

THE PURPOSE OF PRAYER

AGENDA



Welcome



Text Study Three



What I Know!



Discussion/Activity



Vocabulary Preview



Text Study Four



Key Ideas



Discussion/Activity



Text Study One



Did You Know?



Discussion



Personal Connection



Text Study Two



Discussion



WHAT I KNOW!

- What is a prayer?
- What words come to mind when you think about prayer?
- What feelings come to mind when you think about prayer?
- Can you name any prayers you have said before or say regularly?
- What is one reason you might say a prayer?



VOCABULARY PREVIEW

Human spirit – the qualities and capabilities inside every person

Generosity of human spirit – to act with kindness without expecting anything in return

Take for granted – assume we will always have something

Important Hebrew Words

Commandment – *Mitzvah* (מצוה)



KEY IDEAS

- Prayer is a way for us to talk to God.
- Prayer can be used to thank God and to ask for help.
- Certain prayers are considered a **Mitzvah** to say.
- Prayer can help us feel more in control over things in our lives.



TEXT 1

BLU GREENBERG, *DAILY PRAYER AND BLESSINGS*

President of the Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance (JOFA).

Prayer serves many functions, in fact, every function and its opposite:

It is a safety hatch when one is overcome by fear or dread, anger or need.

It calls forth a generosity of the human spirit. Prayer reminds us not to take totally for granted that which we all must presume as we go about our business—the gifts of life, health, love, and good fortune. . . .

Prayer is a sensation of community; but it is also a feeling of intense loneliness and aloneness with God. . . .

Prayer adds routine and organization to life; it is also orientation away from everyday life, a momentary stepping out of time and of motion.

B. Greenberg. 1983. *How to Run a Traditional Jewish Household*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 137.



Prayer has a lot of purposes. People can pray when they are feeling scared, angry, grateful, or happy. Prayer helps us remember all the good things we have in life and brings us together as a community. At the same time, prayer can be something personal between you and God. Prayer can be a part of a daily routine or a chance to step out of your routine for a little while.



TEXT 1: DISCUSSION

- Blu Greenberg says prayer can be helpful when feeling scared or angry. Have you ever used prayer when you felt that way? What or who do you turn to when you are feeling challenging emotions?
- Do you feel like you would be more likely to pray when you are feeling happy? Why or why not?
- Have you ever prayed as part of a community or by yourself? If you have done both, which did you prefer?
- Do you pray every day? Is it part of your routine? Or is it something you do only on special days (Shabbat, holidays)? Is prayer something that allows you a pause from your routines?



TEXT 2

RABBI LAWRENCE HOFFMAN, *PRAYER REMINDS US OF LIFE'S TRUTHS* (2000)

Professor of liturgy at the New York campus of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion.

Perhaps first and foremost, prayer is a delivery system for committing us to the great ideas that make life worth living, because ideas that are ritually construed empower us to do what we would otherwise never have the courage to do.... It imparts Judaism's canon of great concepts and moves us to live our lives by them.

From "Why Pray? A Variety of Jewish Answers." Available online at myjewishlearning.com. Viewed August 2021.



Prayer can help us remain aware of why we are lucky to be alive. When we pray, we are reminded of important lessons of Judaism, and this helps us live our lives by those lessons.



TEXT 2: DISCUSSION

- Why do you think it may be helpful to be reminded, through prayer, that “life is worth living”?
- Do you ever find it hard to remember and feel connected to the Jewish lessons you have learned?



TEXT 3 MODEH ANI

I give thanks to You living and everlasting King for You have restored my soul with mercy. Great is Your faithfulness.

מוֹדָה אֲנִי / מוֹדָה אֲנִי לְפָנֶיךָ מֶלֶךְ חַי וְקַיִם שֶׁהִחְזַרְתָּ בִּי נִשְׁמָתִי בְּחֶמְלָה, רַבָּה אֱמוּנָתְךָ:

Modeh / Modah ani lefanekha melekh chai vekayam
shehechezarta bi nishmati b'chemlah, rabah emunatekha.*

**Modeh (male) / Modah (female)*



An example of a prayer that expresses gratitude is Modeh Ani, which reminds us of the importance of being thankful for all of life's moments



TEXT 3: DISCUSSION

- What are you grateful for when you get up in the morning?
- What might saying this short prayer help you recognize or appreciate in your life?
- How can saying this prayer help you face challenges in life?





TEXT 3 OPTIONAL ACTIVITY: GRATITUDE BRAINSTORM

Photo by Alina Skazka



Photo by Min An



Photo by Pixabay



Photo by Kelly





TEXT 4

RABBI AMY SCHEINERMAN, *APPROACHING PRAYER*

Former trustee of CCAR and a member of its Responsa Committee, teacher, writer, and hospice chaplain.

Prayer has many faces, reflecting diverse motivations that inspire it. For one, prayer can arise from inner spiritual longing and a desire to connect with, and establish coherence with, that which is beyond us . . . prayer provides access to God as the worshiper perceives and understands God.

A second motivation derives from the understanding that prayer fulfills a **mitzvah**, a sacred obligation to God. Jewish tradition has deemed prayer a communal ritual and personal obligation . . . The Rabbis determined long ago that prayer would fill the void created by the destruction of the Second Temple, which brought an end to [animal sacrifice]. No longer able to serve God through sacrifices, Jews would now serve their Creator by offerings of the heart expressed with the tongue . . .

A third motivation is found in the opportunity prayer provides for self-reflection and self-exploration.

A. Scheinerman. 2018. "Approaching Prayer: Mishnah Berakhot 4:2 and the Accompanying Gemara from the Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmuds." In *The Talmud of Relationships, vol. 1: God, Self, and Family*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, Jewish Publication Society. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv6sj6rz>.



One might find 3 different motivations (reasons) to pray:

- 1. It may help you to connect with God.**
- 2. It is considered a *mitzvah* and therefore is something that God commanded us to do. It replaced the commandment of sacrificing animals to God, which is how ancient Jews connected to God.**
- 3. It can be a personal experience that helps you think about yourself and what you want in life.**





TEXT 4: DISCUSSION

- Which of these three motivations feels the most relevant to you? Do you like to pray to feel connected to God, to fulfill a *mitzvah*, or to connect more with yourself?
- Why do you think prayer is an obligation in Judaism? Do you think it should be a requirement or just a suggestion?
- Ancient Jews used to sacrifice animals and modern Jews pray. Is prayer a kind of sacrifice? What might you be sacrificing in order to pray?



TEXT 4 OPTIONAL ACTIVITY: INSTEAD OF PRAYER....



DID YOU KNOW?

There are different items that you can wear while praying to feel even more connected to God. Many people wear a *Tallit* (prayer shawl), a *kippah*, or wrap *tefillin*. There are traditional versions of these prayer garments as well as more modern, customized versions!

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PERSONAL CONNECTION

Try waking up and saying *Modeh Ani* and/or writing a “I am grateful for . . .” list every morning for a few days. How does it make you feel? Does it feel like a routine that helps you start your day on the right foot?

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