

T'fillah

A Recognition of Forces Greater Than You

STUDY GUIDE

The Hebrew word for prayer is *tefilah*. It is derived from the root Pe-Lamed-Lamed and the word *l'hitpalel*, meaning to judge oneself. At first, this surprising word origin seems to signal that t'fillah is about oneself ... yet, in actuality, in order to judge oneself we must understand our role in the universe and our relationship to G-d. This process immediately requires an acknowledgement that there is something bigger than we are.

First and foremost, Jewish prayer serves as a recognition of God's role in the universe. The Yiddish word meaning "pray" is "daven," which ultimately comes from the same Latin root as the English word "divine" and emphasizes the One to whom prayer is directed. In this way, prayer becomes a humbling dialogue during which we recognize God as a force much stronger than we.

Prayer also brings us together as a community, allows us to express our positive wishes towards other individuals and forces us to recognize the way our natural environment provides for our needs. Bracha by bracha drives home the point that in the grand scheme of the universe we are each a small part with an obligation towards something larger – community, nature and God.

The Issue

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," or "You can't command spirituality," they say. People with this attitude pass on prayer and risk an overly strong ego. Some say it is arrogant to not offer praise and thanks for other forces in our lives.

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 through God's creation of other people, animals and natural resources. If you only pray when you feel inspired, than you may restrict prayer as a means to ask for more instead of acknowledging what you already have.

Camp provides an outstanding opportunity for chanichim and tzevet to dig deep into the meaning of t'fillah and to use it as a humbling process through which they feel a part of something bigger. Your task will be to design a Sunday morning shachrit service that makes apparent the way that t'fillah is an answer to our essential question: ***How do we come to learn that the world is bigger than we are? How do we realize that we're not "the only one"?***

Specifically, consider the following:

- The significance behind the requirement for a minyan of ten people to daven

- The t'fillot themselves – their themes, messages and goals
- The different environments in which we pray – do you think there are some that are more motivating than others? Why or why not?

To accomplish this goal you will need to do a close reading of the t'fillot in the Camp Ramah matbe'ah (service order). Read closely to determine exactly how the t'fillot we recite motivate us to feel a responsibility towards God, other people, animals and nature. Tips: Grab a siddur, do some research on the internet – dig deep.

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