

"How God the voice of Jacob" ^{even though Jacob had the political leadership of the Jewish people} ^{Make emphasis}
 that Jacob still needed to pray. why though if Jacob had all this power DID he need to pray. What is prayer to
 why do we need to pray? ^{WHY DO WE PRAY?}

Prayer is a cry for help. Unless a human being believes that he needs help he cannot pray. Most of the time when we make decisions in life we make them blind. We do not have all the facts, and we can never have all the facts. Man is, by his very nature, limited. The most important decisions in our life we make intuitively: who to marry, what occupation to enter, even where to live. We do not interview 2 billion members of the opposite sex before we determine our marriage partner. We do not look through the hundreds of occupations listed by the United States Department of Labor before we choose our occupation. Most decisions we make in life are judgement calls. There are 50 reasons for doing a particular thing and 50 reasons for not doing it. We all need G-d's help in order to make the right decisions. We are not in control of all the factors in the world. When we pray we, in effect, say, "G-d, I do not understand everything about this world, but I know that You do. I need Your help. Please help me as You have helped our forebearers in the past. Please make sure that I make the right decisions. There is so much pain and evil in the world. Please allow me to cope with whatever life throws at me. I know that goodness will eventually triumph, and I know that I have to live a righteous life so that I can help You bring this triumph about. Please give me the strength and courage to help You. I also know, O Lord, that You have never promised us that if we will follow Your commandments we will not have problems, that You have only promised us that You will give us the strength to overcome these problems if we follow Your commandments. Please, O Lord, give me this strength."

This is the underlying message of all Jewish prayer. This is what it means to daven. In order, though, to make these assertions there are certain underlying beliefs that we must hold. We must believe that G-d is the creator, that G-d has the capacity to act and that it is proper to pray to Him; (2) that G-d is the revealer, that G-d wants to have a personal relationship

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with us, and that He has given us the Torah so that we can help Him perfect ourselves and the world; and (3) that G-d is the redeemer, that He wants this world to be perfected and that He wants us to help Him do this job. All Jewish prayer revolves around these three themes.

In the morning service we first proclaim that G-d is the creator. This we do in the first of the two blessings we recite before the Shma. This blessing opens with the the words, "Blessed art Thou, Lord, our G-d, King of the Universe, Who forms light and creates darkness, Who makes peace and creates all things." It concludes with the words, "Blessed art Thou, O Lord, Creator of the lights." In the second blessing before the Shma we declare G-d to be the revealer. We proclaim, "Our Father, our King, for the sake of our forebearers who trusted in Thee whom Thou didst teach laws of life, be gracious to us and teach us likewise to observe, do, and fulfill gladly all the teachings of Thy Torah." It concludes with the words, "Blessed art Thou, O Lord, Who has graciously chosen Thy People Israel." We then recite the Shma which proclaims that G-d is one. In the Shma we testify that we have accepted upon ourselves the responsibility to be G-d's partner in perfecting the world, that we have accepted upon ourselves the yoke of the commandments. We then say the blessing after the Shma which proclaims that G-d is the Redeemer, that G-d not only created the world and revealed His will to us but also wants to perfect this world and wants us to help Him. We then say the silent Amidah in which we ask specific things of G-d. The rabbis tell us that there can be no interruption between the Ge'ula and the Tefila, which means between the last prayer which proclaims G-d as the redeemer and the silent Amidah in which we ask G-d's help. This emphasizes the point that first we must believe G-d can help and will help before we can ask G-d for His help.

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Jewish prayer reaffirms over and over again this threefold message: G-d can help, G-d wants to help, and G-d will help us if we turn to Him. In the introductory prayers of the morning service, called Pesuke Zemira, we sing G-d's praises, not that He needs these praises but in order for us to realize (1) that we are not alone, that we are grateful to Him for having given us this opportunity to be His partner in creation; (2) that we never have to be alienated, that G-d loves and cares for us and because of this love we have self-respect and dignity; (3) that we can go beyond ourselves and touch the godly within ourselves and outside ourselves; (4) that G-d has given us a Neshoma, a soul, which yearns to be in G-d's presence. It is impossible to pray (1) if we do not feel that there is a G-d to whom we can pray; (2) if we feel that the G-d to whom we pray is not interested in us; or (3) if we feel that G-d to whom we pray cannot help. In order to pray with a full heart we must believe that G-d has the capacity to help, that G-d wants to help, and that G-d will help if we turn to Him. It is not really important whether or not we know what the prayers mean word for word. Of course, it is better if we do. What is crucial is the attitude we have when we pray. We cannot be passive when we pray or daven. We must actively participate, which means we must say the words with our lips. We must feel what we say. We must feel we are talking to G-d.

In traditional Jewish worship there are two distinct parts to the service. There is prayer, in which we talk to G-d, in which we pour out our hopes, aspirations, pain, and doubts to Him, and there is learning Torah, in which G-d speaks to us. Prayer, in a certain sense, is almost a form of self-hypnosis in which we continually remind ourselves (1) that it is not might that makes right but right that makes might; (2) that our lives do make a difference; (3) that our suffering is not for nothing; (4) that we are important; and (5) that we can help G-d make this a better world.

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All Jewish prayers are in the plural because we do not pray just for ourselves. We pray for our people, our family, and the whole world. We know that we are part of a larger whole. That's, too, why we cannot say Kaddish and certain other prayers unless we have a minyan. The minyan testifies to the fact that we come closest to G-d when we all work together as a community. Davening with a minyan is a form of identification and reaffirmation. We all draw strength from seeing that each one of us is in the same boat, that we all need help, and that we all must acknowledge that we need help. We know that life is difficult, that many things in it are incomprehensible, painful, and even absurd, but we also know that in the end G-d's kingdom will come and the world will be better if we will all work together. We do not all have to walk in locked step to bring this about. What we have to do is what we do in a minyan where everyone prays individually but together. Each of us is called upon to make our own positive contributions but in harmony with others. We do not have to sacrifice our individuality in order to be part of the minyan. We just have to coordinate our activities.

Davening reaffirms our basic Jewish belief that if we will all work together we can go beyond ourselves. We can make this a much better world, and, at the same time, because we have drawn closer to each other we can realize the godly within each of us.

THE MECHANICS OF PRAYER

We pray three times a day: Shacharis, the morning prayer; Mincha, the afternoon prayer; and Maariv, the evening prayer. The rabbis teach us that we have these three prayers based on the experiences of our forefathers. Abraham instituted the morning prayer, Yitzchak instituted the afternoon prayer, and Yaacov instituted the evening prayer. We need G-d's help both day and night. When the Jewish people wandered in the desert a pillar, a cloud, was above the Tabernacle by day and a pillar of fire by night. During the

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daylight when man has great success, sometimes he forgets why he has had this success. He forgets that he has a silent partner Who has allowed him to make the right decisions. He forgets that his vision is cloudy, and he feels that he has done it all himself. We have to remember during the day when we begin an enterprise and when we conclude it, both in Shacharis and Mincha, that we have been blessed by G-d and, therefore, we have been able to succeed. Abraham blessed G-d when he rose early in the morning. Yitzchak blessed G-d in the afternoon when he was walking in the field and saw how his labors were coming to fruition. We also must bless G-d at night when the darkness surrounds us, when things do not go our way. We also must thank G-d for giving us the opportunity to rectify bad decisions and for allowing us to still have hope even when all looks lost because He is there to help us. Yaacov, when he ran away from his brother, Esau, alighted at a certain place, which the rabbis explain was Mount Moriah, the Temple site, and fell asleep after the sun had set and had a magnificent vision of angels ascending and descending a ladder into heaven. Even at night when personal troubles overwhelm us, we should never give up but realize that G-d's protection and help is always available.

The rabbis also tell us that the prayers we have today are based on the ancient Temple services in which there was a morning communal sacrifice and an afternoon communal sacrifice. When we come to pray in the morning we first put on a tallis fulfilling the Biblical commandment to look at the fringes of our garments so that we shall not go astray. The tallis, the rabbis say, is equivalent to all the 613 commandments. The word "tzitzit" or "fringes" in Hebrew stands for 600. We have 8 strings and 5 knots on each tzitzit, which stands for 13. When we wrap ourselves in our tallis we set the mood for prayer. We put ourselves in the correct frame of mind. It is preferable to pray in a synagogue for the same reason because when we enter a synagogue we have expectations of meeting G-d there. G-d exists, of course, all over,

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and we can pray in every place, but when we enter a synagogue we expect to find G-d there. When we don a tallis we put ourselves in the right mood for prayer. We also remind ourselves that in life we cannot do everything we feel like doing. We must pursue mitzvahs. In this way we will assure our happiness.

The Jewish view of life is similar to the American view but it is not identical. In America we believe in life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. In Judaism we believe in life, liberty, and the pursuit of mitzvahs. By pursuing mitzvahs we will ultimately be happy because we believe happiness is a by product of doing mitzvahs. We do not believe you can be happy by pursuing happiness directly. The tallis reminds us that we have responsibilities not only to ourselves but to G-d and to our fellow human beings.

On a weekday we also put on tephillin. One of the main meanings of tephillin is that it is a symbol of the marriage between G-d and Israel. The 7 windings on the hand stand for the 7 marriage blessings. The tephillin on the head stands for the marriage veil, and the 3 windings on the finger stand for the marriage ring. Putting on tephillin signifies that we believe that G-d has singled out Israel for the unique mission of spreading His morality in the world. It also teaches us that great truth which Judaism continually proclaims in all its practices, that ideas must be concretized in order to affect man's conduct. Our head, our hand, and our heart must be linked together if we are to be able to do great thing. If we are right handed, we put tephillin on our left hand. If we are left handed, we put the tephillin on our right hand. We always put the tephillin on the weaker hand to demonstrate that we must never utilize all our power in a given situation, that we must never take advantage of the weak and the helpless. We do not believe in the killer instinct. We must continually bind our strength to the laws of

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morality. Our strength, our minds, and our feelings must be totally in the service of G-d. That's why the tephillin on the arm is opposite the heart, and the tephillin on the head is opposite the brain. When we pray we acknowledge that there are limits to what we can do. We cannot do what we want when we want. We cannot say that the strong, intelligent, and talented deserve everything and others deserve nothing. This survival of the fittest type of thinking is not Jewish. It is actually the foundation of Nazism.

After we put on our tallis and tephillin we then thank G-d for allowing our bodily functions to work. We in Judaism do not believe that the body is evil and the soul pure. We believe that the body and soul are a unity and meant to work together to help perfect this world. We then thank G-d for giving us the opportunity to learn Torah, which teaches us how we are to act in the world, how we are to balance the conflicting forces upon us.

We then learn a small piece of Torah from the Book of Numbers and then from the Mishnah Peah and then from the Talmud Berachot, in which we proclaim that G-d has given us a soul that is pure. We affirm again the fact that we are important, that G-d loves us, and that we yearn to be in G-d's presence because our soul, itself, is part of G-d. We then thank G-d for giving us intelligence, for making us a Jew, for clothing us, providing for our needs, etc.

We then review the service as it occurred in the ancient Temple, and then we launch into the Pesuke Zemira, in which we thank G-d for creating us and again reaffirm the three basic Jewish beliefs that G-d has power, that G-d wants to relate to us, and that G-d wants to redeem the world and have us help Him do it. The morning service then continues with the two blessings before the Shma, the blessings after the Shma, and the Amidah, the silent standing prayer. In the Amidah we have 19 benedictions. The first three and the last three we say every time we say the silent Amidah. The Amidah is known in the Jewish tradition as "Hatfila - the prayer". It is only in

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the Hatfila that we can ask G-d for anything. It is in the middle 13 benedictions that we ask G-d for things. You can tell what Jewish priorities are by studying what we ask for. We ask (1) that we be granted knowledge. Without learning and knowledge a human being cannot elevate himself and cannot come close to other human beings and G-d. (2) That we all realize that we have self-worth, that no human being is bad or damned. We all have dignity and are important. (3) That no matter how much we have sinned we can restore our dignity and self-worth by repenting. G-d will forgive us. (4) That we all need G-d's help in life. We can do everything right and still fail, like the farmer who plows and seeds but then there is a drought. We all need G-d's help. (5) That we all need good health. We can always rebuild and regain our fortune but once we lose our health we are in a very bad position. (6) We ask G-d for material prosperity, that the crops should be full and bountiful. (7) We ask G-d for our freedom, that Jewish people should be assembled once again in Israel. (8) That we should once again be able to judge ourselves by the Torah, that we should not be subject to tyranny, false judges, etc. (9) That the slanderers and enemies of the Jewish people should be humbled. (10) That G-d's mercy should be felt by all who trust in Him and they should not be put to shame. (11) That Jerusalem should be rebuilt. (12) That the Messiah should come speedily in our day. (13) That G-d should hear our prayers and not turn us away empty handed.

On Shabbos and holidays we do not ask anything from G-d in the silent Amidah. On Shabbos and all holidays, except for Rosh Hashonna, we have only 7 benedictions, the first 3 and the last 3 and a middle benediction which speaks about Shabbos or the holiday. On Rosh Hashonna we have 9 benedictions: the 3 middle ones speak about the holiday of Rosh Hashonna. The first 3 benedictions of every Amidah speak about our forebearers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, about G-d's kindness in supporting all who fail, healing the sick, and reviving the dead

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and about G-d's holiness. The last 3 speak about the hope that G-d will always be pleased with the prayers of Israel, that all living things shall praise Thee, and that we will be blessed with peace. We hope and pray that G-d will bless Israel and the world with peace. Peace is the crown of all the blessings.

On Shabbos and holidays there is a special Mussaf which again confirms the fact that in the ancient Temple there was a Mussaf in which we thanked G-d for giving us the holidays. Again each holiday represents a basic Jewish belief. Pesach stresses the fact that G-d is the redeemer; Shavuot that G-d is the revealer; and Rosh Hashonah, Yom Kippur, and Succot that G-d is the creator. On Monday and Thursday and Shabbat mornings and afternoons as well as the holidays and Rosh Chodesh, we take out and read the Torah. On Mondays and Thursdays and Mincha of Shabbat we call three people to the Torah. On Rosh Chodesh we call four. On Pesach, Shavuot, and Succot and Rosh Hashonah we call 5. On Yom Kippur we call 6, and on Shabbat 7. When a person is called up to the Torah he thanks G-d for giving us the Torah. After being called up to the Torah a mishebirach may be made. Mishebirach means literally "May the One Who blessed our fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, bless so and so who has come to honor G-d and the Torah. May the Holy One, Blessed be He, protect and deliver him from all distress and illness, and bless all his efforts with success together with all of Israel, his brethren, and to this let us say amen." A mishebirach, or blessing, may also be said on behalf of a sick person or may be said to bless one's family or on many happy occasions: for example, the naming of a newborn daughter, a wedding anniversary, a birthday, etc.

Kaddish is an affirmation of belief. It expresses our faith that eventually the Kingdom of G-d will come, that all pain, suffering, and inhumanity will cease. The Kaddish was chosen to be said by mourners because to express such faith at a time of such pain requires great courage. It is also considered a great merit to parents to have raised such children who can, in such a

painful time, reaffirm their belief in the ultimate goodness of the world. The greatest thing that we can accomplish in this world is to leave behind good children, children who follow in the traditions of our faith. When someone rises in the congregation and affirms once again the faith of Israel, a faith which states that we all can help bring about a better world, he does a great thing. Of course, it goes without saying that if a person leads an immoral life in which he cheats and harms others, saying Kaddish is to no avail. But if the Kaddish is a symbol of our determination to help better the world, an affirmation of our belief in the ultimate triumph of righteousness, which we back up with righteous action, then the saying of Kaddish is, in itself, a power stimulus to righteous living and a powerful link between generations.

A Kiddush is actually part of the davening experience in Judaism, too. The origin of the Kiddush is the ancient Shlomeen or "peace offering" which was sacrificed in the Temple. Only a few drops of blood or piece of fat were actually placed on the altar. The rest were eaten by the family and their friends with the exception of a few pieces which were given to the priest. Sharing food has always been a way of expressing joy and happiness in Judaism. Sharing food in the synagogue shows gratitude to G-d and to friends and relatives for all their help in allowing the person or family to celebrate this happy occasion.

Prayer shows that we are grateful to G-d for giving us the opportunity to help Him perfect this world and for giving us the friends and relatives to help us perform this task. Prayer is a meaningful experience which encompasses more than the lips. It encompasses the heart, the mind, and the body. In fact, when we say Hatfils, the silent Amidah, we actually take 3 steps back and then 3 steps forward in order to remind ourselves that we are encountering G-d, coming into His presence. We do the same when we finish the Amidah.

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Prayer signifies to a Jew that he is always in G-d's presence, that G-d is accessible to him, that G-d will help him, and that he is not alone. We are grateful to G-d for giving us life, and we want to continually express this. May we all want to stand in His presence. Amen.