

JEWISH LITERACY
Michael Lotker
The Prayerbook and Prayer

1. Types of Jewish Prayer
 - a) Blessings
 - b) Liturgy - “Services”
 - c) Individual Prayer

2. Blessings
 - a) Begin with traditional opening: “*Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu Mehlech ha-olam*” then one adds either:
 - i) a blessing over an event or food “*boray p’rei ha-gafen*” or “*ha-motzie lechem min ha-haretz*”
 - ii) or if for a mitzvah, add the words “*asher kidshanu b’mitzvotav v’tzivanu ...*” and then name the mitzvah e.g. “*l’hadlik ner shel shabbat*”
 - b) The form of the blessing was “minted” by the rabbis of the Talmud
 - c) Blessings (and prayers) can be said in any language, but Hebrew is preferred.
 - d) See “The Learner’s Guide to Blessings”

3. The Liturgy and Services
 - a) The *Siddur* (means “arranged in order”) is the evolving collection of prayers and ritual.
 - b) Prayers as old as the Torah and as new as those for the new State of Israel
 - c) This is where theology hits the road.
 - i) Each movement has its own prayer book
 - ii) Reform changes in the prayer book
 - iii) Newest Reform prayer book – *Mishkan Tefillah*
 - d) The Service is the remnant of the sacrificial service.
 - i) In Temple times, we had 3 sacrifices per day, now we have 3 prayer services per day.
 - ii) In Temple times, the priests said the prayers, today everyone says the prayers
 - e) The structure of every service is basically the same (morning, afternoon, evening, weekday, Shabbat, High Holy Day) with important differences depending on the day and occasion. See handout.
 - f) For certain prayers (*bar’chu*, *kaddish*, reading of Torah), a *minyan* is required (10 adult Jews).
 - g) The key prayers/sections of the service:
 - i) *Kabblat Shabbat* welcoming the Sabbath
 - ii) *Bar’chu*: the call to worship
 - iii) *Shema* and her blessings: the best known prayer

- iv) *Amidah* or *Tefillah* (means “standing” or “prayer”: the central prayer of the service)
 - a) Took the place of animal sacrifice
 - b) contains 19 sections on weekdays (even though its called the *Shemoneh Esrei* meaning “eighteen”)
 - c) contains 6 sections on Shabbat
 - d) See “Blessings of the *Shemoneh Esrei*” handout
 - v) Reading of the Torah
 - vi) *Aleinu*
 - vii) Mourners’ *Kaddish*
 - h) Differences between Orthodox, Conservative, Reform services.
4. Individual Prayer
- a) Can take many forms:
 - i) Talking to God - and waiting for an answer!
 - ii) Meditation
 - iii) Contemplation
 - iv) Reciting the “*Shema*” or other parts of the service.
 - b) There is more to Judaism than liturgy – your individual prayer is traditional and important to your spiritual life.
 - i) Being in relationship with God: liturgy may be compared with the Hallmark card. Your prayers are the notes you write in the card and/or the letters that you write.
 - ii) It’s not so much that God needs our prayers, but that we need to be the kind of people that pray.
 - c) Set a regular time for prayer. Morning and evening *Shema* is a perfect starting place.
 - d) Don’t let your scientific, logical, left-brain doubts about God (which are perfectly reasonable and OK) interfere with your prayer life and relationship with God.
 - e) Prayer and spirituality cannot only be learned from books. In *Healing into Life and Death*, Stephen Levine relates: “[There was] an intellectual youth who felt he could learn everything from books. He read about the stars and became an astronomer, he read about history and became an historian, he read about swimming and drowned.”
 - f) “Don’t Just Sit There – Pray Something!”
 - It doesn’t matter where you are
 - It only matters what direction your headed in.
 - Do something – do more – be consistent!
 - May God bless us all!

NEXT CLASS: Jewish History. Do some reading about Jewish History (on line for example – www.jewishhistory.org is a great site) and come prepared with questions.

The Structure of the Friday Night/Saturday Morning Service

(page references are to Mishkan T'filah)

1. **Welcoming Shabbat or *Kabblat Shabbat* (pgs: 12-25, 66-89)**
 - Psalms (Friday)
 - Lecha Dodi (Friday)
 - Opening Prayers & Morning Blessings (Saturday)

1. **Reader's Kaddish or *Hatzie Kaddish* (pgs: 26, 106) serves as a divider to begin the actual service.**

2. **The Shema and its Blessings: Key prayers are:**
 - The *Bar'chu* or call to prayer (pgs: 28, 108)
 - The Creation prayer or *Maariv Araviv* (pgs: 30) on Friday (and all) evenings
 - On Saturday (and all) mornings, the Creation prayer is the *Yotzer* (pg: 110)
 - The "God Loves Us" prayer or *Ahavat Olam* (32) on Friday (and all) evenings
 - On Saturday morning, this is *Ahavah Rabah* (112)
 - The *Shema* and *V'ahavta* (same in all services) (pgs: 34-36, 114-118)
 - The Redemption Prayer including the Song of the Sea or *Mi-cha Mo-cha* (pgs: 40, 120-122) note slightly different wording on Saturday (and all) mornings.
 - The Evening Prayer (*Hashkiveinu*) (pg. 42)
 - Covenant of Shabbat or *V'shamru* (44)

3. **The *Tefillah* or *Amidah* consists of 19 sections on weekdays and only 7 on Shabbat**
 1. God of All Generations or *Avot v'Emahot* (pgs: 48, 126)
 2. God's Power or *Givurot* (pgs: 50, 128)
 3. The Holiness of God's Name & or *Kiddusha* Note: longer daytime version (pgs: 52, 130)
 4. The Holiness of the day (Shabbat) *Kiddushat Ha-Yom* and acceptance of our Sabbath rest including *Yism'chu/V'shamru* on Saturday morning (this one short section takes the place of 13 sections on weekdays) (pgs: 54, 132-134)
 5. For Worship or *Avodah* (pgs: 56, 136)
 6. Thanksgiving or *Hoduah* (pgs: 58, 138)
 7. Peace or *Shalom Rav* (pgs: 60) *Sim Shalom* on Saturday morning (140).

4. **Conclusion of *Amidah*: Silent Prayer (pgs: 62, 142)**

5. **Torah Service (note: traditionally Saturday morning) (pgs: 244-263)**

6. ***Aleinu* (pgs: 282-285)**

7. **Mourner's Kaddish (pg: 294)**

Prayer – Further Reading

Hayim Halevy Donin, *To Pray As a Jew: A Guide to the Prayer Book and the Synagogue Service*, Basic Books, 1980. This is an excellent, readable introduction to the traditional prayers. Highly recommended.

Rabbi Lawrence Hoffman, ed., *My People's Prayer Book*, Jewish Lights Publishing. This is an 8 volume series which closely examines different prayers of the prayer book. The titles are:

1. The *Shema* and Its Blessings
2. The *Amidah*
3. *P'sukei D'zimrah* (Morning Psalms)
4. *Seder K'riat Hatorah* (The Torah Service)
5. Birkhot Aashachar (Morning Blessings)
6. *Tachanun* and Concluding Prayers
7. Shabbat at Home
8. Shabbat in the Synagogue
9. Welcoming the Night: Mincha & Ma'ariv
10. Shabbat Morning: Shacharit & Mincha
11. Who By Fire, Who By Water – Unetneh Tokef

Aryeh Kaplan, *Jewish Meditation*, Schocken Books, NY, 1985. A practical guide to this Jewish form of prayer.

Rabbi Nosson Sherman, *The ArtScroll Siddur*, Mesorah Publications, Ltd. 1990. Widely available Orthodox siddur with ample footnotes and explanations.

Chaim Stern, ed., *On the Doorposts of Your House*, CCAR Press, New York, 1994. A wonderful prayerbook for home based celebrations.

Arnold S. Rosenberg, *Jewish Liturgy as a Spiritual System*, Jason Aronson Inc., 1997. Excellent discussion of deeper meanings of individual prayers and of the liturgy as a whole.