

The Fourteen Principles Of Jewish Prayer

Teaching Tefila to high school students presents a challenge to day schools. Nevertheless it is a subject that ought not to be ignored. In an effort to assist schools in providing their students with a foundation in Jewish Prayer, I have created a list of fourteen principles of Jewish Prayer that I think provides that base. Teaching these principles does not require holding a special class in Tefila. It can be taught as part of any Jewish Studies class. Some schools might want to add to the list but I maintain that none of these principles should be omitted.

1. The Siddur represents only one form of Jewish prayer.
2. Non-verbals acts are an important form of Jewish prayer. Arguably, our conduct 24/7 may be the most important element of our prayers.
3. Jewish prayer and Jewish study are two sides of one coin. Put simply: study is worship.
4. The Siddur constitutes a guide to reaching the goal of reciting 100 Brachos each day.
5. The Mitzvah of Kriyas Shema is separate and distinct from the Mitzvah of Jewish prayer.
6. The first line of Kriyas Shema should be recited aloud.
7. If not for the rule of Semichas Geula L'Tefila, linking the redemption from Egypt to Shemona Esrei, there would have not been a Siddur.
8. The definition of Tefila B'Tzibbur is the recitation of the silent Shemona Esrei in a group consisting of ten men. Those ten men do not represent themselves individually nor do they represent a group of ten men. They represent the entire Jewish People. In other words, they should view themselves as possibly being the only group of ten men praying for the Jewish People at that time.
9. The word "Modim" in Shemona Esrei can be defined in one of two ways; i.e. to acknowledge or to bow. Defining the word each way provides a distinct perspective on the purpose of Shemona Esrei.
10. Kaddish is recited after ten men perform a Mitzvah that involves words.
11. Kaddish Tiskabel is recited to mark the end of a prayer service and that saying Kaddish Tiskabel indicates that a prayer service has just concluded.

12. Kriyas Ha'Torah is an activity that is separate and apart from Jewish prayer.
13. The Sephardic Nusach Ha'Tefila is directly linked to Minhag Bavel while the Ashkenazic Nusach Ha'Tefila contains within it important elements of Minhag Eretz Yisroel.
14. Our prayers contain many Piyuttim and remnants of Piyuttim that are easy to overlook.

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