longer say you can't go in or out of your house, or open your refrigerator lest you trigger the thermostat.
8. It is a scientific fact that every bodily movement sets in motion electro-magnetic waves that we ourselves radiate. Are we ready to return to the biblical command, long ago rejected by our tradition, that we shouldn't move from our houses (or in them!) on Shabbat?
9. Many Orthodox scholars have permitted the benefits of electricity on Shabbat as long as it was turned on in advance.

10. Turning on an electric switch means using something which already exists, not creating anything new. The electricity has been produced through turbines or dynamos at the power stations and is stored in great condensers. It simply flows to us through cables and wires and is tapped by us in much the same way as water is brought to us through mains and pipes from the great reservoirs and is tapped by us by turning on a faucet.

11. Use of electricity on Shabbat does not imply doing those things still prohibited like cooking, shaving or washing clothes. Just because we use parve non-dairy creamers, doesn't mean we eat milk with meat!

12. Whatever electrical appliance we do use on Shabbat should be considered in the light of *ruach Shabbat*, or the atmosphere of holiness, serenity and family ties Shabbat seeks to promote -- *e.g.*, we might use the phone to talk to a friend, but not to order a pizza!

WHY PRAY?

There are various reasons people pray, many of them personal, some of them communal. Many are represented in the list below. Check off in the "yes" or "no" column reasons which seem valid for you personally, or which you can see being applicable to your own situation at some time in your life.

REASONS FOR PRAYING

Yes No

— —

1. Need to express innermost feelings: People need to show gratitude, humility, excitement, wonder, awe, amazement, appreciation, and thankfulness for being alive.
2. Fulfillment of desires: People have needs and desires and often turn to God (through prayer) to help them achieve those desires or help them in times of trouble or distress.
3. Relationship with God: Through prayer, people try to clarify and establish a personal, loving, and intimate relationship with the Power behind the universe. Prayer can enable an individual to feel a partnership with God in completing the work of creation.
4. Fear: People have basic fears, problems, and guilt feelings and turn to prayer to enunciate and clarify them.
5. Identification: Prayer enables the Jew to identify with past, present, and future members of the Jewish people, as well as with a particular community or peer group engaged in prayer activity and ritual.
6. Ethical responsibility: Prayer gives people the opportunity to evaluate themselves and their society by assessing the needs of others and evaluating their own values in the light of the values expressed in the prayers.
7. Study: The act of Torah study itself is considered a form of Jewish worship and is included within prescribed prayer rituals. It is vitally important in enriching one's intellectual abilities and adding to knowledge about living good lives.
8. To shape experience: The act of prayer can significantly change a given event. Saying a blessing at the appropriate time raises the experience to a higher and more spiritual level. Both the experience and the individual are enriched by a prayerful act.
9. Self-discipline: Regulating one's life around prayerful activity makes one sensitive, on a daily basis, to the wonders, mysteries, and challenges of living.

10. Joy of language and words: Many people enjoy the beauty and power of well-written poetry. Prayer is written, for the most part, in the language of poetry and many enjoy this type of emotional and intellectual experience.

11. Mitzvah: People engage in traditional prayer activities because they feel commanded by God to do so.

Now that you have checked off the reasons for praying which seem appropriate to you, it is only fair to look at pressures and problems which prevent people from participating enthusiastically in a prayer experience. In the list below, indicate those issues which seem to be most bothersome to you personally.

REASONS FOR NOT PRAYING

Yes No

- | | | |
|-----|-----|---|
| ___ | ___ | 1. God really doesn't listen (or maybe His answers always are "No"). |
| ___ | ___ | 2. I'm quite happy the way I am. |
| ___ | ___ | 3. It takes too much time. |
| ___ | ___ | 4. I don't understand the Hebrew language. |
| ___ | ___ | 5. I don't believe in God (or at least I'm not sure I do). |
| ___ | ___ | 6. It's boring. |
| ___ | ___ | 7. I'm angry with the way God has messed up the world. |
| ___ | ___ | 8. Why should He listen to me with everybody else to worry about? |
| ___ | ___ | 9. I don't like my synagogue (or its rabbi or cantor). |
| ___ | ___ | 10. I don't know enough about prayer to be comfortable. |
| ___ | ___ | 11. It's just not what I'm interested in. |
| ___ | ___ | 12. I'm afraid of what it might do to me (e.g., make me more religious, perhaps). |
| ___ | ___ | 13. None of my friends are interested in the synagogue or prayer. |
| ___ | ___ | 14. It's old-fashioned. |
| ___ | ___ | 15. I like to be spontaneous, not told what to say. |
| ___ | ___ | 16. I was turned off by Hebrew School. |
| ___ | ___ | 17. The prayers don't seem to meet my needs. |

Now, for each "yes" that you have checked off, ask yourself the following questions:

1. Is this a real reason for not praying or a convenient excuse?
2. Do I really believe this is a problem, or am I just afraid that if I give prayer a real chance it might become important to me?
3. Do I believe this myself or is it what most of my friends seem to believe?
- 4., What could I do to change this particular negative feeling?
5. What would be the first steps I could take if I really wanted to change this particular negative reaction to prayer?

Rabbi Yose ben Kisma related: Once I was travelling on a journey. A certain man met me and extended greetings. I greeted him in return. He inquired, "From where do you come?" I replied, "I come from a great city of scholars and sages." He said, "Rabbi, if it would please you to live with us in our community, I would give you thousands of gold *dinarim*, as well as the most precious stones and pearls in the world." I replied, "Though you give me all the silver, gold, precious stones, and pearls in the world, I would not live anywhere except in a community where there is Torah." Moreover, at the time of a person's death, neither silver, gold, precious stones, nor pearls will accompany him, only his Torah and his good deeds.

(Pirkei Avot 6:9)

The people of Israel were given three crowns: the crown of Torah, the crown of priesthood, and the crown of royalty. Aaron was given the crown of priesthood, as it is written: "It shall be for him and his descendants after him a pact of priesthood for all time" (Numbers 25:13). David acquired the crown of royalty, as it is written: "His line shall endure forever, his throne like the sun before Me" (Psalm 89:37). The crown of Torah, however, is designated for all Israel, for it is written: "The Torah which Moses handed down to us is the heritage of the community of Jacob" (Deuteronomy 33:4). Whoever desires it may come and get it.

(Mishneh Torah, *Hilkhot Talmud Torah* 3:1)

From *Reclaiming Our Legacy*, pp. 6-7.

THE COVENANT: THE STATE OF ISRAEL AND THE ROLE OF RELIGION

I. GENERAL CONCEPTS

1. Throughout the ages we have revered, honored, cherished, prayed for, dreamed of, and sought to settle in Jerusalem and the land of Israel.
2. We rejoice in the existence of Medinat Yisrael, the State of Israel, in the Land of Israel -- with its capital in Jerusalem.
3. The re-establishment of the modern state is indeed a miracle.
4. The *brit* or covenant between God and the Jewish people created an unbreakable bond between us and the geographic entity we call Eretz Yisrael, the Land of Israel.
5. Our religion has been land-centered, but never land-bound.
6. We are a portable religion and have survived creatively and spiritually in the Tefutsot (Diaspora).
7. Eretz Yisrael has always enriched world Jewry even as world Jewry has enriched Eretz Yisrael.
8. We encourage and cherish *aliyah* to Israel as a value, goal and *mitzvah*.
9. Conservative liturgy takes cognizance of the rebirth of Israel and Yom Ha-Atzmaut is observed in our congregations.
10. The State of Israel and Diaspora Jewry have complementary roles. Each has roles to fill. Each can aid and enrich the other.
11. Diaspora Jewry furnishes vital, economic, political, and moral support to Israel; Israel imbues Diaspora Jewry with a sense of pride and self-esteem.
12. Only in Israel may a Jew lead an all-encompassing Jewish life.
13. Jewish identity cannot be replaced by Israeli identity or the ability to speak Hebrew.
14. We see the State of Israel as needing to be a democratic state safeguarding freedom of thought and action for all of its citizens, while at the same time being a distinctively Jewish state fostering Jewish religious and cultural values. Finding the balance between the democratic and Jewish goals in Israel is a constant challenge.

15. We believe that the laws of Israel should support a pluralistic model of Jewish religious life, while protecting the rights of minorities as well as enabling the majority to express its views.
16. The state should permit all rabbis, regardless of affiliation, to perform religious functions.
17. The Conservative Movement believes that the Jewish religion as reflected in the Jewish way of life is the most significant factor that identifies, distinguishes, unites, and preserves the Jewish people. The State of Israel must therefore encourage and support patterns of Jewish life in all of the agencies of the State and its political subdivisions. For example, *kashrut* is observed in the army and government institutions. The Jewish calendar is in use.
18. Israel should reflect the highest religious and moral values of Judaism and be saturated with Jewish living to the fullest extent possible in a free society.
19. Israel should not be a theocracy, a state controlled by religion.
20. We oppose coercion in any area of religious life and practice in the State of Israel.
21. Matters of personal status (i.e., marriage, divorce, etc.) should fall under secular law.
22. Religion should be a moral influence not used for political power. Therefore we expect Israel's religious leaders to reprove political leaders who behave immorally, and to denounce governmental policies which violate religious and ethical norms.
23. We hope the State of Israel will always be a strong and secure democratic nation that will serve as a haven of refuge to Jews fleeing oppression and a welcome home for those who elect to go on *aliyah*.
24. Israel must set a standard and be an example for other nations to build their societies on principles of social justice, righteousness, compassion, and love for all citizens of all faiths and ethnic groups.

To be said on Israel's Independence Day:

We thank You for the heroism, for the triumphs, and for the miraculous deliverance of our ancestors in other days, and in our time.

In the days when Your children were returning to their borders, at the time of a people revived in its land as in days of old, the gates to the land of our ancestors were closed before those who were fleeing the sword. When enemies from within the land together with seven neighboring nations sought to annihilate Your people, You, in Your great mercy, stood by them in time of trouble. You defended them and vindicated them. You gave them the courage to meet their foes, to open the gates to those seeking refuge, and to free the land of its armed invaders. You delivered the many into the hands of the few, the guilty into the hands of the innocent. You have wrought great victories and miraculous deliverance for Your people Israel to this day, revealing Your glory and Your holiness to all the world.

(Siddur Sim Shalom)

USA denounces rabbinate's ruling on hostel

JERUSALEM (JTA) -- The United Synagogue of America, Conservative Jewry's North American congregational body, has responded angrily to the Jerusalem rabbinate's decision not to renew the kashrut certification of the movement's Bernstein Youth Hostel on Agron Street here.

"We are prepared to resort to the courts for relief and protection from this tyranny that is unfair, unreasonable and immoral," said USA president Franklin Kreutzer. "The Conservative Movement will not accept second-class citizenship in Israel."

At the same time, the Conservative Movement in Israel has vowed to appeal the decision to the High Court of Justice.

The certification was reportedly withdrawn suddenly, with no explanation, possibly because the Orthodox rabbis only recently learned that the hostel was affiliated with Conservative Judaism.

In an article in the June 29 *Jerusalem Post*, Rabbi Pesach Schindler, director of the World Center for Conservative Judaism, said that the center adheres to the kashrut and Sabbath laws and has had a kashrut certificate from the local rabbinate for the 14 years it has been open.

However, a spokesman for the Jerusalem rabbinate, Rabbi Yehoshua Pollak, likened the hostel's asking for a kashrut certificate to a monastery requesting one. He called it a place that "destroys the Jewish religion."

Calling the rabbinate's decision "a dramatic example of *sinat chinam* -- causeless hatred," Rabbi Jerome Epstein, chief executive officer and senior vice president of USA, said the hostel will continue to serve kosher food "of the highest quality" and will host 500 members of the movement's United Synagogue Youth organization this summer.