

INTRO TO PRAYER

by Rabbi Ephraim D. Becker, Ph.D.

Why do we repeat our prayers?

To get us started we must take a look at the purpose of Jewish prayer.

Prayer is an opportunity for me to review my sense of G-d's Providence. That means that when I pray I judge my own awareness that all things are in G-d's Hands, and at the same time I attempt, through prayer, to strengthen that awareness and come away from prayer more connected to the reality of G-d's Providence. Indeed, the Hebrew word *l'hitpalel* (to pray) actually means to judge oneself. I am meant to come away from the prayer experience more aware of the reality that I cannot see with my physical eyes, after having assessed my need to increase that awareness. To pray (in common parlance, to daven) is to check my internal state of connectedness and then to focus on building my connection to the reality that it is all G-d. Prayer could then be viewed as an exercise in *Emunah* (belief in G-d) and *Bitachon* (faith in His Providence).

As such, prayer is not directly related to requesting our needs. However, and here's the link, through a focus on our needs we are able to increase our awareness of Providence. Thinking about G-d and our awareness of His Providence can be an exercise in fantasy and self-deception when it is not grounded. When we ground our awareness in a specific life-need we bring it all down to earth. When I think about G-d in the context of the visceral experience of need I am more readily able to work on sensing G-d in my reality, not just in my theory. In essence, then, my need is a vehicle for enhancing my prayer; not the reason for it. The essential requirement to pray exists so long as there is a physical, apparently cause-and-effect reality which distracts me from the unseen reality of G-d's Hand. In a word, we need prayer so long as we live in a physical world and the needs of our world help us ground our spiritual reality.

It should then be clear that by asking G-d for the recovery of a loved one, or for finding a mate, or for sustenance (or for the Mets to do passably well this season) we are not simply submitting our request to Santa Claus (which need not be done in triplicate) with whom we seek no relationship but only the fulfillment of our wants and needs; we are discovering ourselves and our relationship with HaShem. How many times do I need to do that? Well, I think it is fair to say that so long as there are needs in my world I will have the opportunity to transform those needs into a relationship with HaShem. When you think about it, you'll discover that the needs exist for precisely that reason. Not only can I use a need to increase my awareness of HaShem's Providence, but perhaps my friend or loved one who prays on my behalf can do so, as well. That's a very efficient use of a need!

Go ahead and daven over and over. Locate yourself every day on the continuum of awareness of HaShem (ranging from being caught up in cause- and-effect physicality all the way to a keen sense that it is all Him) and use your needs to intensify your awareness.

May HaShem grant the wishes of your heart.

With blessings,

EDB
