

# WHY PRAY? WHY REPENT? WHY NOT?

by JewishAnswers.org

**Question:** *What motivation is there to really repent and be worried on the high holy days, I mean I've survived for years without praying a word so why start now? I'm not looking for a drawn out idea of how beautiful Judaism and connecting to G-d is. I want something more practical, to the point. Why be nervous, and pray, and fast, and change if my life has been great up until now, and I don't see any reason that that would stop? Thanks for your patience, looking forward to hearing from you soon.*

**Answer:** I don't mean to make a joke out of your question. It is a very serious one and deserves a very serious answer. I cannot help, however, share a story with you. A few years ago Harvard University's required essay on the application for admittance was, "Define courage." There was one student who took the application, picked up a blue crayon and wrote, "This is courage."

He was accepted even though his scores were not the highest.

I tell you this by way of a short and to the point answer and not to write a, "Drawn out idea of how beautiful Judaism is," so here is the answer – "Why not?"

A great scholar once said to me that if Jews are wrong then we will have lived our lives in a moral, happy, calm, meditative, sublime, humble, and kind way. We will have spent our time praying for others, praying for ourselves, trying to define the purpose of life, studying deep, powerful philosophy, and bettering the world.

If Judaism is right (for us) then we will have spent our time doing all those things and it will have defined more than we can understand in this world on our own. We will have brought our spiritual beings, our real selves, closer to perfection.

Either way – I still ask the simple question – why not?

The real problem is not why pray. The real question is, "How should I pray? How can I make prayer meaningful? Why use someone else's words? How does it work? The fact that you wrote this question tells me that these are the real questions that you should be asking. There are many ways to get the answers to these questions. We can make many recommendations for you if you like. You, however, have to take the first step and realize that you want to.

Someone recently asked me, "Why can't Judaism have deep meditation like Buddhism?" My answer was, "It does – come and learn." You never know until you ask.

Let me know,

Rabbi Litt