

SUPPLEMENT

Fourteen Steps To a More Meaningful תפלת שחרית

The following was my response to a posting on the Lookstein Center For Jewish Education Listserv which asked for suggestions on improving the involvement of girls in Jewish prayer:

I read your posting on Lookjed and would like to make a simple suggestion as to how you can enhance the prayer experience for the girls in your school. It is the same suggestion that I would make to enhance the prayer experience for boys; provide your students with a one hour class on Beurei Hatefila each week.

I am a student of Rabbi Isaiah Wohlgemuth, zt"l, who taught a course in Beurei Hatefila at Maimonides School in Brookline, MA for many years, the school founded by the Rav, Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik, zt"l. Students were taught an hour of Beurei Hatefila each week from grades 7 through 12. Many Jewish educators are unaware that the Rav considered the Beurei Hatefila course so important that he made it a requirement that a student pass a comprehensive examination in Beurei Hatefila in 12th grade in order to qualify for a Hebrew diploma, a document that the Rav himself co-signed. (He did not sign the English diplomas at Maimonides). Ask any graduate of Maimonides what he/she remembers best from his/her Jewish studies at Maimonides. One hundred percent would tell you that it was the course on Beurei Hatefila.

I am trying to continue Rabbi Wohlgemuth's work. For the last six years I have been publishing a weekly e-mail newsletter in which I trace the sources for the structure and wording of the Tefilos. I have completed my study of the daily Tefilas Shacharis and Mincha. I am now in the middle of studying Tefilas Maariv. I have published a commentary on Birkas Hamazone and a Haggadah. Along the way I have provided supplements on many of the holiday Tefilos. I invite you to review my work at the website of the Beurei Hatefila Institute: www.beureihatefila.com. Please feel free to incorporate any of the material into your school's Jewish Studies curriculum.

Perhaps it would be useful if I suggested some small steps that you can immediately take to enhance the prayer experience for the girls in your school.

1. Remind the students to answer **אמן** to every **ברכה** that the **שליח ציבור** recites. Tell them to do so not only because of Halachic reasons but also because of the history of **תפלה**. Is it possible that the word "אמן" is the reason that the Jewish religion survived after the destruction of the **בית המקדש** and throughout the long Diaspora? An argument can be made for that hypothesis if you agree with me that it was the requirement that ten

men congregate together to pray and to listen to קריאת התורה that has kept the Jewish People as a distinct group. This resulted in Jews having to live near each other in order to practice their religion to the fullest. The synagogue became the center of the community for religious purposes and for social activities. Why was the word “אמן” so important? If you examine the תפילות closely you will notice that חז”ל structured the תפילות around ברכות. That is why חז”ל implored us to recite 100 ברכות each day. Why were ברכות chosen? Two reasons: ברכות were easy to remember (half the words are always the same) and they provided a mechanism by which someone who did not know the תפילות could fulfill his obligation by answering אמן to the ברכה recited by the שליח ציבור. Think back to when חז”ל first issued the תקנה that שמונה עשרה should be recited each day. News of the תקנה could not have spread easily since the תפילות themselves were not initially written down. Instead the תפילות were transmitted orally. Consider further that חז”ל chose ברכות around which to structure the תפילות because of their mnemonic quality, an easy means of remembering the תפילות. Because ברכות also provided the mechanism by which many could fulfill their obligation to recite the תפילות by the act one person, חז”ל did not need to teach the תפילות to many people in order that many could fulfill their obligation. Under those circumstances, the שליח ציבור played a very important role, a much more important role than he does today. When your students answer “אמן” they should be reminded of how lucky they are to be living at a time when they can hold a סידור in their hands and can recite the prayers on their own and do not need to rely on the recitation of the ברכות by the שליח ציבור.

2. Teach the students that whenever they recite the first verse of קריאת שמע, they should do so loudly. When all those congregated recite the first verse of קריאת שמע out loud and in unison, the recital becomes a very moving experience. If in doing so your students are reminded of reciting the Pledge of Allegiance of the United States of America, that is a good thing because קריאת שמע is considered the Pledge of Allegiance of Judaism.

3. Have your students recite קרבנות; in particular, the פרשה of the קרבן תמיד, the רבי ישמעאל אומר of מדרש איזהו מקומן משניות and the חומש, משנה, גמרא. That explanation provides you as an educator the opportunity to discuss the interplay between תפלה and לימוד תורה that is found in the תפילות. Why does לימוד תורה play such an important role in תפלה? That is a complicated question to answer in a short article. Here is a clue: in one of the articles attributed to the Rav he uses the term: עבודה שבלב to describe לימוד

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תורה. That is the same term that חז"ל employed to describe תפלה. What was the Rav teaching us? Let us first ask a more basic question: why is לימוד תורה so important? The Rav employs a concept that I found in the writings of Philo, a Jewish philosopher who lived at the turn of the first Millenium in Alexandria, Egypt. Philo wrote the following: "Man's true function is to know G-d and to make G-d known. He can know G-d only through His revelation, and he can comprehend that revelation only by continued study." לימוד תורה was intertwined within תפלה because man cannot properly address G-d through prayer unless man has made the effort to know G-d through Jewish study. A second reason to recite קרבנות is based on the verse: ונשלמה פרים שפתינו. Since we can no longer bring קרבנות, we are required to substitute the recital of the פרשיות of the קרבן תמיד in place of the bringing of the קרבנות. The recital of the פרשה of the קרבן תמיד is our way of substituting for the קרבן תמיד.

4. Have the students contribute צדקה at the point in ויברך דויד when they say: ואתה מושל בכל. Several sources make that recommendation. Although the sources do not add the following rationale for doing so, I believe that it probably is the underlying reason: Performing the מצוה of צדקה before reciting עשרה שמונה is an opportunity to recite עשרה after fulfilling a מצוה, the מצוה of צדקה.

5. Have your students recite the קדושה in יוצר responsively in the same manner as they recite קדושה during חזרת הש"ץ. Such an approach raises the recital of קדושה in יוצר to the level of a דבר שבקדושה.

6. Have the גאון של יבנה recite the ברכה of גאון ישראל out loud and ask the students to recite the ברכה with him. In that way, they can actively participate in and feel themselves fulfilling the requirement of גאון ישראל לתפלה.

7. Teach the students that reciting the silent עשרה שמונה is תפלה בציבור and is the reason that ten men congregate to pray together. They may have thought that the primary reason that ten men congregate is to recite קדושה, ברכו, or קדיש. That is not so. Ten men who gather together to recite the silent עשרה שמונה have a special power. They represent not only themselves, not only the ten men who are congregated but they represent all of כלל ישראל. It is as if all of the Jewish people are gathered together in one place with them to pray to G-d. That is what the Gemara meant when it described ten men as constituting an עדה.

8. Encourage the students to add their own personal prayers to עשרה שמונה either in Hebrew or in English. Teach them that they can do so in any of the 13 middle ברכות if

what they want to add fits into the theme of any of the middle ברכות. In the alternative, they can recite their personal prayer at the end of שמע קולינו. A third alternative: have them add their personal prayer to the end of שמונה עשרה but before they step back three steps. At what point do they reach the end of שמונה עשרה? שמונה עשרה ends after the ברכה of השלום את עמו ישראל בשלום. To signal that they have concluded שמונה עשרה, they should immediately recite the פסוק of ויהיו לרצון אמרי פי. They need to recite that verse based on the rule found in the Gemara that שמונה עשרה must open with the פסוק: ה' שפתי תפתח and end with the פסוק: ויהיו לרצון אמרי פי. They can then recite their personal prayer. Teach them further that א-להי נצור is an example of a personal prayer. It is one of several examples of personal prayers that the Gemara relates were regularly recited by some תנאים, personalities in the משנה.

9. Teach them the importance of reciting מודים דרבנן. Why did חז"ל institute the practice of reciting מודים דרבנן? חז"ל were concerned that when the שליח ציבור recited the words: מודים אנחנו לך (meaning either that we thank You or that we bow down to You), the שליח ציבור's words could be construed as being less than truthful because he was the only one saying: "we". In order that no question arise as to whether the שליח ציבור was being truthful, חז"ל asked that those congregated join the שליח ציבור in reciting the first three words so that indeed "we" were thanking G-d.

10. Teach the children that תחנון does not end until קדיש is recited after תחנון. From the point that the שליח ציבור completes the ברכה of השלום את עמו ישראל and recites the verse of ויהיו לרצון אמרי פי, we join the שליח ציבור in performing three activities as part of תחנון and נפילת אפים, וידוי (confession); חזרת הש"ץ. In Nusach Ashkenaz it is not obvious as to when they recite וידוי particularly on Sundays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Fridays. It is found in the line: רחום וחנון חטאתי לפניך. Rabbi Shaptai Sofer (1500's) in his סידור recommends that we stand when we say that line because it represents וידוי and we are required to stand for וידוי. Since the recitation of the verse: ויאמר דויד אל ג' recited just before רחום וחנון חטאתי לפניך is of unknown origin, it can be omitted because it overshadows the line of וידוי. (In fact, the Vilna Gaon in his book מעשה הרב, section 49, directs that the verse be omitted.) נפילת אפים which follows וידוי is one of the most important non-verbal acts of prayer that a Jew performs as part of תפלה. Use the subject of נפילת אפים to teach the students the important role that our non-verbal acts play within תפלה. The Avudrohom's explanation of the line: ואנחנו לא נדע מה נעשה found at the end of תחנון highlights the importance of our non-verbal acts

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of prayer. In those words, we remind G-d that we have performed three non-verbal acts during prayer: sitting, standing and **נפילת אפים**. After completing the third act, **נפילת אפים**, we throw our hands up in frustration and cry out to G-d and say: we do not know what else we can do to have You answer our prayers. **תחנון** which follows **נפילת אפים** is one more opportunity to recite a personal prayer. The word “תחנון” means supplication, a humble prayer. **הז"ל** chose a chapter of **תהלים** for us to recite as that personal prayer. But the chapter that **הז"ל** chose is not mandatory. We can choose any paragraph of **תהלים** or substitute with our own prayer.

11. Teach the children the purpose of **קריאת התורה**; i.e the reenactment of **הר סיני**, accepting the Torah anew. Moroccan Jews have a beautiful prayer that they recite as the Torah is being carried from the ark to the **בימה** in which they explicitly affirm that they are accepting the Torah anew. Here is the English translation of that prayer:, “*I hereby accept upon myself the obligations of the Torah that was given to us by G-d through Moshe Rabbeinu. I hereby accept it anew with a complete and unconditional acceptance. This acceptance is done with my complete heart and all my soul and with all my possessions, with all 248 of my bones and 365 of my sinews. This acceptance is being performed without even a shred of compulsion but is being done in joy and with a good heart. This acceptance is in accordance with Rabbi Shimon son of Yochai, and his holy son Rabbi Elazar and in accordance with the holy King Yosam, son of Eliyahu. My mouth is like their mouth; my acknowledgement is like their acknowledgement; my acceptance is like their acceptance and my intentions are like their intentions. By mentioning them, my wish is to include all of the Jewish people, individually and as a group. This acceptance should be upon me, upon my children, and my children’s children, until the end of time, Amen.*”

12. Teach the children that **ובא לציון** is one last moment of learning within **תפלת שחרית**. The importance of that learning is shown by the Gemara when it provides that the recitation of **קדושה דסידרא** (**ובא לציון**) is one of the reasons that G-d allows the world to remain standing.

13. Teach the children the history behind the addition of **עלינו לשבח** into all our **תפילות**. In particular they should learn about the Massacre of the Jews in Blois, France in 1171 and the Piyut that was composed to mark the occasion. In that Piyut the author describes how the Jews sang **עלינו לשבח** as they were led to their fiery deaths.

14. Have the children recite the six **זכירת** and the 13 **אני מאמין** as a memorial to the Jews who died in the Holocaust.