

The Mystery of Prayer

An interpretive Siddur for Kabbalat Shabbat and
Shabbat Mincha

Interpretations by Emtza USYers 2004-2005

Introduction

“Prayer has the power to generate insight; it often endows us with an understanding not attainable by speculation. Some of our greatest insights, decisions, and attitudes are borne in moments of prayer. Often where reflection fails, prayer succeeds.”

– Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel

Prayer is full of potential to take our minds and spirit to unthinkable heights. However many of us are unable to fully experience prayer because we either do not understand the words we are saying or the meaning behind them. Ergo, we are unable to harness the full power of prayer.

This interpretive siddur is a compilation of interpretations, written by your fellow USYers, of prayers from the Kabbalat Shabbat and Shabbat Mincha services. This siddur is an attempt to solve our difficulty understanding certain prayers.

Hopefully, by reading and exploring this interpretive siddur, you will develop your understandings of certain prayers as well as the concepts of prayer in general. Feel free to read these interpretations as we Daven.

Thank you to everyone who helped to make this interpretive siddur possible.

B'shalom

Elan Green

Emtza Region Religion and Education Vice President 2004 – 2005

What prayer means to us

Adath USY

Prayer means several things to Adath USY. First, it acts as a time to expunge all thoughts regarding school and other activities, and to use prayer to relax and realize what Shabbat means to them. Second, prayer acts as a way to strengthen our bonds with God, whether this is by asking God for things or thanking God for everything that God has already given to us. Third, prayer is something that is especially meaningful when experienced with others in the Adath USY community. However, despite this universal application of prayer, it also retains an individual aspect and a sense of self-purification and connection with God.

BEM

Prayer is very personal. Although not everybody may find meaning in the actual written prayers, davening often lends a hand in self-reflection and being able to stop for a moment and create one's own prayers. One thing that Beth El USYers all seemed to have in common, in regard to prayer, however, is that it is a unifying aspect throughout Jewish communities worldwide. Knowing just a bit of Hebrew and a few simple tunes, many of our USYers would feel comfortable in any congregation. The prayers are all the same, it doesn't matter where you go in the world. The meanings and interpretations will be different for every person, but the fact is, we could go to Spain, Canada, Texas, Israel, Brazil, Russia, or any number of places, and as long as we could find a group of Jews, we could daven with them. We wouldn't even need to know a word of their country's language - sure, it would help - but that strong Jewish connection would still exist between us. To Beth El USY, prayer is a connection. It is the link that bonds Jews from all over, together.

BESY

Prayer is a time to relax and forget about all of the troubles of the world. It's a way for people to connect with God and all of their ancestors. Prayer gives people a sense of connection to their religion and a meaningful way to express themselves. In the good times as well as the bad, prayer is essential for people to live their lives to the fullest. Praying as part of a group establishes senses of community and belonging; individual prayer creates a heightened sense of spirituality. Prayer is a special time when people can understand things on a deeper level and make sense of life's mysteries. Without prayer, life would be shallow and unfulfilled. By taking time to pray, people can learn things about themselves and feel things that nothing else in life can provide. This is what prayer means to BESY.

BJUSY

To BJUSY, prayer is one of the most important parts of Judaism. It is through prayer that we can connect to God, therefore connecting to our religion. Knowing that you and the person next to you are praying to the same God creates a bond that no other activity can make. Prayer at USY programs and conventions does this especially well. There is nothing like being together with more than 100 other Jewish teens, the room erupting with the words of Yedid Nefesh on Friday night as we bring in Shabbat together.

That is the communal part of prayer, but prayer is also very personal. When we pray, especially the Amidah, it is our own thoughts and ideas that we are communicating to God. No one has to know what we are asking God for or what we are requesting from God, it is completely our own time. It is a time of reflection, something that is very important for everyone, especially teenagers, to take time out of our day to do.

The reason that prayer is so meaningful and important is that it connects all Jews together and at the same time is a worthwhile moment for each individual to connect by him/herself to God.

BSKI

Prayer: a six letter word that encompasses our daily lives. It is at the core of Judaism and helps many of us through tough times in our lives. Whether before a test, working on a project or essay until the early hours of the morning, or in synagogue or at USY, prayer is what connects us with fellow Jews and God. You can sit or stand and thank God for the blessings he has given you, ask God for help in any situation larger or small, or question why something happened in your life, all the while knowing that there is someone there listening to you, someone who understands, whether you see him or not.

One of the most amazing things about Jews is that we pray for our entire people not just for ourselves. We pray for Israel, the country and the people, in numerous prayers on every occasion. We have songs and prayers of sadness and sorrow for our losses in history, but also songs and prayers of happiness and rejoicing to celebrate our present and our potential in the future. Thank God for your family, your friends, and for USY; and in return, you'll feel that happiness you've been longing for.

Denver Chai USY

What does prayer mean to Denver Chai USY? Praying is a time for us to emotionally connect with Hashem. It is a time for us to take a break from our every day hectic lives. While praying we can relax and forget about all the stressful worries that we may have. During the Amidah we stand and are spiritually in tune with God because we are standing in the presence of God. Also during the Amidah we have time to reflect on not only our personal self but on our community as Jews. Yes, it is true that sometimes, actually quite often, prayer can become a routine part of our lives that in fact we can go on auto-pilot while praying. However, it is imperative that we keep in mind why we are praying and how there is so much we can be thankful for in our lives.

KCUSY

KCUSY believes prayer is a way to communicate with God on various issues through thought and words. Prayer gets you through the rough times and is an escape from the real world for a little bit. It gives you time to think about the previous day and the current events of your life and the world. Some believe that Prayer helped you become a better Jew and it fulfills the Jewish duty. Most of all prayer is singing, learning, being with friends and family, and relaxing.

Mcol Lev USY

Prayer is very significant to Mcolusy in many ways. First off, prayer is an amazing way to feel connected to every Jew in the entire world. Regardless of what type of Judaism we practice, we all pray and give thanks to Hashem and it is in that way that we are all connected. Not necessarily prayer, but giving thanks to Hashem has been one of the foundations of Judaism since the time it began. It's incredible that we have a connection with an all powerful being that my ancestors also had 3,000 years ago. What's also amazing about prayer is that it is something that you can do by yourself or with a group. We find it interesting that one must daven in a group of at least 10 people when one is saying Mourner's Kaddish. This could show that it is important for us fellow Jews to comfort one during a time of need or tragic loss. However, it is also interesting that technically one must daven for themselves and cannot daven for someone else. This is why after a Chazan says a prayer, we say Amen so that we too may receive credit for the davening.

Mcolusy also finds prayer in ruach as we are giving praise to Hashem and thanking Hashem for allowing us to enjoy another Shabbat. This is what prayer means to Mcol Lev USY.

SZSL

When I first ask my fellow board members what prayer means to them, they eventually responded to me, but at first they had a bit of a hesitation. At first, I took it as quite normal for our aged teenagers to not want to spend their free time talking about sitting in a synagogue and reading a bunch of Hebrew, nonetheless actually doing it. But as I thought about it, this reaction puzzled me. From all of the amazing USY conventions that I have been too, we have prayed, prayed a lot. And it always seems that the overall impression is that prayer is some sort of a punishment. I thought, why is it that prayer is hated so much? Is it because of the feeling kids get that they are being forced to do it? That they are being deprived of their right to socialize with their friends? But then, why don't we think about the amazing privilege that praying is? It's our chance to communicate with God, to meditate, and take a little time for ourselves instead of thinking about that English paper you left to the last minute, or the TV show you want to record, or the dance coming up that you are still dateless for. I am asking you, as I asked my fellow board members to think past the difficult Hebrew and long hours of standing and to concentrate on how lucky we are today to be allowed to worship however we please. Imagine being alive in the time of the Maccabees, who weren't allowed to believe in what they choose to believe in, or pray to whom they chose to believe in. The same way you might feel that you aren't given a choice to talk to your friends, the Maccabees weren't given the choice of praying, or studying Torah. Hopefully today, we can appreciate the gift and privilege we are given by living in a free country. When I shared my feeling about prayer to the board, they completely agreed, and shared with me their feelings. "Prayer is a time to reflect on personal thoughts and feelings about my life and the world around me." "Prayer doesn't have to be from a siddur. Payer can be from the heart." Some of our board's favorite prayers include..."the Aleinu because of all the fun

stuff you can do during it." "the Shema because its the most important prayer." "Adom Olam, because I've always known it, and sung it since I was a kid. I like the backstreet boys version." So next time you turn to whisper to your friend during t'ffilah, think about the time when the Jews weren't allowed to pray, and what an important, meaningful, and spiritual time it can be.

Dani Saks USY Religion Education Vice-President

Prayer to me is something that is a pure expression of the soul. To take the time to ask God for something is truly a spiritual act. It forces the physical aspect of our lives to step aside for a moment and recognize that we don't always have power over our lives. Unfortunately, most prayer occurs when something terrible happens like the sickness of a friend or a family member, but to me prayer should be more than asking for help. After all, God doesn't need prayer, prayer is for us. It should be about creating a relationship with God and to keep us from not getting too wrapped up in our own lives. For example, someone who prays on a consistent basis understands that the well being of others is just as important as their own well being. After all, we're all created in the image of God.

The most important thing to remember is that prayer is supposed to be personal. That's why my favorite part of tefillot is the silent amidah. It's a great opportunity to connect with God without having to feel like you don't know what you're saying because there's an opportunity to add private prayer (during the bracha of shema tefillah). Try to take your prayer to a more personal level than ever before, and you'll be surprised at how your attitude might change.

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel

To pray is to take notice of the wonder, to regain a sense of the mystery that animates all beings, the divine margin in all attainments. Prayer is our humble answer to the inconceivable surprise of living. It is all that we can offer in return for the mystery by which we live. Who is worthy to be present at the constant unfolding of time? Amidst the meditation, the humility of flowers – wiser than all alphabets – clouds that die constantly for the sake of His glory, we are hating, hunting, hurting. Suddenly we feel ashamed of our clashes in the face of the tacit glory in nature. It is so embarrassing to live! How strange we are in the world, and how presumptuous our doings! Only one response can maintain us: gratefulness for witnessing the wonder, for the gift of our unearned right to serve, to adore, and to fulfill. It is gratefulness which makes the soul great.

Kabbalat Shabbat

Yedid Nefesh p. 252

Yedid Nefesh does not only hold the responsibility of helping us to transition into Shabbat. It is the prayer that we, as daveners, use to proclaim our deepest love and compassion for Hashem. Yedid Nefesh - Beloved of my soul, my soul mate. The translation of this prayer sounds, truly, like a letter between lovers. One's heart calling for the other's mercy, compassion, love, and safety that they will provide. When two soul mates are joined together, a single entity is formed. Without the other, it can seem impossible to exist. Yedid Nefesh is our profession to Hashem, saying that without His love and guidance, we would not survive. We would be lost and our hearts would break. All meaning in our existence would cease.

Marissa Shragg
BEM

Lechu Neranena p. 254

This prayer expresses how grateful we are for all the Lord has done for us. We identify many of the wonderful miracles the Lord has performed, and it is very happy and celebrative. We want to know that the Lord has always been there for us, and he always will be there. This prayer also talks about how we should not worship idles, and the Lord is honorable and joyful. We sing this prayer to thank the Lord for all the wonders he has worked, and he has worked many wonders.

Lindsey Gerson
KCUSY

Shiru La'Adonai Shir Hadash p. 254

Shiru La'Adonai Shir Hadash begins by telling us to "Sing a new song to Ha'Shem." What does this mean? To me, "singing a new song" does not mean to sing a song with different words or a different melody, but rather to sing with great ruach and kavanah. This prayer is full of natural personification, such as "letting the earth tremble in [God's] presence," "letting the sea and all it contains roar in praise," and "letting the field and forest sing for joy." This suggests that we should pray with such great ruach that even non-living things will get caught up in our celebration. This is certainly true for Kabbalat Shabbat because it's difficult to think of a time more appropriate to celebrate than sitting and waiting anxiously for the Shabbos Queen to arrive. Shiru La'Adonai Shir Hadash serves as a reminder that we should be praying "with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our might."

Brad Serber
BESY

Adonai Malach p. 256

"Adonai Malach" portrays God as an almighty power that presides in the thunderous clouds and tall mountains on this earth. His justice is honorable, righteous and supreme over all the land. But God and His power are hidden from view because they are not physical, but are spiritual. We make God and His justice part of the world when we sing praises of the righteous, and feel shame for the idol worshippers through our prayers and thoughts. Although God is all powerful, you should not fear Him because His power can become part of you when you carry on His mitzvot and commandments throughout one's actions in daily life. We, the people, make God visible in our hearts when He is not visible to the eye.

Yonit Olshan
SZSL

Mizmor Shiru L'Adonai Shir Hadash p. 256

Mizmor Shiru is a prayer that we sing during the Kabbalat Shabbat service on Friday evenings. This prayer talks about how we sing and praise God, for God has shown us power and strength. God has the power to continue life and kindness as long as we appreciate what God has given. The prayer says that we can just be grateful and thank God for what we have. This prayer makes me want to rejoice and enjoy the happiness of life. When singing and rejoicing to God, I feel a closer connection with not just God, but my relationships with other people. These connections help my relationships with the people I care about most. When I sing Mizmor Shiru, I feel a connection between all people and God, united as one. Rejoicing makes me see positive qualities of life, and goals that I want to accomplish in life. It is also a time where I can get to know myself better. Prayer helps me to think more clearly, and make important decisions. I sing Mizmor Shiru not just for its actual meaning, but for its values that affect me as a person. As I rejoice, I think about how the values in prayers can make me a better person. I hope that these ideas will help you to better understand your own prayer.

Danielle Sandler
Adath USY

Havu L'Adonai p. 260

Psalm 29 depicts the powers of God while being revealed in a thunder storm. This psalm describes God and illustrates the divine presence moving through the world.

We first acclaim God, God's children, God's glory and might, and lastly God's majestic name. We are then told to worship Adonai in a sacred way. There is no specific way we are told of how to do this. The psalm continues with the mention of God's voice numerous times. It makes me think on way to praise God is through our voices. It is important to use our voice with meaning while praying. When we find ourselves in services, we should pray, rather than talking to our neighbors. We should also be careful of the things we say to others at all times. Our voices are powerful and when used properly great things will come from them. We only need to realize the importance of our words and voices and the enormous effect they can have on people. To conclude the psalm, we are reminded that God strengthens and blesses us with peace.

Sarah Raider
BAUSY

Lecha Dodi p. 262

Lecha Dodi is the prayer during the Kabbalat service where we openly embrace our Sabbath Queen. What is so unique about the prayer Lecha Dodi is that it describes Shabbat as a bride and the way we present ourselves during the prayer is in a wedding fashion. When Shabbat enters during the last verse, we all rise and face the entrance like we would for a bride. So what can we learn about Shabbat being like a bride and a queen? The Zohar declares "On Shabbos, one must add on from the mundane to the holy in all matters: in one's eating, drinking, clothing, and reclining. One must prepare a pleasant sleeping chamber with embroidered covers and pillows from [the best of] all that is found in his house, just as one would prepare a marriage chamber for a bride. For behold, Shabbos is a queen and a bride." Just as the Shabbat is the source of all blessings, similarly, the rejoicing of the groom and bride and the greeting of them is the source of blessing. Our sages then go on to say that not only is Shabbat considered a queen, but we as a Jewish people are also considered a queen with the Torah being what binds us and Hashem. This could be why on Shabbat, we are suppose to dress nicer, rest, and praise Hashem as a queen may for her king.

Sam Zuber
Mcol Lev USY

Shir Shel Shabbat p. 266

A Song for Shabbat. Like most Kabbalat Shabbat prayers, Shir Shel Shabbat is a celebration of God. However as the first prayer after L'cha Dodi, Shir Shel Shabbat is the first prayer to praise God after we have "formally" greeted the Shabbat Queen. It shows us how God is in our lives throughout the day, even more so on Shabbat, "to proclaim your love each morning. To tell of your faithfulness each night." Shir Shel Shabbat is all about being happy. Each person being happy and each person being able to happily sing praises to God. Have you ever wondered why there are so many wicked

people in the world who are able to succeed, while many of the world's pious people have difficulty making ends meet? This prayer provides an answer to that question. It says that while the wicked flourish in this world, God has forever sealed their fate in doom, "Your enemies, Lord. Your enemies shall perish; all the wicked shall disintegrate". Like many other prayers, Shir Shel Shabbat praises God as just, saying that while the wicked have sealed their fate in doom, the righteous will "flourish like the palm tree; they shall thrive like a cedar in Lebanon."

Joel Portman
BSKI USY

Adonai Malach Geut Lavesh p. 268

The Lord is King, Crowned with Grandeur

In this psalm we are again affirming Hashem's greatness. It describes Hashem in His full grandeur at the completion of Creation. God is described as being dressed like a person in special Shabbat clothing. This could mean that we Jews can see, by God's quality of such a garment how great Hashem is. One might say, but isn't that superficial of Hashem? To which I would answer them, if you were trying to make a good impression at a job interview, wouldn't you dress on the nicer side to send the message that you are serious?

Arielle Rubin
Denver Chai

Mourner's Kaddish p. 268

The Mourner's Kaddish (Kaddish Yatom) is only one of 4 different types of Kaddish that we say during the service. However, the Mourner's Kaddish is the most talked about one. Like the other Kaddishes, it requires a minyan to say. Also like the other types, all of whose words are mostly the same, Kaddish Yatom praises God (using nearly every Hebrew word associated with praise) and asks for peace. The question is why is this prayer set out specifically for mourners and what does it have to do with mourning?

According to the Or Hadash commentary on Siddur Sim Shalom, the recitation of Kaddish Yatom by mourners probably started as a way of honoring them and their loved one who had passed away by allowing them to say an important prayer. Now it has become one of the many ways in which mourners publicly grieve over their loved one. It seems sort of strange that mourning, a deeply personal and private experience, would have a public aspect, however, in Judaism the public part of mourning seems to be almost as important as the private element. For thirty days after a sibling or child has passed away, and for parents eleven months, mourners say Kaddish Yatom and publicly mourn. The recitation of Kaddish Yatom is a way for the mourners to see that they have a great

community that is willing to help them if they need. For this reason, many people who aren't mourning stand during the Kaddish Yatom as a way to comfort the mourners.

Strangely, Kaddish Yatom says nothing about death or mourning. In fact, it mostly praises God for all that God does for us. This seems contradictory to what people feel after their loved ones die – often a sense of anger towards God and feelings of being depressed. It is for exactly this reason that mourners are told to recite Kaddish Yatom. At the time when they have the least faith in God's kindness and care, mourners are asked to publicly announce their belief in God's righteousness. Standing and saying "May God's great name be blessed forever" at a time of such sorrow is the ultimate pronouncement of faith and shows the rest of the community that if they can have faith during such troubling times, nothing should stop us from having faith in God.

Jonah Newman
BJUSY

Shabbat Mincha

Ashrei p. 558

"POTEYACH ET YADECHA UMASBIYAH LECHOL CHAI RATZON"

"Your hand is always ready to fill all life with joy"

At this point in the Ashrei it is customary to open your hand while reciting this verse and then kiss it after saying RATZON. Excluding bowing, gestures in davening are very uncommon. The ones we do are unfortunately performed blindly, out of habit. For example, most people do not know why we extend our pinky finger out during Hagba, why we bow in three different directions while reciting OSEH SHALOM, or why we take three steps back and three steps forward before we recite the Amidah. Although there are many different Mirashim to explain the reasoning behind these gestures, the action for POTEYACH ET YADECHA has a very simple meaning behind it. By opening out hands, we are mimicking Hashem opening His hand in generosity to fill our lives with happiness. The concept of generosity and giving to others, Tzeddakah, is a major aspect of Judaism. As Jewish teens, we are constantly reminded to share and give to those who are less fortunate than us. These days, teenagers are stereotyped as being selfish and inconsiderate. However, by saying the Ashrei, we prove this generalization to be false. We recognize Hashem's generosity and appreciate all He does for us. By opening our hands, we are allowing Hashem into our lives, hearts, and souls. We therefore know the importance of giving a small part of ourselves up for the betterment of others. Opening our hands symbolizes not just accepting Hashem, but what we will do in return for Hashem's kindness. We are being selfless and are grateful for having the opportunity to bestow onto others the joy we have in our own lives. POTEYACH ET YADECHA: through Hashem, we are able to open our hands to help bring joy to others.

Emily Gordon
Mcol Lev USY

Uvah Lztion p. 560

A few years back, Emtza decided to spice up the Shabbat Mincha service by adding new tunes. In USY, we allow people to be touched by prayers in different ways. For me, there are some prayers where I have read the words in English and felt a connection. Other prayers do not have meaning for everyone.

I first started connecting to this particular prayer because of its fun tune. I think that enjoying a nusach with other Jews is certainly an appropriate way to connect to t'ffilah – it encourages the community aspect of Judaism, but it has a different feeling than singing pop music with friends.

Although I knew the words and the tune, in the past I had never taken time to read the translation. Its meaning seems fitting, though. This prayer is about God. It is about personal relationships with God, but the prayer is written using pronouns like “we” and “us.” This prayer, both in its meaning and presentation, make me proud to be part of the Jewish community.

Alex Perl
Adath USY

Hatzi Kaddish p. 564

Hatzi Kaddish is one of the most repeated prayers in Judaism. It is a prayer of appraisal simply filled with comments about G-d's greatness. In Judaism it is important to always remember there is more than one kind of prayer. There are prayers asking for something: forgiveness, health, or good fortune. There are prayers that are thankful that a previous prayer has been answered. Then, there are prayers of praise. These prayers are very important because if a person was always asking for things or thanking G-d for the things he had, he may not remember the actual greatness of G-d. Whether or not one has good fortune, he would be taking for granted the fact that he was blessed with life and the ability to pray. The Hatzi Kadish successfully praises G-d and its repetition reminds us that we must always praise G-d for with what he has blessed us.

Naomi Rennard
BILU

Hotsei et ha Sefer (Taking out the Torah): The Grace of G-d p. 666

“I offer up my prayer to You, O Lord, at this time of grace. In Your abundant mercy, answer me with your saving truth.” (Siddur Sim Shalom p. 566)
Grace n. of the Latin gratia; pleasing, quality, favor, thanks, to lift up the voice, praise. As we remove the Torah from the ark during Shabbat Mincha, we speak of a “time of grace”. This grace refers to the grace of G-d, perhaps when the Jews were gathered at

Mount Sinai to receive the Torah for the first time. As we sing these songs of praise to God, imagine how the Jewish people felt as they stood watching the glow on Moses' face as he related to them the words of God for the first time. We talk about God's greatness. We talk about His mercy and power and splendor at this time as we do throughout most prayers and services. However this section of the service is different. We are preparing to hear the words of God, not the words of Rabbis and Sages, as meaningful as they may be. God's word is truth and power. His words will lead us towards mercy and happiness. By readying ourselves to hear God's words, we can truly appreciate their meaning and the effect they have on us.

Joel Portman
BSKI USY

Gabbi's prayer p. 568

"May his kingdom over us be revealed and become visible soon." These are the words that are said when someone is called to the Torah. In order for God's kingdom to be come visible to us we need to adhere to the laws and the guidelines that the Torah sets forward for us. If we live our lives according to the Torah then maybe that will be merit enough for the times of peace under God's kingdom to return.

Orrie Chazin
BESY

L'David Mizmor p. 570

For most kids the returning of the sefer Torah usually marks that the end of the service is very close. However, it means much more than that. When the rabbi returns the Torah to the Ark, he is giving back the gift that God gave to us. The Torah is being placed back into its home and we were blessed enough to have it in our presence for a short while. We share the gift that was given to us and we learn from it. God intended Torah to be a teacher to anyone who is eager to learn. When the Torah is placed back into the ark, the congregants are thanking God for sharing by reciting the blessing.

Marla Daniels
KCUSY

Uvnucho Yomar (Etz Chaim) p. 570

The first verse of this k'kedem comes from Bemidbar. It tells us that when the movable Ark, which the ancient Israelites carried with them in the wilderness, would come to rest, God would return to the many families of Israel. Hashem would be with them in rest and peace as well as travel and war.

The next three verses come from the Book of Psalms. They contain a prayer that the priests of Israel may act with righteousness, that God's pious followers may rejoice, and that God may restore the house of King David. This is said after we have spread the word of Hashem by reading from the Torah; keeping the Jewish religion thriving.

The last verses are from the Book of Proverbs and they describe the Torah as a tree of life (an enormous Jewish symbol) and its paths are peaceful. Just as a tree nurtures, protects, and provides sustenance for those living around it, the Torah guides, protects, and provides spiritual sustenance for the Jewish people. In conclusion we ask Hashem to renew our days of old.

Arielle Rubin
Denver Chai USY

Avot p. 574

Avot, literally translated means "ancestors". However the first words of the Amidah: "Open up my lips, O God, so that my mouth may declare your praise", has little to do with our ancestors. Yet, that opening moment allows me time to take a step back and breath before continuing with the rest of the Amidah. For me, this is the Amidah incarnate. The time to stop and look back and reflect on ones self and to find their Jewish identity is what Avot is. Standing and praying, listing off my ancestors and declaring the glory, God is centering and allows me to continue with confidence as I talk to God.

Zach Rosenblatt
Bausy

Kedusha p. 576

The title "Kedusha" or "holy" is certainly a fitting title for this prayer. The Kedusha begins with a proclamation of God's holiness, saying, "Holy, holy, holy Adonai Tz'vaot; the grandeur of the world is God's glory." The Kedusha expresses such praise for three paragraphs before it changes to be more a request than praise. The fourth paragraph of the Kedusha requests God's presence in Zion. It asks for God to return and rule over the Jewish people as described in the psalms of David. Much like many of the prayers in the traditional Jewish siddur, the Kedusha ends by once again praising God, declaring the greatness and holiness of Adonai.

Mara Sanders
BEM

Modim p. 580

Modim is a prayer that is said as part of the Amidah. This prayer is thanking God for being good to us and also praises God for God's mercy and kindness. It basically says that we are so indebted to God for all that God does for us, that we thank God morning, noon and night; and it is just this that sets Modim aside from other prayers. Modim is recited in every single Amidah, whether on a Yom Tov, on a normal weekday, or on Shabbat. In other words, Modim is said three times a day, everyday of the year. Personally, I interpret this prayer in the sense that we should be thankful that we have the opportunity to spend time with all of our friends in USY, even if it is only for one, two, or three weekends every year. Ergo, Modim is important because it connects us with God, and God connects us with religion, and religion connects us with USY, and in turn, USY with our friends.

Aaron Kaye
Adath USY

Elohei Natzor p. 584

Alohi Notzar is a very interesting prayer. It is the last prayer said in the Amidah. During this time one can insert their own personal prayers, wishes, hopes and thoughts. This is the reason the prayer is focused on oneself. "MY God, keep MY tongue from evil, MY lips from lies. Help ME ignore..." This is when one can personally talk to Hashem and have his complete attention.

At the end of this paragraph we say "Oseh shalom bemromav, who yaaseh Shalom alenu val kol yisrael vemru amen." During this line we are supposed to take three steps back, then bow to the left, then bow to the right, then bow to the center and finish by taking three steps forward. This is because, in the beginning of the Amidah we start off by taking 3 steps forward. We are supposed to be stepping into a box with Hashem. So during the amidah we are supposed to be inside Hashem's box, it is supposed to be 4 amot, which equals 3 feet. So at the end we take 3 steps backwards to symbolize us leaving Hashem's box. It symbolizes closeness.

Hava Munishor
Mcol Lev USY

Zakni L'simcha p. 584

While reciting Zakni L'simcha we ask God to "Grant me the privilege of the liberating joy of Shabbat, of truly tasting its delights. May I be undisturbed by sorrow during these holy Shabbat hours." This prayer articulates what I hope to get from every Shabbat, an opportunity to step back from the stresses of life and enjoy what is around me. Reciting this prayer gives us a chance to think about what will allow us to enjoy Shabbat, and how to use this special time.

Its location in the at the end the silent Amida in Shabbat Mincha , Zakni L'simcha presents itself as one final reminder of the opportunity to truly enjoy Shabbat as a time to be free of the worries of the secular world before Shabbat concludes.

As you recite Zakni L'simcha, take a deep breath and think about what it is you want to get out of Shabbat.

Élan Green
Emtza Region Rel/Ed

Kaddish Shalem p. 596

Kadish Shalem comes near the end of the service. It is a prayer of praise and though it is said mostly by the service leader, the occasional contribution by the entire congregation shows the importance of praising God as a community. This is especially evident in the last three parts of the prayer, which are the only parts which make this prayer different from the Hatzi Kadish. These lines basically state the hope that all people will be able to live in peace and goodness in life. This prayer not only shows the idea that it is important to praise God in one's prayers, but also to pray for all people, those we know and those we have not yet met.

Naomi Rennard
BILU

Aleinu p. 598

The Aleinu is one of the most interesting teffilot in our siddur. It does not fit into any grouping of the normal teffilot. It is not a "thank you", "sorry", "request", or prayer of the awe of God. So, what is the Aleinu really about anyway?

The Aleinu is a declaration separating Judaism from paganism and all other religions. When the Aleinu was written, Hellenism (Alexander the Great and the Greeks) were taking over Israel and assimilating Jews into their culture. When Jews recite this teffilah, they are separating themselves from the secular world. So essentially, this teffilah is for us, and not for God like most teffilot. It is only until the second paragraph when we address God into the equation to say that we wait for the Messiah.

USY is an organization which provides us with the distinction from the ordinary world and the world of Conservative Judaism. It allows us to appreciate Judaism and take pride in being Jewish teens. The Aleinu is a teffilah which instills pride in being Jewish just as USY makes us proud representatives of the Conservative movement. So the next time you recite the Aleinu, whether it be at shul or at a convention, remember to take pride in who you are and what you represent.

Josh Goldberg
Religion and Education chair International General Board

Adon Olam p. 6

Adon Olam is one of the best known prayers in the siddur. The author of this prayer is thought to be Solomon Ibn Gabirol, a poet philosopher who lived in Spain. Basically, the first 6 lines in Adon Olam express God as infinite, timeless, and as the creator of all. The last 4 lines tell how the poet relates to God, and the trust he feels toward God. This is best expressed in the last line, "God is with me; I have no fear." The message is that while God is great and infinite, God still involves God's self in man's personal needs when man is in distress.

Eli Allen
BJUSY