

Entering *Mishkan T'filah* (Session 3)

WHERE ARE WE? WHERE ARE WE GOING? ***FINDING OURSELVES IN MISHKAN T'FILAH***

Please refer to pages 148-149 of the *Mishkan T'filah*

Introduction

In this third and final session of the "Entering *Mishkan T'filah*" curriculum, participants will explore the meanings and the importance of the liturgical terms *chatimah*, *kavanah* and *keva* to better enable congregants to "finding themselves" in the new *siddur*. While these Hebrew words have long been part of the Jewish liturgical lexicon, they have received renewed emphasis in the thinking behind and the design of *Mishkan T'filah*. Since it was a mission of the editors of the new Reform *siddur* to provide multiple entry points that draw congregants into prayer, it is also an objective of this session is to identify ways to take optimal advantage of the new prayer book to accomplish this.

Much background material has been prepared to support *Mishkan T'filah*; articles can be found at the Web sites **www.urj.org/mishkan** and **<http://urj.org/worship>**. The Additional Resources section below lists resources that are specific to this session.

The last page of this session contains an Evaluation Form. Please copy it for all of your participants, ask them to complete the form before leaving the session, collect completed forms and send them to the Union address as indicated. Your feedback will help us plan adult Jewish learning suited to the needs of your congregants.

Enduring Understanding

Mishkan T'filah, in its form and content, reflects the Reform Movement's evolving relationship with prayer, Hebrew language, ritual practice, Israel, egalitarianism and Jewish theology. *Mishkan T'filah* provides multiple, meaningful entry points for individuals to express public prayer within a unified Jewish worship community.

Essential Questions

1. What recently emergent cultural and religious factors have caused our community to want a new siddur?
2. How do we liturgically express the dynamic tensions of the Reform Jew as an individual and as a part of a sacred community?
3. How do multiple options for individual prayer experiences with *Mishkan T'filah* reflect the ongoing tension in contemporary Reform Judaism between *keva*

(fixed words of prayer) and *kavanah* (personal intention and focus the individual brings to prayer)?

4. How can *Mishkan T'filah* enable the individual to find his or her own place within our liturgy?
5. How do we, as twenty-first century Reform Jews, identify and articulate our understanding of our relationship with the Divine?

Questions to be Addressed

1. How does *Mishkan T'filah* express the dynamic tensions between *keva*, fixed (exterior) prayer, and *kavanah*, intentional (interior) prayer?
2. How does the new Reform siddur contribute to engagement with communal liturgy while also encouraging meaningful individual prayer?

Vocabulary Used in this Session

- **Chatimah**—"seal," the final sentence of a blessing that states or restates the blessing's main concept. All prayers included in *Mishkan T'filah's* innovative "two-page spread" end with the same *chatimah* and convey that it is time to move to the next prayer. It can also be a signal for those who have entered into private meditation or chosen an alternative reading to rejoin the community in prayer.
- **Integrated Theology**—"In any worship setting, people have diverse beliefs. The challenge of a single liturgy is to be not only multivocal, but polyvocal—to invite full participation at once, without conflicting with the *keva* text...This is the distinction of an integrated theology: Not that one looks to each page to find one's particular voice, but that over the course of praying, many voices are heard, and ultimately come together as one. As a worshipper, I must be certain that I am not excluded; yet, it is not my particular belief that needs to be stated each moment. As *worshippers*, we realize that our community, however diverse, includes me—but it is the community that matters most. The ethic of inclusivity meets *awareness of* and *obligation to others* rather than narcissism." This is facilitated by the innovative "two-page spread" layout used in *Mishkan T'filah*.
- **Kavanah**—Proper (internal) intention and emotional focus that enables us to connect with God through prayer. To facilitate *kavanah* in worship, *Mishkan T'filah* includes alternative renderings of major traditional prayers.
- **Keva**—Fixed (external) prayers; set order of prayers used in Jewish worship.

Staff/Facilitator

This class should be led by a rabbi, cantor or educator of the congregation or a knowledgeable lay leader.

Additional Resources

1. Harvey J. Fields. *B'chol L'vavcha: With All Your Heart*. Rev. Ed. New York: UAHC Press, 2001.
2. Elyse D. Frishman. "Entering Mishkan T'filah," *CCAR Journal*, Fall 2004, in www.urj.org/mishkan.
3. Lawrence A. Hoffman. *The Art of Public Prayer: Not for Clergy Only*. 2nd Ed. Woodstock, VT: SkyLight Paths Publishing, 1999.
4. _____. "The Prayer Book of the People," *Reform Judaism*, vol. 34, no. 4, Summer 2006, 32-35.
5. _____. *The Way Into Jewish Prayer*. Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights, 2000.

Materials Needed

- Pencils/Pens, colored markers
- Paper
- A copy of *Mishkan T'filah* for each congregant, if possible.
- "Keva" sign—include definition from Vocabulary above; "Kavanah" sign—include definition from Vocabulary above.
- Copies of text sheet, work sheet and "Prayer Is Speech" for each congregant
- A copy of the Evaluation Form for each participant

Session Overview

Beginning the Session (5-10 Minutes)

Set Induction: My Feelings About Prayer (10-15 Minutes)

Prayer Book Journeys: The Many Moods of Prayer (40-50 Minutes)

Conclusion: Entering the Tent (5-10 Minutes)

Session Plan

Beginning the Session (5-10 Minutes)

1. Welcome participants and invite them to introduce themselves to each other, if appropriate.
2. If you have taught Session 1 and/or Session 2 of *Entering Mishkan T'filah*, spend a few minutes giving a brief summary before beginning Session 3.
3. Explain that this, the final session in the three-session curriculum devoted to gaining an understanding of our new Reform siddur, focuses on several ways to bring individual congregants into community worship. A quite novel approach to accomplishing this has been called "integrated theology" by the siddur's editors. By offering several readings, poems and prayers based on the same theme as the traditional prayer, each congregant can search for the text that best conveys the message to that individual. Then he or she can read the *chatimah*, the one-sentence blessing that summarizes the theme, and turn the page, ready to resume communal prayer. This comes together in the innovative *Mishkan T'filah* feature referred to as a "two-page spread." Participants will have the opportunity to preview this feature as they study several prayers praising "Adonai, our God, who brings on evening."¹

Set Induction: My Feelings About Prayer (10-15 minutes)

1. Distribute pencils/pens and paper to each participant. Explain to the group that you will read several incomplete sentences that need a phrase or two to complete them. After each sentence fragment, pause for a moment and ask participants to jot down the first few words that come to mind to complete the sentence. There are no right or wrong answers, only one's own personal feelings and beliefs.
2. After finishing the exercise, ask participants to share a few "completions" for each sentence.
3. Sentence Fragments . . .
 - I attend worship services because . . .
 - A structured, familiar series of prayers gives me an opportunity to..
 - Being able to say a spontaneous prayer during the service gives me an opportunity to . . .
 - Prayer is important to me because . . .
 - After attending a service I often return home feeling . . .

Prayer Book Journeys: The Many Moods of Prayer (40-50 minutes)

Point out that, as the previous activity suggests, people pray for many different reasons and use different ways to reach God. Some enjoy saying the same prayers in the same way whenever they pray, while others feel the need to pour forth with whatever is in their heart at a particular moment, and there are times

¹ *Mishkan T'filah*, 148-149.

when one approach may be more appropriate to the individual's spiritual needs than the other. These next activities explore both fixed prayer, or *keva*, and spontaneous prayer, or praying with *kavanah*, and show how both can bring the worshiper in contact with the Divine and with the community.

I. *Keva* or *Kavanah* (15 minutes)

1. Explain to the group that the challenge of finding meaning in fixed prayer is not new. Such innovations as the development of a standard, fixed prayer book, beginning in about the tenth or eleventh centuries, moved us toward a canonization of the synagogue service, with central elements of the service becoming standardized over time. Because of this, the question of how to involve worshippers with the service in a personally meaningful way has been a difficult one. The editors of *Mishkan T'filah* developed an ingenious approach to this issue by providing several readings with the same theme, along with the "traditional" prayer. By including many of these beautiful and inspirational additional readings and integrating their use into the worship service, the editors of *Mishkan T'filah* have provided multiple entry points to Reform communal prayer.
2. Let participants know that they will now have an opportunity to explore their own personal feelings about which "works" better for them--fixed or spontaneous prayer? (If time permits, you may want to share with participants the "Pro *keva* and Pro-*kavanah*" readings in the Appendix of this lesson.)
3. Place *Keva* and *Kavanah* signs in opposite sides of the room.
4. Distribute the *Keva* and *Kavanah* Texts Sheet to all participants.
5. Explain the meaning of *keva* and *kavanah* or read the definitions to the group. Ask if there are any questions.
6. Create a forced choice activity by asking congregants to pose this question to themselves: "If I had to say which I think is more important in synagogue prayer, *keva* or *kavanah*, which would I choose?" Tell the congregants to go to the sign that contains the answer they would give.
7. Ask each group to either have a volunteer read the text sheet aloud or ask the participants to read it silently.
8. After reading, have the members of each group discuss if they still feel as strongly about their preferences as they did as before the readings. Why or why not?
9. Reconvene the group as a whole and briefly discuss.

II. The Two-page Spread Reflects Many Moods of Prayer (20-25 Minutes)

1. Paraphrase the following as you introduce this activity. In any worship setting, people have diverse beliefs. The challenge of a single liturgy is to invite full participation. Thus many "pages" of our new Reform prayer book are really composed of two facing pages. (Hold up a copy of *Mishkan T'filah* opened to show pages 148-149.) On the right side is the familiar

- prayer in Hebrew, transliterated Hebrew-to-English and a fairly faithful English translation. These are followed by the *chatimah*, the one-line blessing that summarizes the prayer in English, Hebrew and transliteration. (Read aloud the *chatimah* used for all the prayers on this two-page spread, “*Baruch atah Adonai, hamaariv aravim*, Blessed are You, Adonai, who brings on evening.”) Material on the left-hand page reflects the theme of the traditional prayer as seen through various lenses: social justice, feminism, Zionism. The editors of *Mishkan T’filah* have called this selection of several moods interpreting the same theme, **integrated theology**. Ask the participants to turn to page 148 and 149 in *Mishkan T’filah* or distribute the Prayer Sheet to each participant.
2. Once again, call participants’ attention to the last transliterated line on page 148 and on page 149, “*Baruch atah, Adonai, hama’ariv aravim.*” Explain that this line functions as a *chatimah*, a “seal,” the final sentence of a blessing that states or restates the blessing’s main concept. All prayers/readings included in the “two-page spread” end with the same *chatimah*, the summary statement, which makes possible individual prayer within a setting of communal worship. During a service, after congregants have selected and read the prayer/reading of their choice from the two-page spread, they conclude by reciting the *chatimah* and turning the page. This concept of integrated theology is one of the most important innovations contained in our new prayer book.
 3. Invite volunteers to read each prayer/reading to the group.
 4. Ask each participant to pick the prayer or reading she or he would choose to read, were they participating in a worship service and invite volunteers to share their answers, citing either their preference for the feeling of *keva* or *kavanah* suggested by the prayers or readings.
 5. Engage the group in a discussion about the values/advantages or drawbacks/disadvantages of each of these two aspects of Jewish prayer—fixed, exterior (*keva*) or personal, interior (*kavanah*).

Conclusion: Entering the Tent (10 minutes)

1. Ask participants to explain in their own words how the emphasis on the *chatimah* in *Mishkan T’filah* might reinforce the value of communal prayer.
2. Distribute a copy of “Prayer Is Speech” to each participant and invite a volunteer to read this out loud.
3. Ask the group for their reactions to the reading.
4. Conclude the session by welcoming all participants into the “tent” of *Mishkan T’filah*!

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KEVA AND KAVANAH TEXTS SHEET

Keva: Fixed (exterior) prayers; fixed order of prayers in Jewish worship.

1. *Be not rash with your mouth, and let your heart not be hasty to utter a word before God.* Ecclesiastes 5:1
2. *Change not the fixed form in which the Sages wrote the prayers.* Talmud²
3. "Prayer is a skill; it takes work....That is precisely the reason that religious routine is so important. It holds us in readiness for God's commanding voice. It means we are on the lookout for the holy...We must recognize that connection to God and Torah arises only from continued communal worship and a sense of ongoing religious obligation."³

Kavanah: Proper intention and emotional focus (interior) that enables us to connect with God through prayer.

1. *Only that person's prayer is answered who lifts his hands with his heart in them.* BT *Taanit* 8a
2. Rabbi Eliezer said: If a person prays only according to the exact fixed prayer and adds nothing from his own mind, that prayer is not considered prayer. BT *B'rachot* 28a
3. Rabbi Abahu would add a new prayer to his worship every day. Rabbi Acha in the name of Rabbi Yosei said: It is necessary to add new words to the fixed prayers each time they are recited. BT *B'rachot* 4a⁴

² Harvey Fields, *B'chol L'vavcha, With All Your Heart, A Commentary*, New York: UAHF Press, 7.

³ Eric Yoffie, "The Nobility of Religious Routine," in *Reform Judaism* magazine, Fall 2002, vol. 31, no. 1, 2.

⁴ Fields, 9.

***Mishkan T'filah*, 2006, CCAR, pp. 148–149**

Click on Web site's Session Three PDF link to download *Mishkan T'filah* pages.

Prayer Is Speech

Prayer is speech, but not 'mere' speech. The word is not to be despised. Words have power over the soul. "Hear, O Israel!" is a cry and an affirmation, a reminder of glory and martyrdom, a part of the very essence of our people's history. Our prayer books are but words on paper; they can mean little or nothing. Yet the searching spirit and questing heart may find great power in their words. Through them we link ourselves to all the generations of our people, pouring out our souls in prayer with those of our brothers and sisters. These words, laden with the tears and joys of centuries, have the power to bring us into the very presence of God. Not easily, not all at once, not every time, but somehow, sometimes, the worshipper who offers up his heart and mind without reservation will know that he has touched the Throne of Glory.⁵

⁵ Chaim Stern, *Gates of Prayer*, no. 16, 6.

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APPENDIX

Pro-*Keva* (Fixed Prayer) Arguments

1. We are a congregation, and in order for us to feel a sense of unity with one another, we need to use the same words. The more we share, the closer we will feel.
2. Prayer demands the discipline of regular practice and the same words if we are to be successful at it.
3. When we use prayers composed by Jews throughout our history, we identify ourselves with the traditions and generations of our people. When we pray with the same prayers used by Jews throughout the world, we feel at one with our people....Fixed prayer insures the unity of the Jewish people.
4. Beautiful prayers, like great poetry, never lose their meaning through repetition. The more we read them with open minds and hearts, the more meanings we can discover.⁶

Pro-*Kavanah* (Spontaneous Prayer) Arguments

1. While fixed prayers may be beautiful, after you have said them over and over again, they become dull and repetitive, and they lose their meaning. The Mishnah says: "Do not let your prayers be a matter of fixed routine but rather heartfelt expressions."
2. Spontaneous prayer allows us to express our feelings, hopes, and concerns. If we are bound by a fixed text, we are prevented from making our worship as personally meaningful as it should be. The Bratslaver Rebbe said to his students: "You must feel your words of prayer in all your bones, in all your limbs, and in all your nerves."
3. We can't program ourselves to be in the same mood as everyone else at the same time. Spontaneous prayer allows us the freedom to express our true feelings in the moment we pray.
4. In every generation our people has faced new problems and challenges. These should be expressed in our prayers. Obviously, if we are bound to a fixed text or style of prayer, we cannot include contemporary issues or forms in our worship.⁷

⁶ Fields, 7-8.

⁷ Ibid, 7, 9, 11.