

REFRESHING JUDAISM: *THE WAY WE PRAY*

Session IV: Words and rituals that give meaning to home and synagogue spirituality

November 8, 2020 • 10:00 a.m.

Presented by Cantor Melissa Cohen



WHY PRAYER? WHY PRAY?

THE COMMANDMENT TO PRAY: *You shall serve God with all your heart (Deuteronomy 11:13)*

וְהָיָה, אִם-שָׁמַעַתְּ תִשְׁמָעוּ אֶל-מִצְוֹתַי, אֲשֶׁר
אֲנִי מְצַוֶּה אֶתְכֶם, הַיּוֹם--לְאַהֲבָה אֶת-יְהוָה
אֱלֹהֵיכֶם, וּלְעִבְדוֹ, בְּכָל-לְבַבְכֶם, וּבְכָל-
נַפְשְׁכֶם.

And it shall come to pass, if you shall hearken diligently unto
My commandments, which I command you this day, to love
and serve God with all your heart and with all your soul...

INSPIRATION FROM OUR SAGES:

- The prayers that you pray are the very presence of God. (*Pinchas of Koretz*)
- What begins with a person's request ends with God's presence; what starts in the narrowness of the ego, emerges into the wide expanse of humanity; what originates in concern for the self becomes a concern for others...what commences in petition concludes as a prayer. (*Samuel Dresner*)
- The service of gratitude is eternal. Our worship must not be impatient supplication, but patient praise. We must think less of what we lack, more of what we have. (*Rabbi Mordecai M. Kaplan*)
- We enter the synagogue in conversation with ourselves. And as we engage in prayer, this conversation becomes one conducted with God. (*Rabbi Edward Feld*)
- When the words that I speak are the same as the promptings of my heart, then my voice is pleasing to God. (*Joseph Albo*)
- Maimonides asserts that there is an obligation to pray and enumerates this obligation in his list of 613 mitzvot. Other medieval authorities disagree and find no warrant for the obligation in Torah. So why does Maimonides turn prayer into an obligation? For Maimonides, prayer instills a sense of appreciation and humility before the wonders of life—essential aspects of a religious path. Thus he sees prayer as an essential part of the process of religious formation. (*Mishneh Torah, Hilkhoh Tefillah 1:1*)
- One's prayer is answered only if one takes one's heart into one's hands. (*Rabbi Ami; Babylonian Talmud*)
- Prayer is for one's soul what nourishment is for one's body... (*Yehuda Halevi*)
- I am not always in a mood to pray. I do not always have the vision and the strength to say a word in the presence of God. But when I am weak, it is the law that gives me strength; when my vision is dim, it is duty that gives me insight. (*Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel*)

🔗 **Why do you pray? What makes you pray?**

KEVA AND KAVANAH

Keva: The fixed liturgy, the “when, how and what way prayers are arranged and recited” according to the early Rabbis.

Kavanah: Intention; recitation of personal or *keva* with the spontaneity of the heart

 **How do we balance the *keva* (fixed routine) with the *kavanah* (intentionality; personal) during prayer?**

Jewish prayer is guided by two opposite principles: order and outburst, regularity and spontaneity, uniformity and individuality, law and freedom, a duty and a prerogative, empathy and self-expression, insight and sensitivity, creed and faith, the word and that which is beyond words. These principles are two poles about which Jewish prayer revolves.

- Routine holds us in readiness for the moments in which the soul enters into accord with the spirit. *(Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel)*
- Teach me, God,
To bless and to pray for the secret within the enfolded leaf,
The glow of a ripening fruit,
And this freedom: to see, to sense, to breathe, to know, to celebrate, to fail.
Teach my lips how to bless and sing praises as Your time is renewed with the arrival of morning,
And evening, that my day today be not like my yesterdays,
That my day not simply be habit. *(Lea Goldberg)*

MINHAG HAMAKOM “THE CUSTOM OF THE PLACE”

אל תִּפְרוֹשׁ מִן הַצִּבּוֹר “Do not separate yourself from the congregation/community.” *(Pirkei Avot 2:5)*

Many different Jewish communities have evolved their own particular *way* of prayer. Many of them have different customs and variations, including our own. *Not all shuls are the same!*

- Remember, *minhag* (custom) is not *halakha* (law)!

 **List 3 examples of prayer customs that you observe:**

- 1.
 - 2.
 - 3.
- There are many ways to express ourselves in prayer and all are quite within our tradition, even if unfamiliar to you! No one way is “correct” or “wrong!”

MUSIC AND PRAYER

Most religious traditions go beyond mere words in expressing prayer. Music is perhaps the most abstract and expressive language in our world. Music helps us when words are insufficient and has the power to renew the meaning of words that are recited over and over again.

Why is the Torah *chanted* in public, like a song, and not *read*, like a book?

The Torah is referred to as a *shirah*, a song, intended to be chanted, not read. Music is interwoven into the fiber of lives through Torah. Music is intended to be a key element in our services.

וְעַתָּה, כְּתֹבוּ לָכֶם אֶת-הַשִּׁירָה הַזֹּאת, וְלַמָּדָה אֶת-בְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל, שִׁמָּה בְּפִיהֶם: לְמַעַן תִּהְיֶה-לִּי הַשִּׁירָה הַזֹּאת, לְעֵד--בְּבָנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל. Therefore, write down this song and teach it to the people of Israel; put it in their mouths, in order that this song may be My witness against the people of Israel. (*Deuteronomy 31:19*)

- The way to praise God is first to begin with the words and then, as our souls rise, to give expression to the words with song. The music moves us to sing without words and, finally, our whole body wants to praise God, and we dance. (*The Baal Shem Tov*)

Do you have a favorite melody or prayer? What is it? Why do you like it?

What's On Your "Pray"list?

Nusah: A simple form of prayer chant for weekdays and Shabbat developed during the Diaspora that varies according to time of day and year.

- Most modern Cantors or *Hazzanim* incorporate both *nusah* and more melodic and song-like pieces to interpret liturgy.
- Nusah is a cycle of musical ritual on which we can rely and expect:
 - Weekday (morning, afternoon, evening)
 - Shabbat (morning, additional, afternoon, evening)
 - High Holy Days (morning, additional, afternoon, evening)
 - Festivals (and then special melodies within the Festivals)

Trope: A musical notation that also provides the proper syntax and accentuation of the words in the *Tanakh*.

- There are six trope modes:
 - Regular/Shabbat Torah
 - High Holiday Torah
 - Haftarah (prophetical)
 - Esther
 - Lamentations
 - Song of Songs/Ruth/Ecclesiastes

Why do we read Torah on Mondays and Thursdays?

In the 5th Century BCE, Ezra the Scribe was the person to reinstate the service in the Second Temple as well as the public reading of the Torah on Mondays and Thursdays, to coincide with market days.

WOMEN AND PRAYER

An Expression of Gratitude

Rabbi Yoḥanan stated, “From the beginning of time, no one ever thanked God as Leah did.” (*Babylonian Talmud B’rakhot 7b*). For she said: “This time I will praise and thank (*odeh*) Adonai” (Genesis 29:35), giving the name “Judah” (*Y’hudah*) to her newborn son. Thus, the descendants of Jacob would be known as “Jews” (*Y’hudim*) meaning “thankful.” Her heartfelt prayer of thanks reflects her having grown from self-concern and what she lacked to a genuine sense of appreciation for what she has.

In Honor of our Ancestors

The first blessing of the *Amidah* recalls our ancestors and their relationship to God and God’s continuing relationship to us, their descendants.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי, אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ וְאִמּוֹתֵינוּ
אֱלֹהֵי אַבְרָהָם, אֱלֹהֵי יִצְחָק, וְאֱלֹהֵי יַעֲקֹב,
אֱלֹהֵי שָׂרָה, אֱלֹהֵי רִבְקָה, אֱלֹהֵי רָחֵל, וְאֱלֹהֵי לֵאָה

Blessed are You, our God and God of our ancestors,
God of Abraham, God of Isaac, and God of Jacob,
God of Sarah, God of Rebecca, God of Rachel, and God of Leah

 Why is “God of...” repeated before each ancestor’s name?

And Hannah Prayed...

וַתִּתְפַּלֵּל עַל-יְהוָה תְּבִכָּה. ...she (Hannah) prayed to God, weeping all the while. (*1 Samuel 1:10*)

וְהָיָה כִּי הִרְבִּיתָהּ, לְהִתְפַּלֵּל לִפְנֵי יְהוָה; וְעָלִי, שֹׁמֵר אֶת-פִּיהָ. As she kept on praying before God, Eli watched her (Hannah’s) mouth. (*1 Samuel 1:12*)

וְחִנָּה, הִיא מְדַבֶּרֶת עַל-לִבָּהּ--רַק שִׁפְתֶיהָ נִצְעוֹת, וְקוֹלָהּ לֹא יִשְׁמָעַל. Now Hannah was praying in her heart; only her lips moved, but her voice could not be heard...(*1 Samuel 1:13*)

וְאֲשַׁפֵּךְ אֶת-נַפְשִׁי, לִפְנֵי יְהוָה. ...I have been pouring out my heart to God. (*1 Samuel 1:15*)

וַתִּתְפַּלֵּל חֲנָה אֵין-קְדוֹשׁ כִּיְהוָה, כִּי אֵין בְּלִתְדָּ; וְאֵין צוּר, כְּאֱלֹהֵינוּ. And Hannah prayed... There is no holy one like Adonai, truly, there is none beside You; there is no rock like our God. (*1 Samuel 2:1-2*)

And They Persisted...

The First Female Rabbis:

Regina Jonas, Z”L (ordained in Germany 1935)

Sally Priesand (ordained 1972—Reform)

Sandy Eisenberg Sasso (ordained 1974—Reconstructionist)

Amy Eilberg (ordained 1985—Conservative)

Sara Hurwitz (*ordained 2009—Orthodox)

*not universally recognized/accepted within orthodox communities

The First Female Cantors:

Barbara Ostfeld (ordained 1975—Reform)

Erica Lippitz and Marla Rosenfeld Barugel (ordained 1987—Conservative)

Sharon Hordes (ordained 2002—Reconstructionist)



A NOTE ON KADDISH

- The blow to faith is never more pronounced than it is at the moment when you bury a loved one. Yet, here comes the Kaddish and proclaims faith in God. It isn't that the mourner is talked back into faith by reciting the Kaddish. But the fact that a mourner says the Kaddish keeps the mourner in the community of faith.
(Ron Wolfson)

I Cannot Ask You to Say Kaddish For Me (Henrietta Szold, founder of Hadassah)

September 16, 1916 (New York)

It is impossible for me to find words in which to tell you how deeply I was touched by your offer to act as "Kaddish" for my dear mother. I cannot even thank you — it is something that goes beyond thanks. It is beautiful, what you have offered to do — I shall never forget it.

You will wonder, then, that I cannot accept your offer. Perhaps it would be best for me not to try to explain to you in writing, but to wait until I see you to tell you why it is so. I know well, and appreciate what you say about, the Jewish custom; and Jewish custom is very dear and sacred to me. And yet I cannot ask you to say *Kaddish* after my mother. The *Kaddish* means to me that the survivor publicly and markedly manifests his wish and intention to assume the relation to the Jewish community which his parent had, and that so the chain of tradition remains unbroken from generation to generation, each adding its own link. You can do that for the generations of your family, I must do that for the generations of my family.

I believe that the elimination of women from such duties was never intended by our law and custom — women were freed from positive duties when they could not perform them, but not when they could. It was never intended that, if they could perform them, their performance of them should not be considered as valuable and valid as when one of the male sex performed them. And of the *Kaddish* I feel sure this is particularly true.

My mother had eight daughters and no son; and yet never did I hear a word of regret pass the lips of either my mother or my father that one of us was not a son. When my father died, my mother would not permit others to take her daughters' place in saying the *Kaddish*, and so I am sure I am acting in her spirit when I am moved to decline your offer. But beautiful your offer remains nevertheless, and, I repeat, I know full well that it is much more in consonance with the generally accepted Jewish tradition than is my or my family's conception. You understand me, don't you?

[Marvin Lowenthal, *Henrietta Szold: Life and Letters*. New York: The Viking Press, 1942. pp. 92-93. Used by permission of Viking Penguin, a division of Penguin Group (USA), Inc.]

Kaddish in Popular Culture

- In the episode "Kaddish for Uncle Manny" on the TV show *Northern Exposure* (1993), Joel seeks out ten Jews in remote Alaska to join him for Kaddish in memory of his recently departed Uncle in New York. Watch here beginning at 47:26: <https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x3rg4rr>
- The concluding words of Kaddish, *Oseh Shalom*, are set to the traditional melody and feature prominently in *Prayer* from the musical *Come From Away* (2013). Listen here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RO8uT90qNoQ>