

I Talk to God By... Major Concepts in Jewish Spiritual Expression

GUCI Kallah Bet 2011

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During Kallah Bet this summer, we will be talking about how we communicate with God. This entails talking some about our general spiritual expression and also about our worship patterns. This educational theme will give us a great opportunity to help our campers (and staff!) develop some of their ideas about how they feel spiritually.

For many of our campers, camp might be the only place throughout the year where they even worship, let alone talk about worshiping. My hope is that through our discussions this session, we will be able to help their attitudes about worship mature and become better understood. By doing this, their experience of worship and spiritual expression should be enriched.

The real challenge for this session is making the different topics age appropriate. While some of them are definitely more geared toward the older campers (for instance, Superstition and Mysticism), all of them will likely be challenging for any age group. By tailoring the topics to the proper ages of our campers, though, these topics can be very effectively taught.

This education packet looks mostly like the manual section (section B) of your Kallah Aleph education packet. There are 20 different topic pages from which you can choose the number of educational days you will need. You can also choose the order, though some of the first and last topics on my list seem to fit most logically at the beginning and end, respectively. On each day, like last session, there are goals, texts, and thoughts to consider. Additionally, there is a bit of an introduction I have written for each page. This is somewhat like a condensed version of the part A of last session's packet, with individual ideas placed on each page. On the table of contents page, there are two asterisks next to topics that I feel you really must include (still, though, you may talk to me if you disagree). There is one asterisk next to the topics which I advise you to incorporate into your packet.

Please, please, please note: there is potential for overlap with some of these different topics. While this is alright, we must make sure that our staff doesn't plan this overlap into their programs. For example, while *Standardized Liturgy vs. Extemporaneous Prayer* and *Keva vs. Kavanah* definitely have some potential to have overlap, we should make sure not to let our staff intentionally plan activities/sichot/themes into their programs which make this happen. To do this, we need them to: 1) work from the ideas present on their particular days' pages, 2) plan carefully and ahead of time (and with attention paid to what other topics exist in their packet), and 3) work with the rabbis to make sure that what they're teaching is best suited to their actual topic.

Good luck with this-I think if we work well on this, it will help create an amazing summer for our campers!

--Ari Ballaban

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1. The Purpose of Prayer: For Ourselves or for Others**

Understanding the purpose of prayer is no small task. Questions one might ask themselves about this include: Why do we pray? Do we pray for our own sake or pray for the sake of others? Is it alright for us to ask for our own desires in prayer, or should we limit this sort of petitionary prayer for the well-being of others? Do we show up to t'fillot for our co-pray-ers, or do we show up because it feels good for us? Is sitting unconnectedly in t'fillot only bad for ourselves, or does it affect others too? Does this matter?

Clearly there is a lot to consider about the communal nature of prayer. Let's get our campers to start asking these questions of themselves!

Goals:

1. CWBAT see the importance of prayer for both oneself and for others.
2. CW consider who they feel their prayers are most important for, self or others.

Texts:

- <http://www.jewfaq.org/prayer.htm>
 - Most of our prayers are expressed in the first person plural, "us" instead of "me," and are recited on behalf of all of the Jewish people. This form of prayer emphasizes our responsibility for one another and our interlinked fates.

In Judaism, prayer is largely a group activity rather than an individual activity. Although it is permissible to pray alone and it fulfills the obligation to pray, you should generally make every effort to pray with a group, short of violating a commandment to do so.

A complete formal prayer service cannot be conducted without a quorum of at least 10 adult Jewish men; that is, at least 10 people who are obligated to fulfill the commandment to recite the prayers. This prayer quorum is referred to as a minyan (from a Hebrew root meaning to count or to number). Certain prayers and religious activities cannot be performed without a minyan. This need for a minyan has often helped to keep the Jewish community together in isolated areas.
- http://judaism.about.com/od/prayersworhiprituals/f/cons_prayforgiv.htm
 - In Judaism, praying is communal. When we pray for forgiveness on Yom Kippur, one stands with his/her community and not alone. One is not alone in admitting to having sinned. And it helps us to admit our wrongs knowing that we are not the only person to have made bad decisions or sinned....Secondly, prayer is an experience for both the individual and also the community (from a minyan of ten to a larger worship group). With both study and more prayer experiences, Jewish prayer can become meaningful and fulfilling for you.
- <http://spectrummagazine.org/article/landon-schnabel/2011/05/31/why-study-more-important-prayer-jewish-perspective>
 - When we study God speaks to us, and when we pray we speak to God. Notice that it is a "we" and "us," not an "I." Judaism views true worship as taking place in community. Yes you can study and pray alone, but true worship happens when people come together. That is why there must be a minimum number of (unfortunately exclusively) male worshipers (ten) in order for a synagogue to exist.

- Living Judaism: the complete guide to Jewish belief, tradition, and practice, by Wayne D. Dosick 229-230, 1st ed.
 - Prayer is an intensely personal quest, and Judaism acknowledges and acclaims the individual prayers of the individual pray-er.

But much of Jewish prayer is public, communal, shared.

...

My father remembers a Yom Kippur eve in the early years of World War II. Parents had just sent their young sons off to war, to danger unknown and fates unsure. When the cantor chanted the words of the traditional Kol Nidre prayer, "From this Yom Kippur until next Yom Kippur, may it be for us for good," a spontaneous collective cry went up from the mothers and fathers standing in that synagogue. They did not know what the next year would bring them and their precious sons, but being together in community gave them a sense of united purpose, shared commiseration, and collective strength.

Thoughts to consider:

- If I come to t'fillot, who do I do it for?
- If I don't come to t'fillot, should I be coming for myself or others?
- Is it appropriate to ask for certain things for others but not for oneself?
- Are we entitled to ask for things for ourselves/others during prayers?

2. The Purpose of Prayer: For God or for People**

As we discussed on the last day, the purpose of prayer is quite a big, open question. Now we shift to another side of this question: is prayer for people or for God? Many people feel that it is for only the sake of people, saying "if prayer helps me achieve a higher level of spirituality, then I should go. If I doesn't I won't pray and that is alright." Others feel that prayer must be done for the sake of God and feel that regardless of how they feel about having to pray, they should do so because God requires it.

We want our campers to think about this idea on this day.

Goals:

1. CW consider for whom our prayer is meant.

Texts:

- <http://www.jewfaq.org/prayer.htm>
 - **The Need for Prayer**

Many people today do not see the need for regular, formal prayer. "I pray when I feel inspired to, when it is meaningful to me," they say. This attitude overlooks two important things: the purpose of prayer, and the need for practice.

One purpose of prayer is to increase your awareness of G-d in your life and the role that G-d plays in your life. If you only pray when you feel inspired (that is, when you are already aware of G-d), then you will not increase your awareness of G-d.

In addition, if you want to do something well, you have to practice it continually, even when you don't feel like doing it. This is as true of prayer as it is of playing a sport, playing a musical instrument, or writing. The sense of humility and awe of G-d that is essential to proper prayer does not come easily to modern man, and will not simply come to you when you feel the need to pray. If you wait until inspiration strikes, you will not have the skills you need to pray effectively. Before I started praying regularly, I found that when I wanted to pray, I didn't know how. I didn't know what to say, or how to say it, or how to establish the proper frame of mind. If you pray regularly, you will learn how to express yourself in prayer.

- http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/862503/jewish/Whose-Prayer-Is-It-Anyway.htm (from an ultra-Orthodox website)
 - ...This was an insight which I had not fully appreciated until we had this conversation, although, as a concept, I had certainly studied it in yeshivah. My "secular" editor friend taught me a lesson that I had never been able to understand fully my entire Torah-educated life: prayer is not about me and my "feeling good"; it is about G-d and my connection with Him.

The conclusion of the *Hin'ni* prayer is most compelling: "May it be your will, O G-d... that the angels bring my prayer before the throne of Your Glory and spread it before you, for the sake of all the righteous ...Blessed are You, who hears prayer."

It does not say, "May it be Your will, O G-d, that I walk away from this prayer feeling fulfilled, uplifted and unburdened." That is a by-product of a successful prayer experience. That is not a right, it is an earned reward.

...

Besides being a nice story, to me this highlights the point that my teachers attempted to convey to me, and which my friend succeeded in doing. It says that prayer is not mine. It is not there for me to enjoy and derive instant pleasure. It is G-d's, and He rewards us with a "fringe benefit" of a feeling of fulfillment and relief and hope. However, this depends on the way in which we enter prayer. Is it about me or Him?

My editor friend himself answered his own question. The whole premise of not finding a place of prayer or a specific prayer that "does it for him" was misguided. Indeed, prayer has all of these liberating qualities, but they are born out of intense humility and lack of expectation for the self. True prayer is about divestment of self and unification with G-d, and this unification gives us the G-dlike quality of tranquility and fulfillment. Not the other way around.

Indeed the Talmudic word for prayer is *avodah*, translated literally as "work." It is a job to pray right. And it is a reward to connect through prayer and receive its therapeutic properties.

- <http://www.rossel.net/basic07.htm>

- As is easily seen, Jewish prayer is an aid to developing a meritorious attitude, and a commendable way of feeling. Therefore, Jews actively seek reasons to praise God's creation. There are Jewish prayers to be said when witnessing a falling star, when hearing the clap of thunder in the clouds, when seeing a rainbow, when noticing the first bud of spring on the branch of a tree, when placing a *mezzuzah* (a decorative box containing portions of the most important Jewish prayer, the *Shema*) on a doorpost, when sitting in the *sukkah* at Sukkot, and even when seeing a very tall or extremely short person.

Jewish prayers are usually recited in Hebrew. Yet, they can be recited in any vernacular or local language, whether it is Yiddish, Aramaic, French, English, Spanish, or Russian. Jews believe that God understands no matter what language a person employs in prayer. Even silence is sometimes said to be an appropriate Jewish prayer language.

The most important of all Jewish prayers is a prayer called the *Shema*. Strangely enough, the *Shema* is a prayer that speaks to the Jewish people, and not to God. Its verses instruct the Israelites (the prayer is from the Torah even before the term "Jew" was used for the Jewish people) what they have to do.

- <http://www.jweekly.com/article/full/6275/devarim-successful-prayer-does-not-require-rationality/>

In 11th century Spain, Rabbenu Bahaya ibn Pakuda, in his "Obligations of the Heart," praises an ancient pious worshipper who prayed: "Your knowledge includes everything that is good for me, and I have not told you my needs to make you aware of them, but so that I will realize my utter dependence on you and my reliance on you."

Similarly, in 19th century Germany, Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch characterized the highest form of prayer as "judging oneself." Thus he analyzed the grammar of the most common Hebrew word for prayer as a reflexive form of the verb "to judge": *Hitpallel*, from which "tefillah" is derived, originally meant to deliver an opinion about oneself, to judge oneself -- or an inner attempt at so doing, such as the reflexive of the Hebrew verb frequently denotes (Horeb, 472).

For the party known as rationalists, finite beings cannot properly praise the infinite being, cannot make sensible requests of the all-knowing being. **So we finite**

beings must logically, when we say words that sounds like praise, petition and thanksgiving, really be engaged in a process for our own benefit.

Thoughts to consider:

- Do we feel that prayers are most important for humans or for God?
- Does God need our prayers?
- If God doesn't need our prayers and prayer is for God, then why do we pray?
- How can we be sure that prayer is/is not beneficial to God?
- Can prayer be beneficial to both God and to people?

3. To Whom Are We Talking? A Discussion of God**

An essential part of the conversation about spiritual expression and worship is, of course, a discussion of the entity with which we are communicating. The who, what, when, where, why, and how of God are all tough questions that take more than a single lifetime to process... and yet, we all only have one lifetime and thus we must begin to ask these questions early. Let's use this day to have our campers ponder these questions.

Goals:

1. CW analyze their beliefs about God.

Texts:

- http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/judaism/beliefs/beliefs_1.shtml
 - **Jewish faith and God; The relationship with God**

Jews believe that there is a single God who not only created the universe, but with whom every Jew can have an individual and personal relationship.

They believe that God continues to work in the world, affecting everything that people do.

The Jewish relationship with God is a covenant relationship. In exchange for the many good deeds that God has done and continues to do for the Jewish People...

 - The Jews keep God's laws
 - The Jews seek to bring holiness into every aspect of their lives.
- http://www.ajcarchives.org/AJC_DATA/Files/913.pdf
 - The Unity of God

One of the central prayers in Judaism, the Shema, expresses the most profound tenet of Judaism: the belief in monotheism. "Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is one" (Deut.6:4). Within the Hebrew Bible the struggle against polytheism is a dominant and continuing theme...

 - For Jews, God is both the transcendent creator of the universe, above, beyond, and more than the universe, and at the same time an active and personal presence in the world linked by a perpetual covenant with the Jewish people. One of the ways the Talmud addresses this apparent paradox is to make the analogy of the relation of God to the world with the relation of the soul to the body:

"As God fills the whole world, so also the soul fills the whole body. As God sees, but cannot be seen, so also the soul sees, but cannot be seen. As God nourishes the whole world, so also the soul nourishes the whole body. As God is pure, so also the soul is pure. As God dwells in the inmost part of the Universe, so also the soul dwells in the inmost part of the body." (Berakot 10a)...
 - Throughout the Hebrew Bible God is described as having neither a beginning nor an end...
 - Judaism teaches that God is a God of both justice and mercy.
- <http://www.mechon-mamre.org/jewfaq/beliefs.htm>
 - The closest that anyone has ever come to creating a widely-accepted list of Jewish beliefs is [Maimonides'](#) thirteen principles of faith. Maimonides' thirteen principles of faith, which he thought were the minimum requirements of Jewish belief, are:

- i. God exists
- ii. God is one and unique
- iii. God is incorporeal
- iv. God is eternal
- v. Prayer is to be directed to God alone and to no other
- vi. The words of the prophets are true
- vii. Moses' prophecy is better than any other prophet's
- viii. The Written Torah (first 5 books of the Bible) and Oral Torah (teachings all recorded in the Talmud and other ancient writings, all summarized in Maimonides' Mishneh Torah) were given to Moses
- ix. There will be no other Torah
- x. God knows the thoughts and deeds of men
- xi. God will reward the good and punish the wicked
- xii. The Mashiach [Messiah] will come
- xiii. The dead will be resurrected

As you can see, these are very basic and general principles. Yet as basic as these principles are, the necessity of believing each one of these has been disputed at one time or another, and the liberal movements of Judaism dispute many of these principles.

- http://www.myjewishlearning.com/beliefs/Theology/God/About_God/Must_I_Believe.shtml
 - How important is belief in God? Can one be a "good Jew" without believing in God? These questions--articulated in this way--are relatively modern ones. However, while normative Judaism has always been God-centered, some thinkers--both ancient and modern--have conceptualized Judaism in ways that make beliefs about God less central...

At the heart of Wettstein's article is a quote by Abraham Joshua Heschel that echoes the thoughts about the non-centrality of belief mentioned above. According to Heschel, "Awe rather than faith is the cardinal attitude of the religious Jew. In Biblical language, the religious man is not called 'believer,' as he is for example in Islam (*mu'min*) but *yare hashem* (one who stands in awe of God)."

Working off of this notion, Wettstein claims that at the heart of the Jewish religious sensibility is a distinctive attitude toward life, a major component of which is awe. Various aspects of Jewish religious practice--prayer, Torah study, the rhythms of the Jewish calendar--are meant to facilitate this attitude.

Wettstein acknowledges that the object of this awe is God. He does, however, propose that this awe--and the meaningful life it helps to create--is also available to a naturalist who rejects a supernatural God. To demonstrate this point, he compares this "religious naturalist" to a non-fundamentalist theist, one who believes in God and Judaism, but doesn't understand every biblical story literally.

Such a person does not believe that the creation story in Genesis reflects actual events. God didn't necessarily create the world in six 24-hour periods nor did God actually rest on the seventh day.

This, however, does not negate the meaning of the story. "The notion of Sabbath, as creative retreat from creative engagement with the world, as spiritual renewal," writes Wettstein, "will be unaffected." The imagery, religious resonances, and meaning of the story are available to this non-literalist even though she does not believe it to be factually true...

Nevertheless, on an official level, most Jews are uncomfortable with the idea of a Judaism without God. This is true for the liberal movements as much as it is for more traditional Jews. In 1994, the UAHC (the synagogue council of the Reform movement) rejected an application for membership from a synagogue that practiced "Judaism with a humanistic perspective" because the synagogue's principles deviated from "the historic God-orientation of Reform Judaism."

Thoughts to consider:

- Do you believe in God?
 - If not, why not?
 - If so, why so?
 - Does your answer change your attitude towards spirituality?
 - Should it?
 - Does the question of God's existence really have any major bearing on your life?
- If you believe in God, what kind of God do you believe in? Describe this God.
 - How do you relate to God?
- Is it necessary for everyone to believe in the same kind of God?
- Can a person be unsure about whether God exists?
- Can a person go from being sure about God's existence to being unsure?

4. Informed Choice: A Basis for Making Our Decisions in Worship*

Reform Jews are given a very weighty task. Whereas traditional Judaism tells each person praying which prayers to say, Reform Judaism allows the individual worshiper to make choices about what is important to him or her. Because of this, a Reform Jew has the responsibility to make decisions about worship from a standpoint of education. Education on a large range specific Jewish decisions can't be made in one day, however we can educate our campers on how to go about making decisions.

Additionally, we can make it clear that Reform Judaism isn't "Judaism-lite," but instead a Judaism which encourages one to learn, then make decisions.

Goals:

1. CWBAT make decisions about how they worship instead of just "doing things."
2. CW understand the concept of making our decisions from a knowledgeable standpoint.

Texts:

- http://judaism.about.com/od/beliefsandlaw1/f/rabbi_kipa.htm
 - I would be surprised if the Reform rabbi you mentioned in your letter was the only Jew in the synagogue with an uncovered head on the day you observed it. There are still many Reform Jews, especially in the American South and Midwest, who choose not to wear a kippah. This is entirely in keeping with the Reform principle of "informed choice" -- each Jew is expected to make his or her own decisions about how to observe Judaism based on knowledge of the tradition.
- <http://www.commentarymagazine.com/article/what-does-reform-judaism-stand-for/>
 - And no less open-armed was Reform's new approach to diverse types of Jewish expression. In ritual matters, the movement now happily accommodated head coverings and prayer shawls for both men and women during services, while continuing to welcome those who eschewed such garb; synagogues and other institutions began to provide for members wishing to observe aspects of Jewish dietary laws, even as they respected the desires of those partial to prohibited foods. And so forth.

Here the guiding principle has been autonomy and choice. Each individual Jew has the inalienable right to define which aspects of the faith are personally meaningful to him; so long as these choices are "informed," the movement not only tolerates but endorses them.

Thoughts to consider:

- What actions do we take that are from an uninformed position?
- Should we wait to act until we have learned about what the significance of our actions are?
- What kinds of things constitute good reasons for actions?
- How do we know that we have enough information to act in an informed way?
- Is it good for us to be able to make our own decisions in Judaism?
- What benefit might exist for Jews to have their decisions made for them?

5. Praying “To” God and Praying “Before” God

There is something quite absurd about humans praying: we assume that the Master of all Being cares to hear about our thoughts, concerns, dreams. On top of that, we seem to assume that God doesn't already know all of these things, and that God will listen to us at any time! For this reason, sometimes people have trouble praying “to” God. One solution, then, is to pray “before” God. To recognize that we aren't informing God of anything, blessing God with our blessings, nor truly asking for things in any distinctly rational, human way- instead, we are simply placing our thoughts before God. Let's get our campers to consider this idea, it might help reconcile some of our campers beliefs with prayer. If nothing else, it raises great questions!

Goals:

1. CW consider the differences that exist between praying “to” God and praying “before” God.
2. CW see how these two concepts can work in their own spiritual experience.

Texts:

- http://www.myjewishlearning.com/practices/Ritual/Prayer/Themes_and_Theology/Theology_of_Blessing.shtml
 - "Mortals are a combination of body and soul. From the perspective of the human soul, it is appropriate for a person to cleave to his Maker, always standing before Him. From the perspective of the human body, however, a mortal cannot stand before God. Therefore the *b'rakhah*, uttered by mortals, uses language that is both direct [in the second person] and concealed [in the third person]."
- <http://www.bje.org.au/learning/judaism/prayer/index.html>
 - Why Pray?

Many people do not pray because prayer does not come naturally to the human spirit. Human beings must be taught to pray, just as they have to be taught a variety of other skills of feeling and communication.

There is no single reason why a Jewish person should pray. The structure of daily prayer is like the unfolding of a beautiful flower, or the highlighting of a symphony. Each layer suits its proper moment or mood...**Prayer is at times brazenness before God, at times humility.**

Thoughts to consider:

- Have you ever felt that you couldn't pray “to” God?
- If so, do you feel praying “before” God could solve this issue?
- Is there really an issue with praying “to” God?
- How does one distinguish between the two (and know that they have done what she wanted)?
- Is there a difference between these two?
- Are there different times when one of these might be more appropriate than the other?

6. Prayers of Praise

Judaism values many different types of prayer. One of the most important types of prayer in Judaism is the prayer of praise. There are quite a few places to find prayers of praise in our liturgy, not the least important of which is a whole section of the Amidah. On this day of Shiur/Limud, we want our campers to consider what value exists in giving praise to God (this can be explored as prayers of praise whether structured in services or spontaneous/unstructured).

Goals:

1. CW consider whether there is value in giving praise (especially when it is not clear whether it is being received or not)

Texts:

- <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Judaism/amidah.html>
 - There is a logical basis for the order and content of the blessings. One Talmudic source provides scriptural foundations, another suggests that each is associated with a historic or miraculous event, and another relates the blessings of the Amidah to the prayer of Hannah. Either way, the *Amidah* contains three sections: a three-blessing introduction made up of praises of God; thirteen petitions to God for various needs; and a closing of three blessings of thanksgiving. The model for this structure is how one would approach a powerful ruler or how a servant would approach a master.

The *Amidah* is introduced with a verse that requests, "Lord, open my lips and my mouth will declare Thy praise" ("*adonai sfatai...*"). The first three blessings of praise appeal to God as the protector of our forefathers, and extol His powers and holiness
- Psalm 150 ("Hallelu")
 - Note- "hallelujah" literally means "praise God" as a command.
 - Hallelujah.

Praise God in God's sanctuary; praise God in the firmament of God's power.
Praise God for God's mighty acts; praise God according to God's abundant greatness.
Praise God with the blast of the horn; praise God with the fiddle and harp.
Praise God with the timbrel and dance; praise God with stringed instruments and the pipe.
Praise God with the loud-sounding cymbals; praise God with the clanging cymbals.
Let every thing that hath breath praise the Lord. Hallelujah.

Thoughts to consider:

- What is the importance of praising God?
- How can a human being praise God in any meaningful way?
- What does it actually mean to praise God?
- Can we praise God in ways other than with t'fillot?
- What are some ways we can praise God at times other than t'fillot?

7. Prayers of Petition

A sort of prayer very different from prayers of praise is the prayer of petition. In a prayer of petition, one is asking God for something; this could be anything from the most simple, personal prayer to the very complex, universal dream. For this day of Shiur/Limud we want our campers to analyze what it means to ask for something from God. Do we ask for it with the real expectation that God will help us get it? Should we only ask for things which are for others? Is it appropriate to ask for things from God for ourselves? What kinds of things are worth God's attention (for example, healing)?

Goals:

1. CW consider the appropriateness of asking for things from God.
2. CW be able to distinguish between things that might be appropriate to petition for from God and things which might not be appropriate to ask for from God.

Texts:

- http://www.ou.org/index.php/jewish_action/article/57274/
 - At the core of the Amidah, however, are the petitionary prayers, which convey the neediness of every human being but also reflect the belief that one can confidently ask things of God and expect Him to respond. The center of the Amidah therefore reveals a different prayer mode than the awe-ridden and fear-filled opening section.

- http://judaism.about.com/od/prayersworshipritual1/f/pray_success.htm

- **Question:** Does Judaism have a prayer that requests success in sports?

I am becoming more religious and turing pro as an athlete. Does Judaism have a prayer that requests success in sports?

Answer: In general, Judaism does not have many prayers asking God for specific personal success. For example, there is no prayer in which a business person asks to make a lot of money. There is no prayer for a rabbi to ask to teach Judaism really well.

On the other hand, there are prayers in which we can ask God to help us develop qualities that lead to success. Every day we ask God in the Amidah to help us find wisdom, understanding, piety, forgiveness, health and sustenance -- all qualities that can help a person succeed in any endeavor, including athletic competition.

Jews do not generally think of prayer as "God's suggestion box." The purpose of prayer is not to get God to give us things. Rather, prayer is the way that Jews maintain their relationship with God so that they will be able to find the God-given abilities that already are within them. Viewed in this way, I would say that every prayer and blessing in Jewish tradition is a prayer for the ability to succeed in all of life's noble and worthy challenges.

I wish you success and joy in your pursuits on the field, on the court, in the ring, on the track, and in life.

L'shalom,

Rabbi Jeffrey W. Goldwasser

Thoughts to consider:

- Do you ask God for things in your everyday life?
 - What?

- Do you feel that these things are appropriate to ask for from God?
- What are appropriate things to ask for from God?
- How should we ask for things from God?
- Are there specific people for whom we should ask for things from God?
 - Can it be for ourselves?

8. Prayers of Thanksgiving

One last type of prayer for our campers to discuss is the prayer of thanksgiving. This sort of prayer, like the prayer of praise, is prominently featured in Jewish worship. Giving thanks to God for what we have seems to be a quite the important sort of prayer- but is it? Does God really care if we give thanks to God? Does it really make any difference for us to give thanks to an entity which we're never quite sure exists?

Goals:

1. CWBAT verbalize for what they are thankful.
2. CWBAT see what they are thankful for in their everyday lives.
3. CW consider whether they should give thanks to God.

Texts:

- *From daily Amidah, Hoda'ah (thanksgiving) prayer*
 - *We thank you, that you are Adonai, our God, and the God of our ancestors forever. You are the rock of our lives, the protector of our salvation for all generations. We thank you and shall speak your praise. For our lives held in your hand, and for our souls directed to you, and for your miracles that are with us every day, and for your wonders and goodnesses that occur at every time, evening, morning, and afternoon. You are the Good One because your mercies never end, and the Merciful One for your kindnesses never cease, we have always held our hopes for you. And for all of this your name shall be praised and raised up high, our Ruler, forever and for all times! And all life knows you and shall praise your name in truth, the God who is our salvation and our aid. Blessed are you, Adonai, Goodness is your name and it is fitting to thank you.*
- *Mishnah Pesachim 10:5*
 - *In every generation, one is obligated to see oneself as if they left Egypt, as it is said (Exodus 13), "And you will tell your child on that day, saying, 'Because of this that God did for me when I left Egypt.'" Therefore we are obliged to thank, praise, glorify, extol, exalt, beatify, bless, etc., etc. to the One who did all these miracles for our ancestors and for us: Who brought us out from slavery to freedom, from sadness to joy, from mourning to festivity, from darkness to great light, from servitude to redemption. And we say before God, Hallelujah.*

Thoughts to consider:

- How is giving thanks different than praising?
- What is the value in giving thanks?
- Is it important to appreciate what you have in order to give thanks?
- Must we give thanks even at difficult times?
- Leave aside thanking other people. What is the value of thanking God? Is there any?

9. Superstition and Mysticism

A large part of the Jewish experience throughout history has included mysticism and superstition.

Jewish mysticism has been largely shunned by Reform Judaism because of its departure from rationalism. However, might there be something to this idea? Maybe there are certain aspects of spirituality out there which simply defy rationality, but are quite true. On this day, our campers need not learn a huge numbers of details about Jewish superstition and mysticism. However, they should consider the importance which these ideas could and should play in our spiritual expression and t'fillot.

Goals:

1. CWBAT see how superstition and mysticism have played a role in Jewish spiritual expression throughout history.
2. CWBAT see how superstition and mysticism play a part in their spiritual expression.

Texts:

- <http://tmt.urj.net/archives/4jewishethics/040810.html>
 - The traditional *Mi Shebeirach* for healing did not appear in any Reform prayer book until the recently published *Mishkan T'filah*. The practice was eliminated from our liturgy as the rationalist founders of Reform rejected some of the more miraculous rubrics of prayer they deemed unnecessary to our communal worship experience.
- http://www.beth-elsa.org/be_s0613.htm
 - This kind of superstition [, the sort which is used to blame a non-practitioner when something goes wrong,] was on the minds of our early Reform rabbis when they wrote the prayer, "May the time not be distant . . .," so beloved in the old Union Prayer Book, and now found in our Gates of Prayer. With those words, we pray for a better world in the years ahead. One of the prayer's hopes is that "superstition no longer enslave the mind." Our Reform founders sought to create a Judaism free of superstition, a rational faith worthy of the modern, sophisticated Jew.
- <http://data.ccarnet.org/cgi-bin/respdisp.pl?file=74&year=carr>, *Contemporary American Reform Responsa*
 - Drugs and Mystical Experience
 - QUESTION: Is it possible to use mind altering drugs in order to attain a mystical experience? (K. V., Los Angeles, CA)
 - ANSWER: The Jewish attitude toward mystical experience is shaped by *halakhic* and *kabalistic* views. Normative Judaism has been antimystical, or at least suspicious of mysticism. The *Talmud* cautioned that such literature not be studied until the student is mature (M. Hag. 2.1; 13b). Sometimes this struggle between the two forms of Judaism may be found in a single individual, such as Joseph Caro, author of both the *Shulhan Arukh* and the mystical *Magid Mishnah* (R. J. Z. Werblowsky, *Joseph Karo, Lawyer and Mystic*).

The various Jewish philosophical and mystical works, which deal with heightened states of awareness of whatever form, demand that they be attained through study, introspection, the observance of the *mitzvot*, and a life of piety. External

stimulants are, to the best of my knowledge, not mentioned by authorities in this field, like Gershom Scholem.

As psychedelic drugs promote no assurance that a "heightened state of awareness" will be attained, we would, therefore, have to classify such a use of these drugs as seeking pleasure. This is prohibited by Judaism; that question has been treated in another responsum. Mind altering drugs, therefore, may not be used by Jews to induce a "heightened sense of religious awareness" or to seek a mystical experience.

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- <https://www.forward.com/articles/120111/>
 - For all these reasons, Spinoza has often been seen to prefigure a kind of secular, even Reform Judaism. But Angel wisely rejects this conclusion. He sees that what Spinoza is after is not a reform within Judaism, but a reform of religious sensibility altogether. What Spinoza calls "true religion" has to do not with sectarian observances, but simply with moral behavior toward others. As Angel puts it, Spinoza "shed his Jewishness without much remorse and may have seen himself as a prototype of what Jews (and all other human beings) should become: just plain human beings devoted to rational philosophy." Maimonides, by contrast, sought an intellectually grounded Judaism devoid of superstition but not of its distinctiveness, a Judaism still wedded to the strict observance of Jewish law and ritual, and even certain doctrinal beliefs. Angel makes it clear that he sides with Maimonides against not only the hyper-rationalism of Spinoza, but also any attempts to ground Judaism in the irrational (his primary target is the Hasidim).
- CCAR Pittsburgh Platform (the 1885 platform which stated the early Reform movement's fundamental beliefs)
 - Note- A liturgy teacher of mine, Rabbi Dr. Dalia Marx, teaches that early Reform Judaism considered themselves Jews from the neck up. This quote is exemplary of this concept.
 - We hold that all such Mosaic and rabbinical laws as regulate diet, priestly purity, and dress originated in ages and under the influence of ideas entirely foreign to our present mental and spiritual state. They fail to impress the modern Jew with a spirit of priestly holiness; their observance in our days is apt rather to obstruct than to further modern spiritual elevation.

Thoughts to consider:

- What role does superstition and mysticism play in your spiritual expression?
- Do you have any superstitions in non-Jewish ways?
- Do you feel that superstition and mysticism can be reconciled with Reform Judaism's rationalist attitude?
- Is there value in prayers like the Mi Shebeirach that rely on one's ability to believe that God will heal those who we keep in mind during a specific time of prayer?
- Do you believe in superstitions and mysticism because you actually believe them, or because of some other factor (it feels normal, you are accustomed to thinking that way)?

10. Standardized Liturgy vs. Extemporaneous Prayer

As Jews, we are very lucky to have thousands of years of liturgical tradition. When we have the need to pray, there are many, many prayers to go to which have been beautifully composed and edited by Jewish scholars. Sometimes, though, this liturgical tradition can feel more like baggage than a gift. There are times when fixed prayers feel impersonal and untrue to what we as Jews wish to express.

At these times, spontaneous and personal prayer can be quite helpful. On this day, our campers should consider the importance and usefulness of both traditions in their lives.

Goals:

1. CWBAT distinguish between standardized liturgy and extemporaneous prayer.
2. CWBAT see how each of these two styles of prayer can enrich the expression of their spirituality.

Texts:

- <http://www.bje.org.au/learning/texts/siddur/history.html>
 - In ancient times, customary daily prayers were recited by heart, or a reader prayed aloud and the congregation responded to the blessings with “Amen”. There were no books containing the texts of the prayers. It was said, “The writers of blessings are like those who burn the Torah.” (Tosef. To Shab. 13:4). Writing down the text of blessings was considered forbidden.
- http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsourc/biography/Amram_Gaon.html
 - This is a piece about a famous rabbi, Amram Gaon. It discusses his compilation of the first siddur. This took place around the latter part of the 9th century CE.
 - Amram's fame, however, rests primarily on his Seder (commonly called his siddur), "the order of prayers and blessings for the entire year... according to the tradition which we possess, as laid down by the Tannaim and Amoraim."

The Seder, "*Yesod ha-Amrami*," originated in a responsum which was seemingly sent to the community of Barcelona. From there it spread throughout Spain and to other countries. The Seder Rav Amram is the oldest order of Jewish prayers extant. It contains the text of the prayers for the entire year, as well as the laws and customs pertaining to the different prayers.
- Classic Hassidic Tale, taken from Haim Shalom,
 - חוברת דפי לימוד ומדריכים למורים סוגיות "בין אדם לחברו" בתרבות היהודית
 - The Ba'al Shem tov was visited by the people of a nearby village. “Master,” they said. “Help us. Our town faces disaster and is to be destroyed. The Ba'al Shem Tov decided he would go to a particular place in the woods that had special significance to him. He would light a fire there, in a most particular way, that seemed to help. And he would say a very particular prayer. After that, the BESHT would offer his own spontaneous prayer: Ribono shel olam (Master of the Universe!) - I beseech you to come to our aid at this perilous moment. And surely, the disaster was averted and the town was saved.
 - - In the next generation The Maggid of Mezrich faced a similar problem – another town was in risk of destruction so he tried to recall the teaching of his late mentor. He had some of the parts, but not all. He was able to go back to that

same place in the woods, and to say the same particular prayer - but along the way, the secret of the fire was lost. He said ribono shel olam - I know that our ancestors in such times would turn to you in a special way. I am afraid that I can no longer light the particular fire, but I have come to the special place, and said the special prayer. May these be enough." And he too returned and the crisis was averted and the town was saved.

- A generation later, Rabbi Moshe Lieb of Sassov faced the same problem and he too tried to recall the teaching of his mentor. He too could not remember all the essential ingredients. The fire was long ago lost, and though he still knew the prayer, by now he was far from the land of his teachers - he couldn't go to the same sacred spot in the woods. He sent a message to his friends back in Mezrich and Medzhibedzh to go to that place on his behalf - but no one there, either, could recall the place. So he recited the prayer, and then said ribono shel olam - I know that our ancestors in such times would turn to you in a special way. I am afraid that I can no longer light the particular fire, or go to the special place, but I have said the prayer. May this be enough." And, he too returned and the crisis was averted and the town was saved.
- In the fourth generation, by the time of Rabbi Israel of Rizhyn, the great Rizhnitzer Rebbe, the troubles for the Jews in Eastern Europe had only intensified. His town faced great calamity and he knew what he had to do. But by now, not only was the secret of the fire lost, not only did he not know the sacred spot in the woods, but even the language of the prayer was lost. So he thought and thought, and finally, he sat down in his own special place, and said: ribono shel olam - I know that our ancestors in such times would turn to you in a special way. The knowledge of this is lost -- I can no longer light the particular fire, or go to the special place, or even say the particular prayer. But I do have one thing, and that is the story of my ancestors' deeds. May this be enough." And it was enough. He too returned and the crisis was averted and the town was saved.
- Numbers 12:13
 - Moses says "please, God, heal her please," asking God to heal his sister Miriam. It is a completely spontaneous, unstructured prayer.

Thoughts to consider:

- Do you value the standardized liturgy which exists in Judaism?
- Is the standardized liturgy open to change?
- If we change the standardized liturgy, is it still truly standardized?
- Is extemporaneous prayer more or less expressive than standardized prayer?
- Does the expertly crafted and edited nature of the standardized t'fillot make it any more useful to express one's spirituality than extemporaneous prayer?
- Is there something better about personal, extemporaneous prayer that makes it bad to record it and give it to others?

11. Communal Practice: Minhag Hamakom*

While we as Reform Jews ought to cherish our right to make religious decisions in an autonomous, informed way, there is truly something magical about worshiping with others in the same way. Judaism has a teaching about this notion, “minhag hamakom,” “the custom of the place.” According to Judaism, the custom of the place (provided that it is religiously valid) is the Jewish law of the place.

This means that sometimes, while Judaism will protect the minority, it will ask that the minority recognize that they should respect the wishes of the majority. We will ask that our campers discuss what this means to them. How do we balance our own interests with the interests of a majority, especially when we disagree with the majority?

Goals:

1. CWBAT evaluate when the opinion of the majority should be respected and followed instead of their own.

Texts:

- <http://leaches.net/moline/view--252.html>
 - The title means "local custom," and in the grayish areas of Jewish ritual conduct it is the determining factor in what is the standard and what is not.

Perhaps the most obvious example for Agudas Achim is egalitarianism on the pulpit. Men and women who are Jewish and of age have full and equal access to all matters of ritual leadership and participation. Permitted within our understanding of *halakha*, it is the default position of the community and, as such, must be respected. It would be inappropriate — in fact, to the point of offense — to suggest that we suspend including women in *minyan* or leading prayer in deference to the practice elsewhere.

How do we prevent local custom from becoming a tyranny that eliminates individually meaningful practice? This dilemma, while not new, is more pronounced in a society that is fluid and diverse, as ours has become. People gather in Alexandria having been raised up the street, across the river or beyond the Mississippi and bring with them practices they learned and cherished at a different time of life. Others have visited different communities and been inspired by something they encountered there. Do we tell people to "get with the program" or get out?

Of course not. Like most everything else, it takes common sense and respect on the part of everyone. I myself have a number of individual customs that enhance my personal *davvenen* [praying], but that are not a part of our public worship. I observe them quietly, unless I am in a leadership role — in which case, I uphold the community standard. Were I to interject my practices by distraction, it would be disrespectful and inappropriate.

- <http://www.etzchayim.org/AboutUs/Rabbi/Writings/JewishProverbsOfLeadership.html>
 - “A place’s custom is a mitzvah,” *“Minhag hamakom din hu.”*

Don’t walk in unaware, uncaring, diffident, and swaggeringly proud of your own ideas. Check out what people do there first, then, when you know how the place and people operate, suggest ideas in ways that can be heard by them without revulsion or anger.

- http://www.hadassah.org/site/c.9iKRJcNR112F/b.6504619/k.96DB/Moonbeams_A_Hadassah_Rosh_Hodesh_GuidebrWomen_and_Israeli_Law.htm
 - In 1989, several Israeli members of the Women of the Wall petitioned the Supreme Court to assure the rights of Jewish women to pray as a group at the Kotel. In 1990, several American supporters made a similar petition. In 1994, the Court decided on both petitions together. In his 126-page decision, Justice Menachem Elon wrote that even though women's group prayer had a valid basis in Jewish law, such prayer could not take place at the Western Wall because it ran counter to minhag hamakom—the established custom of the place.

Thoughts to consider:

- How do we make sure to be true to ourselves without offending others?
 - When our custom conflicts with the custom of a place (like, for instance, standing during the v'ahavta when the custom of the place is to sit during the v'ahavta), how do we handle this?
- Re: the Women of the Wall text, are there times when minhag hamakom should be deliberately violated?
- Can it be appropriate to try to change a place's custom so it falls in line with your own?
 - If so, what are appropriate ways to do this?
- Have you ever been in a situation where your custom was in a minority?
 - How were you treated?
 - How did it make you feel?
 - Would you have wanted the situation to have been handled differently?

12. Music in Prayer

GUCI is known for being a very strong, musical camp. As many of our campers may have discovered by now, music can form a large part of a person's spiritual expression and prayer experience. Sometimes, though, this might go too far. We should ask our campers and ourselves when music has taken the place of worship and when (and how) music can help to strengthen worship.

Goals:

1. CW discuss the importance of music to their worship experience.

Texts:

- Entering Jewish Prayer, Rabbi Dr. Hammer
 - Music and ritual have been united since the most ancient times. Even storytelling was accompanied by music. The bards were musicians as well as tellers of tales. Certainly the psalms were songs as well as poems, as the headings of many of them indicate. The religions that sprang from Judaism have all used music and chant as part of the experience of worship, and there is every reason to assume that this was influenced by the practice of the parent religion. Over the centuries, music that accompanies worship has been developed into a high art.

The Talmud teaches that "If one reads [Scripture] without chant or studies [Mishnah] without melody, of him is it written, 'I gave them laws that were not good' (Ezekiel 20:25)." Melody adds not only to the beauty but even to the quality of the words. To this day, learning in traditional yeshivot is done to the accompaniment of a kind of singsong melody. The Torah is not read during the synagogue service; it is sung.
 - <http://www.shirlala.com/holidays/story-the-shepherd-and-his-flute>
 - The Shepherd and His Flute

There is a story told of a young shepherd who on Rosh Hashana came to his synagogue to pray. But he could not pray. For he had not learned to read the words that skipped across the pages of his books and prayers. He sat quietly, listening to words that "climbed in wisps, soaring upwards into the white light to meet the heavens." The more he listened, the more he wanted to pray. But all he could do was sit silently and listen.

Then he remembered that in his pocket was the little flute he carried, with which he led his flocks. He drew the flute from his pocket, lifted it to his lips, and began to play the simple melody he used to call his sheep.

Of course a shepherd's flute has to be very loud, and indeed it was. The sound of his melody filled the synagogue with its high, piercing notes. The people around him looked up in surprise! What was this? Who was this young boy, not dressed well, not holding a prayer book, playing his ugly flute in the middle of services on holy Rosh Hashanah?!

Immediately a murmur went through the congregation as all heads turned to stare at the young boy, each face with a look of shock and anger. But the young shepherd did not even notice! His eyes were closed as he played his flute, his heart filled with the feelings of his prayer.

“Rabbi, Rabbi!” one woman said. “Can’t you make this young boy stop! He does not respect the prayers! He is interrupting our service and should leave at once!”

The other angry people murmured in agreement at the woman’s words. All eyes turned to the Rabbi for his response. But the Rabbi too had his eyes closed! What was he doing?

Slowly, the Rabbi opened his eyes and looked out upon the congregation with great love and wisdom. He said, “Do not be angry my friends. This young boy plays his flute as we sing our prayers. It is his prayer, his way of speaking to God on Rosh Hashanah. Listen again, my friends, and maybe you will hear a touch of what he hears.”

And so the people closed their eyes, and their anger quickly melted away. They heard the shepherd play a sweet soft melody for God. As the music filled the room, the people fell quiet before the melody, listening to the prayer of the shepherd and his flute.

Adapted by Shira Kline

Source unknown

- Psalm 150 (“Hallelu”)
 - Note- “hallelujah” literally means “praise God” as a command.
 - Hallelujah.
Praise God in God’s sanctuary; praise God in the firmament of God’s power.
Praise God for God’s mighty acts; praise God according to God’s abundant greatness.
Praise God with the blast of the horn; praise God with the fiddle and harp.
Praise God with the timbrel and dance; praise God with stringed instruments and the pipe.
Praise God with the loud-sounding cymbals; praise God with the clanging cymbals.
Let every thing that hath breath praise the Lord. Hallelujah.

Thoughts to consider:

- Does music add to your worship experience?
 - How so?
- Have you ever felt that there was too much music in a worship experience?
- Has music ever detracted from your worship experience?
- Have you ever felt that your worship experience became more like a concert than a service?
 - How do we know where we draw the line between a service with music and a Jewish music concert?
 - Is there a difference?
- What about music makes it such a powerful tool in prayer?

13. The Language of Prayer

Jewish spiritual expression has the special feature that it often takes place largely in Hebrew. Even in a service where Hebrew is mostly absent, there is no denying the special historic connection that Jewish spiritual expression has had with Hebrew. We want our campers to experience the magic of praying the exact same words, of the same language, that Jews have prayed for centuries. We also, though, would like them to explore how Judaism could be most thoughtfully expressed: whether that's in Hebrew or English. This day should be utilized to help our campers think about what role language plays in their experience of spiritual expression.

Goals:

1. CW recognize the importance of Hebrew in Jewish spiritual expression.
2. CW recognize that Jewish spiritual expression can exist without Hebrew.

Texts:

- <http://www.jewfaq.org/prayer.htm>
 - The [Talmud](#) states that it is permissible to pray in any language that you can understand; however, traditional Judaism has always stressed the importance of praying in Hebrew. A traditional [Chasidic](#) story speaks glowingly of the prayer of an uneducated Jew who wanted to pray but did not speak Hebrew. The man began to recite the only Hebrew he knew: the [alphabet](#). He recited it over and over again, until a [rabbi](#) asked what he was doing. The man told the rabbi, "The Holy One, Blessed is He, knows what is in my heart. I will give Him the letters, and He can put the words together."
- <http://reformjudaismmag.org/Articles/index.cfm?id=1149>
 - (Discussing the [Mishkan T'filah](#))
 - **Transliteration of all the Hebrew is also provided on every page--another innovation?**
Yes. The *Union Prayer Book* contained no transliteration at all. In *Gates of Prayer*, transliteration could only be found at the back of the book. Nowadays, while we as a Movement have increasingly advocated Hebrew literacy in recognition of Hebrew as our people's historic language, we have also urged that prayer be open also to people who cannot read the original. If *Mishkan T'filah* is a prayer book for all the people, then we shouldn't lock out those who can't read Hebrew.
A minority of rabbis opposed our decision to transliterate all the Hebrew in *Mishkan T'filah*, believing it will be a disincentive for Jews to learn Hebrew. In respectful response to them (though disagreeing with them), our committee decided to publish an alternative *siddur* version without transliteration.
- From "The Pittsburgh Principles," the most recent (1999) platform of Reform beliefs from the CCAR
 - We affirm the importance of studying Hebrew, the language of Torah and Jewish liturgy, that we may draw closer to our people's sacred texts...
We affirm that both Israeli and Diaspora Jewry should remain vibrant and interdependent communities. As we urge Jews who reside outside Israel to learn Hebrew as a living language and to make periodic visits to Israel in order to study and to deepen their relationship to the Land and its people, so do we affirm that Israeli Jews have much to learn from the religious life of Diaspora Jewish communities.

Thoughts to consider:

- What language do you prefer to pray in?
- Is there anything special about Hebrew?
 - If so, does this add to your prayer experience?
- Why does/doesn't language make a difference?
- Have you ever had a misunderstanding because of a language barrier?
 - Could this happen with prayer?
 - How can ideas be lost in translating our liturgy?
- Are there certain types of prayer that should be said in one language but not the other (standardized vs extemporaneous, personal vs communal)?

14. How Do We Pray: The Choreography of Prayer*

Jewish prayer can involve quite a bit of physical activity. Bowing, standing on one's tip-toes, and prostrating oneself on the floor can all be included in Jewish worship. When to do all of these things, though, can get quite convoluted. Additionally, it's not always clear whether doing these things even helps improve the quality of our spiritual experience! On this day, we want two things to happen: first, we want our campers to learn what some of the most common normative "movements" of prayer are.

Second, we want them to consider what importance there might be in using choreography in our prayers.

Goals:

1. CWBAT recognize the normative choreography of Jewish worship.
2. CWBAT see how using one's body in prayer can be beneficial to worship.

Texts:

- <http://www.nfty.org/resources/rc/choreography/>
 - **The Choreography of a Service**

Many postures and movements accompany prayers. Some are traditional and date back to thousands of years, while others are more recent innovations.

Jews stand during prayer as we would stand before royalty. It is generally accepted by our tradition that we stand for the *Barchu*, *Hallel* (psalms of praise), and the *Amidah*. Many Reform Jews also rise for the *Shema*, but it may surprise you to learn that not everyone does—this is because *Shema* is an affirmation, and not a direct address to God. Our tradition also teaches that one must say the *Shema* with *kavanah*. Some Jews close or cover their eyes while saying the first line in order to concentrate better.

Amidah literally means "standing up," and is traditionally considered the most important prayer. It is traditional to bow down on the words "*Baruch atah*" and stand back up on "*Adonai*." Bowing is a small-scale simulation of falling to the ground during Temple times to prostrate oneself before God. When bowing, one bends the knees, but rises up at the waist up. Although we bow for "*Baruch atah Adonai*," there is no traditional basis for bowing at "*elohei Avraham, elohei Yitzhak, v'elohei Yaakov, etc.*"

During the morning *K'dushah*, we rise up on our tiptoes three times for "*kadosh, kadosh, kadosh*." The Kabbalists were the first to suggest that the triple sanctification of God's name is an indication that one must reach to God with one's whole body. It is also an imitation of God's ministering angels.

Some congregations will then sit and read through the remaining sections of the *Amidah* together. Others will instruct individuals to pray the rest of the *Amidah* individually—standing until one has completed the *Amidah*.

During the Torah service, we rise when the Torah is removed from the Ark, returned to the Ark, and when the Torah is raised for *Hagbah* and *G'ililah*. We sit for the Torah reading, in that it imitates Torah study in which a group might sit in a classroom or in a living room.

We stand for the *Aleinu*. The very words of this prayer tell us what to do: "*va-anachnu* (and we) *korim* (bend at the knees) *u-mish-tachavim* (and bow down) *u-modim* (and give thanks), (we then raise ourselves back up) *lifnay melech mal'chay ha-m'lachim ha-kadosh barchu* (before the King of Kings, the Holy One, Blessed be He)."

We also stand for the *Kaddish Yatom*, the Mourner's *Kaddish*. Traditionally, only those who are in mourning or who are observing a *yartzeit* stand to recite this prayer. Many Reform Jews today stand in order to not single out the mourners, and to say *Kaddish* for those who do not have someone to say *kaddish* for them.

When praying, it is important to practice the postures that you feel most comfortable with. Try both traditional and non-traditional postures in order to decide which ones enhance your personal worship experience.

- CCAR responsum
 - Note- the specific content of the responsum isn't the main point, it is its attitude towards certain types of actions in prayer.
 - Prayer Motions

QUESTION: Some congregants have asked about certain body motions made during various parts of the service. For example, raising one's eyes during the recital of the *qedushah* or rising on one's toes on that occasion. What is the origin of these customs? (Joseph Lieberman, Pittsburgh PA)

ANSWER: Most customs of this nature seem to have an origin in the mystical literature. The *minhag* of raising the eyes to heaven may have expressed a desire to rise to the level of the heavenly host during worship. This verse, of course, reminds us of the prophet Isaiah (6.3). Among *Sephardim* it was customary to turn the eyes downward during the recital of this prayer. These and other movements may represent an effort to encourage greater inner concentration (*Tur Orah Hayim* 125 and commentaries; *Hamanhig* #52). They generally were created by mystics and their source may be found in various Kabbalistic books. In later generations the origin of the customs was forgotten and they remained as they do now among many traditional Jews. There is no reason for us, however, to follow these customs.

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- <http://templebethshalom.wordpress.com/2007/04/08/the-gestures-and-choreography-of-worship/>
 - There are many gestures and movements associated with Jewish prayer, from the lifting of the hands for the Priestly Benediction to “bowing before the Ruler of Rulers, the Holy One, Blessed Be” during the Aleinu. Such gestures and movements can add texture to our worship and deepen our personal involvement in the experience of prayer. When specific gestures and movements are visible to other members of the congregation, they may become identity markers for a community. Classical Reform Judaism discouraged gesture and movement in worship; both were considered, along with tallit and head-covering, to be tokens of excessive “ritualism.” Their absence was long a hallmark of Reform Judaism and shaped not only the identities of individuals and communities but their understanding of what proper worship prayer should be. In recent years, many older practices—as well as some new ones—have become increasingly common in Reform Jewish services.

Thoughts to consider:

- What choreography do you use in prayer?
- Does using your body in prayer help you pray?
 - How so?
- What connection does a person's body have to his or her spiritual expression?

- How can we overcome the typical division of body and soul?
- Is there anything that can be gained by leaving body out of prayer?

15. Place of Prayer

During staff week, Mark spoke to us about “beit t’fillah green,” one of his favorite colors. This comment brings up an important question in Jewish prayer- what importance is there in the location of where we pray? Some people prefer to pray outside, some people prefer to pray inside a small, humble room, and some people prefer to pray in large sanctuaries- which is best? Is one best? We want our campers to consider the importance of location in prayer and spirituality.

Goals

1. CWBAT understand the impact, if any, of location on our spiritual expression and experience.

Texts:

- Midrash Rabba, Exodus 2:2
 - Rabbi Eliezer said: The Divine Presence never departed from the Temple, as it is written, 'For now I have chosen and sanctified this house so that My name shall be there forever and My eyes and My heart will be there all the days' (II Chronicles 7:16)... Even when [the Temple] is destroyed, it remains in its sanctity... Even when it is destroyed, God does not leave it.
 - Rebbe Acha said: The Shechina (Divine Presence) will never depart from the Western Wall, as it is written, "Behold — He stands behind our wall" (Song of Songs 2:9).
- [http://blogs.rj.org/reform/2011/04/keeping-secrets-with-god-takin.html?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+rjblog+\(RJ+Blog\)](http://blogs.rj.org/reform/2011/04/keeping-secrets-with-god-takin.html?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+rjblog+(RJ+Blog))
 - Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav prayed, "Grant me the ability to be alone; may it be my custom to go outdoors each day among the trees and grass--among all growing things and there may I be alone, and enter into prayer, to talk with the One to whom I belong." I have been granted the ability to be alone. I have been blessed with opportunities to go outdoors, to spend my time among trees and growing things. I know the smell of the desert after rain, I know the taste of wind in the spring, and I know the feel of the warm sun on my skin after a chilly dark night. When I read the words of our ancestors' prayers, their language of wilderness resonates with me. I can pray scripted words in a sanctuary only because my soul has experienced spontaneous longing unencumbered by walls and artificial light. I believe there is immeasurable value in praying outside.

Thoughts to consider:

- How does location of prayer affect you?
- Do you feel more spiritual in different places?
- What is your favorite place to pray?
- Is there anything special about places like the Western Wall that makes them better for spiritual expression?
 - What is it?
 - Does its history play a part of this?
 - Is it more about its cultural importance?

16. Keva vs. Kavanah

In Judaism, there is a fine balance which must be struck between the twin elements of keva and kavanah. Keva refers to the idea of a person going with the set norms of Jewish practice (things like set choreography and liturgy) as is considered “appropriate.” Kavanah is the idea of having meaningful, good intentions in what one does, in this case in worship. In Judaism, one is expected to have a balance between the two: Judaism without kavanah can feel lifeless and impersonal. Judaism without keva can feel ungrounded, constantly changing, and... “not Jewish.” For this day, our campers should consider where the balance is between these two elements.

Goals:

1. CWBAT understand the notions of keva and kavanah.
2. CW begin (or continue) to consider how to balance these two elements.

Texts:

- http://www.myjewishlearning.com/practices/Ritual/Prayer/Prayer_Music_and_Liturgy/What_is_Jewish_Liturgy/Intention/Keva_and_Kavvanah.shtml
 - Prayer is not a service of the lips; it is worship of the heart. "Words are the body, thought is the soul, of prayer." If one's mind is occupied with alien thoughts while the tongue moves on, then such prayer is like a body without a soul, like a shell without a kernel.

And so it is with words of prayer when the heart is absent.

Prayer becomes trivial when ceasing to be an act in the soul. The essence of prayer is *agada*, inwardness. Yet it would be a tragic failure not to appreciate what the spirit of halakhah [Jewish law] does for it, raising it from the level of an individual act to that of an eternal intercourse between the people Israel and God; from the level of an occasional experience to that of a permanent covenant. It is through halakhah that we belong to God not occasionally, intermittently, but essentially, continually. Regularity of prayer is an expression of my belonging to an order, to the covenant between God and Israel, which remains valid regardless of whether I am conscious of it or not.

Heschel wrote: "How grateful I am to God that there is a duty to worship, a law to remind my distraught mind that it is time to think of God, time to disregard my ego for at least a moment! It is such happiness to belong to an order of the divine will. 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" (Man's Quest for God: Studies in Prayer and Symbolism, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1954, pp. 64-68).
- <http://blogs.rj.org/reform/2008/08/keva-kavanah-and-back-to-keva.html>
 - But my own thoughts yesterday went even further afield - guided in part by our discussion here at RJ.org of the progress in Reform worship, and especially by BZ's reminder that the service doesn't happen only on the bimah. The shlichey tzibur, the messengers of the community, are charged with guiding the *keva*, leading us through the fixed liturgy. In a departure unparalleled by predecessors *siddurim*, *Mishkan T'filah* facilitates the *kavanah*, the inner meaning and personal understanding the worshipper is expected to bring to the prayer experience, by suggesting alternate interpretations or different understandings, or even by stimulating new pathways to conversation with the Divine.
- <http://www.sinaibrookline.org/page.php/id/717>

- Our 6th Graders' [mentioned earlier in the article] prayers represent one side in a tug-of-war within Jewish prayer. Pulling from one end is kavanah, praying with intention, with a whole heart, spontaneously and with meaning. The students offered their prayers spontaneously, in a time of need or welling-up of emotion. That's kavanah. The Baal Shem Tov, the founder of Hasidism, taught that without this type of kavanah, intention and spontaneity in prayer, "it is impossible to pray" (Tzava'at HaRivash #60). But kavanah is not the only aspect of Jewish praying. Tugging from the other end is keva', "fixity," praying through the fixed words, through the pattern and structure of the composed vocabulary we have inherited. Judaism prescribes fixed times for prayer, and it developed set formulas and composition to establish a clear rhythm to our prayer life. To pray with other community members, we need this fixity, but we also need to feel our prayers. In Judaism, a constant balance must be maintained between these two, kavanah and keva'.
- Jewish prayer can be like a script. Just as every actor interprets Shakespeare in his or her own unique way upon the stage, we, too, can personify the ancient words of Jewish prayer to express our own unique inner prayers, differently each time we pray them. But, as Rabbi Kushner points out, "improvisation" has a place in Jewish prayer, as we try to reach upwards and outwards – and also reach inwards – to the God who hears all human prayer.

Thoughts to consider:

- Which do you feel most attracted to, keva or kavanah?
- In what way do you include keva in your life?
- In what way do you include kavanah in your life?
- Can you have too much of either keva or kavanah?
- What is your balance between the two? (ex, 60-40 keva)
- Re the last text, how can kavanah be a part of keva?
- How can we guide our kavanah towards keva without stifling it?

17. Saying (and Understanding) What You Mean*

One of the difficulties of a standardized, one-size-fits-all worship service is that sometimes we don't completely agree with the prayers which we feel compelled to say. Some that come to mind for me personally are the Aleinu (which talks about the special destiny prescribed for the Jews and not for the other nations of the world), the Torah blessings (which say that God "chose us from all the nations"), and the many instances of "oseh shalom..." (that we only ask God for peace for us and not for others).

While there is a discussion to have about how to deal with issues of this sort if they arise, more important for our campers is to recognize that they should try to understand what they say in prayers so they can even arrive at the point of disagreement (or agreement). What we want them to realize on this day is that while there might be some sort of special nature to saying prayers in an historically continuous way, there is even more importance in understanding what we are saying. On top of that, if at all possible, it is ideal for us to agree with things we say.

Goals:

1. CW understand the truthfulness of our words in prayer as an extension of our overall honesty.
2. CW feel compelled to understand (at least) the general meaning of the prayers they are saying in order to feel most comfortable saying them.

Texts:

- <http://www.catholic.org/hf/faith/story.php?id=39029>
 - Note- even though this is a Catholic axiom, the same concept can be expanded to Judaism (excepting, of course, the "Church" and "Risen Jesus Christ" parts)
 - CHESAPEAKE, VA. (Catholic Online) - There is a Latin maxim that addresses the centrality of worship in the life, identity and mission of the Catholic Church; "*Lex Orandi, Lex Credendi*". The phrase in Latin literally means the law of prayer ("the way we worship") is the law of belief ("what we believe"). It is sometimes expanded to as, "*lex orandi, lex credendi, lex vivendi*", further deepening the implications of this truth - how we worship reflects what we believe and determines how we will live.

The Church has long understood that part of her role as mother and teacher is to watch over worship, for the sake of the faithful and in obedience to the God whom she serves. How we worship not only reveals and guards what we believe but guides us in how we live our Christian faith and fulfill our Christian mission in the world by manifesting the continuing presence of the Risen Jesus Christ.
- <http://www.jewfaq.org/prayer.htm>
 - This is not to suggest that praying in Hebrew is more important than understanding what you are praying about. If you are in [synagogue](#) and you don't know Hebrew well enough, you can listen to the Hebrew while looking at the translation. If you are reciting a prayer or blessing alone, you should get a general idea of its meaning from the translation before attempting to recite it in Hebrew. But even if you do not fully understand Hebrew at this time, you should try to hear the prayer, experience the prayer, in Hebrew.

Thoughts to consider:

- Does it really matter that we understand the prayers we say?
- What bad things could happen if we don't understand what we say?
- Is there anything else in your life that you say regularly, but agree with or understand?
- Should we still say certain prayers even if we don't agree with them?
- Should we change our prayers so that we agree with them if we originally didn't?
- What does 'the law of prayer leads to the law of life' mean in terms of our Jewish worship?
- How can we make our spiritual expression most honest?

18. Rationality and Spirituality: Convergence and Divergence

We have already touched on the interplay between rationality and spirituality in Jewish spiritual expression in a few other topics, but this topic is specifically devoted to these two ideas. Rationality, the idea that all of our religious actions should have some sort of logical basis, can have issues with certain typical facets of Jewish worship. While rationality and Judaism can function together, they require their adherents to view their Judaism in a particular light. Spirituality has a more natural link to Judaism and connotes the emotional connection that a person has to the supernatural. While spirituality does not necessarily entail religiosity, a religious association is not too foreign from this idea. On this day, we want our campers to explore how they can balance or choose between rationality and spirituality in their personal praying life.

Goals:

1. CW analyze how they feel about rationality and spirituality's place in their expression of Judaism.

Texts:

- <http://www.jweekly.com/article/full/6275/devarim-successful-prayer-does-not-require-rationality/>
 - Kadish writes, "If we accept the Torah's premise that such a relationship does exist...we should do the same for prayer. Prayer should be accepted on its own terms, and not reinterpreted according to rational categories" (Kavvana,126).
We do not have to understand how it makes sense to engage in prayer.
- http://www.myjewishlearning.com/practices/Ritual/Prayer/Themes_and_Theology/Theology_of_Blessing.shtml
 - Dr. Max Kadushin, a twentieth-century scholar, considered such explanations inadequate. He wrote: "The attempt to make an idea specific when the rabbis [of the Talmud] have not done so often results in the misinterpretation of a rabbinic idea." Dr. Kadushin notes that the rabbis in the Talmud did not explain the change from second person to third person [discussing a topic in liturgical blessings] either rationally or philosophically, because they did not have a rational or a philosophical apprehension of God.
- http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Judaism/reform_practices.html
 - Reform Judaism is the most liberal of the major movements within Judaism today. It started in the 1800s in Germany during the emancipation and encouraged the examination of religion with an eye toward rationality and egalitarianism.
- http://www.ou.org/jewish_action/article/tefillah_a_unique_method_of_communicating_with_god
 - The pious scholars of antiquities (Chassidim Harishonim—Mishnah Berachot, chap. 5) would prepare an entire hour before beginning their prayers. It was during those long, quiet stretches of time that they would contemplate ways in which the very desires they were about to ask for could be used to fulfill a higher spiritual objective. Through middot harachamim [attributes of mercy], Hashem allows us to confront Him with our own rationally devised plan for effecting change within ourselves, and for elevating our sense of worth and purpose in our own eyes, and in His.

Thoughts to consider:

- How do you see rationality as a part of your normal worship habit?
- How do you see spirituality as a part of your normal worship habit?
- Does either of the two inhibit your worship experience?
- Are there any ways to help combine the two or make them work together synergistically?
- Is it that God allows us to rationalize God, or do we choose to rationalize God with our own means?

19. Unconventional Prayer: Alternative Worship Services*

While the standard worship service works for many Jews, it is an ineffective form of worship for many others. For those for whom this sort of worship does not provide meaning, there are all sorts of unconventional prayer experiences which exist. These are conventionally known as alternative worship services, and they include a wide range of different practices. The goal of all of them, though, is to inspire spirituality for those who can't easily find it. We want our campers to realize that there are other forms of worship out there other than the typical t'fillot service. Ideally, they could experience some sort of alternative worship service in order to better understand the idea behind this.

Goals:

1. CW learn about alternative worship services that exist.

Texts:

- http://urj.org/worship/wisdom/alternative_worship/
 - When I became a Jew-by-Choice some years ago, my entree to services was the Alternative Saturday morning service. (We call ours *Chevrat Torah*.) I was tremendously insecure about Friday night: What do I wear, what do I do (everyone else there *will* know), I don't know anyone, yadayadayada. The attraction of an alternative service in our congregation has been as it was with me: A relaxed, convivial, nonthreatening Torah service at which no one does anything "wrong," i.e., it can be promoted within the congregation and particularly with new members in the area, as a great way to start out. (Don't forget the bagels and cream cheese!) We now have growing teenagers who are frequently called to Torah and sometimes offer comments. We have the core group, but more and different faces are coming and staying all the time.
- <http://www.synagogue3000.org/story-3>
 - Over the past few years, we have seen an important new phenomenon in Jewish life: the creation of dozens of independent minyanim, spiritual communities, alternative worship services, and emergent congregations. This rich array adds diverse opportunities for worship, learning, social justice work, community-building and spiritual expression.

We knew very little about the thousands of people associated with these new endeavors. Who are they? What are their concerns? How do they feel about the communities they're creating, joining, and building? Why do they participate?
- http://www.thejewishweek.com/special_sections/36_under_36_2011_new_re_engineers/rabbi_joshua_strom_30
 - Assistant rabbi for three years at Temple Shaaray Tefila on the Upper East Side, he has handled a variety of duties at the Reform congregation — counseling, youth group work, religious school teaching; now teaching two adult education liturgy courses — but his biggest accomplishment is the bi-monthly Shabbat Unplugged alternative worship service he leads for a young crowd, mostly 20s and 30s, few of them Shaaray Tefila members, many of them residents outside the area.

The 1½-hour service, which began before the rabbi joined the temple, features a spiral-bound Kabbalat Shabbat siddur with traditional prayers and creative readings,

the rabbi's 10-minute sermon, and a band in which he plays a bongo-type drum. Attendance at the service has risen from 40 to a standing-room-only 200-plus, he says.

The services — no bima; everyone sits at the same level — attract a mixed crowd, including some senior citizens, with roots in all branches of Judaism, people “who wouldn't be anywhere near a shul if it weren't for this.”

Services are followed by an Oneg Shabbat, but the people don't come for the food or schmoozing, Rabbi Strom says. “This generation very much is spiritually seeking. They want to connect.”

Thoughts to consider:

- What types of worship services work best for you?
- Have you ever experienced an alternative worship service before?
 - If so, what made it different than normal t'fillot?
- Would you consider GUCI's camp setting (musical and informal) an alternative worship service?
- What kinds of things would help you express yourself spiritually in a service?
 - Do you think these could be integrated into an alternative worship service?

20. Taking Our Positive Spiritual Experiences with Us: Bringing the Magic of GUCI Home**

Most of our campers appreciate the worship services and spiritual opportunities which exist at GUCI.

For a good number of them, the opportunities which exist here are by far preferable to the opportunities which exist in their home communities. We should use this as a wrap-up day to discuss how our campers can bring the positive spiritual experiences which exist at GUCI to their homes.

Goals:

1. CWBAT understand how to import the most positive spiritual aspects of GUCI to their Jewish home life.

Thoughts to consider:

- How can we bring the magic of GUCI spirituality home?
- Are there aspects of GUCI that you think you could do individually at home that would enhance your spiritual experience?
- Are there people at home with whom you could work on this (rabbis, teachers, family, etc)?
- Have you explored the options available at your temple? Maybe they already have programs that could help with this.
- Where do you pray at home? Maybe there are different locations, alternative worship services there.
- How often do you attempt to pray at home? Maybe you could try more/less.
- Do you pray with only standardized liturgy or extemporaneous prayer, private or communal prayer, keva or kavanah based prayer at home? Maybe you could try branching out to the others.