

# Experiential Tefillah

*A teaching guide*



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Dear Advisor,

Contained within this booklet are several “workshops” focusing on different aspects of Tefillah. The workshops were written for the various shabbatonim that the Dije run throughout the year. You will notice that the method, structure and tone of all these workshops are different. This can be attributed to the fact that each of them were created for a different user group in mind, beyond this, the workshops were created by several different people, those that I have written myself are somewhat “meditative” in their nature. Others are more fact based and informative. The focus of this booklet therefore is to present you, the advisor with an array of different approaches to teaching Tefillah.

The process of prayer is an incredibly personal and sometimes intimate one, it is our primary mode of communication to Hashem, and without it, a relationship with Him would be an impossibility. In his book “Mussar Avicha”, Rav Kook tells us how each person needs to write his own ‘sefer’, he goes on to explain that while there may be many similarities, each person’s relationship and experience of Hashem is unique and varied, so much so that while the fundamental concepts underlying our understanding of God remain eternally true, the ‘colour’ of each individuals relationship with Hashem are up to the individual himself to fill in. Just as there is no such thing as “identical people” so to there is no such thing as identical relationships.

Fundamental to teaching Tefillah therefore is the facilitation of a process whereby each individual is allowed an opportunity to explore their own experience and relationship with God. Teaching someone how to daven without first introducing and then growing their own personal relationship with Hashem could run the risk of being absolutely futile. The art of Tefillah is a dynamic process where experiential learning is seamlessly combined with knowledge building to gradually build a holistic aptitude for connecting with God. Experiential learning is so often excluded from the religious educative experience and to its own detriment because it is a basic ingredient to any transformative process. One reason for this unfortunate omission may lie in the fact that beyond giving a framework and guideline for facilitation, this type of learning is not well suited for explicit outcome based instruction. The nature of experiential learning is such that it cannot be “taught”, it has to be experienced as the name suggests. And what is even scarier is that as educators, we cannot control *what* is experienced by the learner. The result of that experience may be positive, it may be negative, it may be a combination of both, and the essential element though is that the learning that takes place is far more authentic and “real”. By way of an analogy: The difference between explaining the way a sunset looks to someone who has not seen one before and actually showing them a sunset, is beyond measure .

In order to effectively guide learners on this journey, we, as the guides, have to know what *our* journeys have entailed. Meaning to say that you, as a teacher, have to be sufficiently involved and engaged in whatever it is that you are teaching. In our case, this ‘teaching’ is of G-d and how we connect with Him through prayer. Accordingly, it is essential that we fuse our own personal religious experiences in the workshop. The way you relate to G-d, the way you communicate with Him, what you find difficult and what brings you joy are some examples of the things the we have traditionally been told to avoid expressing when involved in teaching . But, can we honestly expect learners to form and inform their

relationship with G-d and answer some of the above mentioned questions without us having shown them that we, too have been through a process of exploration and discovery? It is not your conclusions however that are *necessarily* being shared but rather the universal experience of searching: searching for answers, searching for meaning . Whether you choose to explicitly express your own experiences or to relate them in more subtle ways is up to you. An example of this would be allowing the learners to read a passage from a book that played a defining role in your experience and through a discussion afterwards, let them reach their own conclusions. Another example is choosing/creating a specific exercise that introduces a concept that is meaningful to you, to them. With all this in mind, it is important to remember the boundaries that exist between teacher and learner. While they are not as rigid as boundaries expected in the formal institutional learning environment, they are nonetheless required in order to effectively distinguish between the distinctive role of teacher and learner and similarly the intended lesson that is being given over. This does not mean that the learning as such should not be a shared experience. It is therefore helpful in this sense to see yourself as a *leader* as opposed to a teacher, in this way you are simultaneously involved in the workshop with the learners but are nonetheless “ahead” of them as you know the way.

I therefore encourage you to expand on, or modify, the workshops contained in this book. Include yourself within it. It is a principle that should remain true for whatever it is you are teaching especially in informal education. In order to do this though, you have to be sufficiently familiarized with the workshops by actually doing the exercises yourself beforehand. You cannot, for example, lead a deep breathing exercise without knowing how controlled deep breathing feels for you, and even less advisable is instructing a group to “go out and introduce yourself to Hashem” without you having tried that out before. Only once this is done can you make up your mind as to how you would like to give over the workshop.

One final comment: Hashem is with you throughout this whole process, and very powerfully so, after all you are helping His creations draw closer towards Him in the most direct of ways. So before you do a workshop with a group, a suggestion is to ask Hashem that He may help and guide you so that you will do what He needs you to do.

Owing to the experimental nature of all the workshops, any comments, suggestions or feedback that you may have would be greatly appreciated. This will ensure that a continuing process of refinement and improvement is followed.

Hatzlacha rabah

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## Grade 6 - Tefillah Workshop Day 1

### **Aims:**

- To show through an exercise the power of communal prayer.

### Trigger (10min)

#### *Happy Family Game*

- Make a circle of chairs with enough chairs for each participant and the facilitator.
- Explain that this is a kind of relay game and that everyone should be looking for an opportunity to join in, and give the following rules.
- Ask for a volunteer to begin by sitting on the floor in the middle and telling their story, e.g.: their name, number of siblings, favourite band, worst subject in school etc
- The Linking begins as follows: Another person can intervene by standing and saying "A link!", when they have something that is the same as mentioned in the story (e.g.: blue is also his or her favourite colour/ they also have an identical twin... ).
- They must first repeat the last sentence of the person to whom they link, then go to the middle to sit down, before continuing with their own story, until there is another link between them or someone in the group - and so on, until everyone has moved to the middle.

When the last person moves to the middle, he/she talks about themselves until there is a link between him/her and the first volunteer. As soon as this happens, i.e. there something in common with the last person who joined the circle this person moves next to the first volunteer and then the whole group shouts, "We are a happy Jewish family!"

## Exercise (10min)

- Initiate a discussion encouraging them to come to a consensus of what we want eg: Peace in Israel, The situation in Haiti to improve, no more crime, mashiach, stop anti-semitism etc.
- Once they are all in agreement, make that communal desire into a 1-liner. Eg: We want Mashiach! No more crime! Heal the sick!
- Now we go around the circle and ask each kid to shout that “1-liner” aloud. As loud as possible.
- Once they have all had their turn, tell the group that they are now all going to say it aloud in unison at the same time.
- Now for the final stage, each kid has to close their eyes and spend 15 seconds visualizing what the world or their lives would be like if this problem were fixed. Then on your command, give a three second countdown, at the end of which all the kids will begin chanting the 1-liner in a hushed voice. Slowly begin to raise the volume until you are shouting your lungs out!

## Discussion: (7min)

- Judaism is a religion of community; of people coming together and helping each other in all aspects of life. We can see this clearly through prayer; the fact that we come together as a community to pray together and that our prayers are written in the plural form to include everyone.
- By praying together, are prayers become 100% more potent and powerful. So much so that we actually do have the ability to change this world for the better.
- The concept of a minyan

- Praying, however is not all about screaming together, its also about **thinking together... feeling** together. In the last stage of the exercise we simultaneously had the “1-liner” on our minds. This is extremely powerful as Hashem has given us the potential to affect change in this world via communal prayer.
- Now just imagine when we are communally thinking and saying negative things about this world and other people....it also has a potent but DETREMENTAL effect on us and the world.

## Conclusion

Lets now go through the Siddur and show them prayers like “ashrei”, “Aleinu” which make use of the plural form of Hebrew.

- Lets now say the Shema together, aloud. Allow them time to daven the *personal* amida, followed by a sung out version of Aleinu

## Grade 6 - Tefillah workshop day 2

*After having introduced the concept of communal prayer, we will now put it into action.*

### **Aim:**

- To actualize the mechanism of communal prayer in the form of saying Tehillim for a sick person.

### Method

- In a 5min discussion, review the ideas learned in yesterday's session.
- Now, hand around the pieces of card board to each kid
- Explain to them that they now have an opportunity to write down the name of a person who they know is sick or is in need of help.
- Give them time to think about it, if they know the person's name in Hebrew then write it down but if not, English is fine.
- Once completed, encourage each kid to give a little background to the person who they wrote and why they need our prayers. Change, the volume, pace and tone of your speaking. The kids need to know that they are in a **safe, honest and private** environment. (Don't push it, some of them may not feel comfortable to speak). If you are able to get them to open up, you will see that the *energy and tone* of the circle will change immediately, the kids will quite down and become more attentive. IF not, then the exercise will still be very effective none the less.
- Instruct them to now place the cards in the middle of the circle, one on top of the other.
- Explain to them that we are now going to do something very powerful, we are going to use a secret tool... a God given tool:

- The name of this special tool is called prayer
- The prayer that we will use is almost like a potent spell, a spell to heal people in every single way
- It has been around for thousands of years... originally written by King David, these *Tehilim* have been used throughout Jewish History to save our people in the most terrible times.
- Hand out Siddurim to them and all turn to page 534 for psalm 121. Esai Enay
- Explain to them that we will now recite this prayer line-by-line together and out-loud.

### Conclusion:

- The kids may now take back their cards along with the knowledge of where to find shir hamalot and other such prayers
- Encourage them to hold on to them(or at least the idea). They can use it whenever they want to.

## Grade 7 - Tefillah workshop day 1

### Dad!-Avinu Shebashamayim

*Lets begin by devoting the first 5 minutes of the session to talking about the shabbaton. Are they enjoying it? What do they like about advisors in general etc. Talk about how you ARE enjoying the shabbaton too. What do you like about the kids? This is completely unrelated to our topic but it helps us to create a safe honest environment of mutual communication.*

### Exercise 1(5min)

- Before they start, its essential that you stress that what is said in the circle stays here, its ok to be honest, its ok to not want to say anything too.
- We now move straight into the first exercise: ask the kids, "Out of 10, how much of what goes on in my life do I tell my parents?". They need to depict the rating on their two hands. Ie. Instead of stating the number eg: '6 out of ten'. ONE by ONE they simply need to raise their hands and show you the rating.
- Start with yourself.

### Discussion (5min)

- What determines what we DO and DON'T tell our parents?
  - Is it how judgmental they will be?
  - Will they ground me for doing something wrong?
  - Do they love me no matter what? Are some things meant to be kept private and personal?
  - Without even telling them ,do you think our parents know everything about us?

- Do parents want to know what goes on in our lives?
- The focus here is not to define the boundaries of our relationship with parents but rather to focus on how much our parents love us.
  - There is nothing that I can't tell them,
  - they will love me no matter what. The only "punishment" they give me is for my own good.
  - To help us along our journey to becoming the best person I can be, our parents will sometimes have to be harsh.

(Note: The program mustn't be confused for a parent-child relationship session. The main focus and "meat" of this session is still to come in the next exercise. This previous exercise is only intended to bring to light the positive elements of our parents' relationship with us.)

### Exercise 2 (5min)

- This is exactly the same as exercise 1 except that here, the kids are asked to give a rating out of 10 for how much of what goes on in their life do they tell Hashem.
- The same rules apply here as they did in the previous exercise i.e. They need to depict the rating on their two hands. i.e. Instead of stating the number eg: '6 out of ten', ONE by ONE they simply need to raise their hands and show you the rating.
- Once the ratings have been given ask for a few kids to explain their reasoning for their different ratings given

### Discussion (7min)

- Avinu shebashamayim- Hashem is my Father in Heaven. He is my father in every sense of the word.
- He only wants the best for you. He created you so He understands you better than anyone else. ... The silent *amidah* is a moment of intimacy with God. Imagine that you are whispering in Hashem's ear. The conversation is only between the two of you. You have Hashem's full attention!

### Exercise 3 (10min)

- Hashem wants to hear our voices, He want us to speak to Him in a way that is natural to us. So while the Siddur is of integral importance we need to develop our own *personal* prayer too.
- Allow the kids to leave the circle and go find a secluded private place.
  - Encourage the kids to speak to Hashem the way they would speak to a father who has nothing but love for them. They can start by saying “ Hello Hashem, its me \_\_\_\_\_. Im feeling quite \_\_\_\_\_ today. Or however they feel comfortable to do it.
  - There is no right or wrong way to do this.
  - This dialogue they have with Hashem should be aloud. No one else has to hear it but when they speak to Hashem, they should actually vocalize everything that they are saying.
  - This is the first time for most of the kids that they have done something like this so it might seem quite funny and strange but really urge them to try it out.
  - They can choose to take a Siddur with them if they want.

Note: This has the potential to be a very intimate and personal moment for the kids, therefore make sure that you are providing gentle words of encouragement all the way through the exercise.

## Conclusion (3min)

- Call the kids back
- In a hushed tone ask them to relate their experiences
- Was it strange? Did it feel good?
- He only wants the best for you. He created you so He understands you better than anyone else.
- He wants you to tell Him everything, not because he doesn't know but simply because He knows that it helps US to tell Him.
- He is there for us 24/7 and there are so many ways to connect... 1 of them is through the Siddur but other ways exist... like the one demonstrated today.

## Grade 7 - Tefillah workshop- Day 2

*Do not forsake your Friend or the Friend of your father- Mishlei 27:10*

### Exercise 1 (5min)

- Start off by handing out the “my friend” questionnaire to the kids.
- Ask them to think of their closest friend when answering the questions.

### Discussion(5min)

- What makes a “friend”?
  - The length of time you have know each other for?
  - How much they know about me?
  - How much time I spend with them?
  - The different emotions I can feel in front of him/ger
- What do I need to do in order to maintain that friendship?
  - Communication?
  - Showing Respect?
  - Expressing Gratitude?
  - Expressing our Love and care?

### Exercise 2(5min)

- Hand out a new set of “my friend” questionnaires
- This time though, ask the kids to write down “Hashem” as the name of their friend.
- Ask them to answer the questions now but with Hashem as their friend.

- They may find this difficult or strange but encourage them to answer in the best way they can.

### Discussion(15min)

- One by one compare the answers given for the first questionnaire, to the answers given to the second time they answered with Hashem as their friend.
- Listed below are 10 selected questions which highlight the central themes of the workshop.

(spend 1-1.5 min on each question)

1. *How long have you known each other for?*
  - Hashem has known you since before you were born. How long have you known Him? (ie. How long have you been aware of His being there)
2. *What do you think your friend likes about you most?*
  - What qualities do you think Hashem likes about you?
  - Are you generous, caring, humble, honest, giving, warm?
  - If people are speaking badly about Him, will you speak out and stand up for Hashem?
  - Do you treat His creations nicely?
3. *What do you like about your friend?*
  - There are so many attributes of Hashem for us to connect to and admire and appreciate, here are just a few of them:
  - Somech Noflim(support the fallen) , Rofeh Cholim (Heal the sick)
  - Melech Ozer Umoshia Umagen
  - He creates miracles for people that need them?

- He stands up for the downtrodden, widows and orphans?
4. *How often do you speak to your friend?*
- If your friend is there for you 24/7, and not only is he there for you but he is able AND WILLING to help you with absolutely everything, every problem, every need, every situation, would you not speak to him at least every day? NB: they may answer “No, I would only speak to him every few days”. Explain to them that the 3 times daily mitzvah of Tefillah does not stem from our relation to Hashem as our friend but rather as our Father.
  - What does stem from our relationship to Hashem as a friend is the necessity to have personal confinement and disclosure with Hashem on a regular basis. The concept of talking to Hashem in a non- scripted way similar to “hitbodedut”(Personal prayer by Rebbe Nachman) , is very relevant here. The last exercise of this workshop will apply the idea.
5. *Try remembering your happiest memory... was your friend there with you at the time?*
- Of course Hashem was there with me. He was there sharing in the happiness and joy, smiling along with you.
6. *Try remembering a very difficult time in your life... was your friend there with you?*
- Indeed Hashem was there with you. He felt the same pain you felt, He cried when He say how hurt you were.
7. *Do you feel comfortable to express all your emotions in front of your friend?*
- Ask the kids to count the amount of different emotions that they feel “in front” of Hashem.
  - Do they express their love, appreciation, anger, frustration to Hashem?

- Do they verbally communicate these feelings? Even though Hashem knows exactly how we are feeling and why at all times throughout our lives, He still wants us to express them to Him. After all it wouldn't be a proper friendship if we wouldn't be able to do so.
  - Be that as it may, just as a close friend picks up on our feelings without us having to overtly state them, Hashem knows if we are angry or happy.
8. *Does your friend forgive you easily?*
- “El Rachum VeChanun”, even more than you would ever expect from your best friend, Hashem is always ready to forgive you if you do something wrong to Him.
9. *What do you think your friendship needs right now?*
- In every friendship, there is always room for growth and improvement.
  - Ask the kids to think of 1 thing that they could be doing to make their relationship with Hashem better? Eg: Speak to Him more? Trust Him more? More honesty? More commitment ?
10. *What would you like to thank him/her for?*
- Appreciation is the foundation of any meaningful relationship.
  - It is essential that we express to Hashem our gratitude for everything that He does for us, everything that He helps us with (Ha El Yisha-eteinu Ve Ezrateinu). The key however in a relationship is to not only thank through words but through actions too. After all, expressing appreciation is actually a joyous and pleasurable experience (L'cha Nae Lehodot- It is a pleasure to thank you Hashem).

## Conclusion & Exercise (15min)

- We relate to Hashem in many different ways. As our King, Father, Savior, Helper etc.
- We learn from the pasuk “Do not forsake your Friend or the Friend of your father”- Mishlei 27:10, that Hashem is also our Friend. Especially at this age, when the kids are entering into a difficult stage of life and are facing issues of growing up, they need a friend more than ever.
- We conclude with a simple but powerful exercise: Encourage the kids to, as they did yesterday, go out and find a place where no one can hear them.
- They can take a Siddur with them and daven Shmonah Esrei, being aware of all the things they you have just spoken about. Encourage them to take their time, we will not start breakfast without them 😊

## Grade 8-Tefillah workshop: Day 1

Welcome to the 1<sup>st</sup> day of Tefillah workshops. It's a good idea to get yourself oriented with the program so your delivery of it to the kids is meaningful and significant. As the advisor, you are encouraged to use this sheet as a guideline and to place your own ideas and feelings within the framework provided. Tefillah can be an intimate and personal experience so therefore your own individual experience of Tefillah is invited to shine through, doubts and all.

This workshop focuses on the idea of rain and how important it is to us. So important in fact that it is what motivates the first man created to pray. It is within this interaction between God and man that we discover a fundamental concept regarding Tefillah.

Before that though, with the help of our natural surroundings, we will have a chance to gain some insight into the miracle of rain.

### Part 1

- Take your group down to the river ( or any scenic location on the site)
- While looking at the river, pass around the laminated illustration of “The cycle of water”
- Discuss the importance of rain:
  - How much depends on it?
  - Too much vs Too little rain, both are bad
  - Rain at the right time

- Ask the kids if they know what situation Israel is in with regard to rain.
- Now ask them if they are aware of any prayer(s) for rain

## Part 2

- Ask the group to sit down in a circle.
- Hand out to each of them a copy of the above section- “Just ask”
- Give each kid a chance to read
- Once finished reading, allow the kids to simply speak about what they just read, encourage them to think about how this idea of blessing and asking relates to our own lives.
- Make sure that they grasp the basic fundamental concept.

### Just Ask

“Now no tree of the field was yet on the earth, neither did any herb of the field yet grow, because the Lord God had not brought rain upon the earth, and there was no man to work the soil.” Bereishit 2:5

Until this point in creation, Hashem had “decided” not to shower the earth with Rain. It is only now once man is created that the land is watered. What is it about the creation of man that leads to rain descending? Well the pasuk itself tells us that “ There was no man to work the soil”. But in his commentary on this pasuk, Rashi points to another reason why Hashem withheld the rain:

“They [the plants] had not yet emerged, but they stood at the entrance of the ground until the sixth day. And why? Because He had not caused it to rain, because there was no man to work the soil, and **no one recognized the benefit of rain**, but when man came and understood that they were **essential to the world, he prayed for them**, and they fell, and the trees and the herbs sprouted.”

Here Rashi teaches us a beautiful idea. Once man was put onto earth, he was able to appreciate the fact that without the rain, nothing could survive. It is this realization that led the first man created to pray to G-d. In this prayer he asked God to bring rain upon the earth.

If we explore this a little more we will discover another deep idea: Adam would have come to an appreciation of the rain whether or not Hashem had waited for his arrival so why did Hashem “need” to wait? It would seem like Hashem actually wanted Adam to *ask* Him for the rain i.e. to pray to God. What this teaches us is that while Hashem could have given rain at any point, it was only when there would be a being to appreciate and be desiring of this blessing that Hashem would do it.

But if Hashem wants to give us something then why doesn't He just give it? Why does He want us to ask for it?

When we ask for something we bring into full realization just how much we need that “thing” in our lives. More than that though we also realize the source of that giving. Essentially, when we ask someone for something we are expressing our dependence on them. Now in some cases this can be negative because dependence can lead to vulnerability but this is only true when the giver is someone who wants to take advantage of us. If however that “giver” is someone that loves me beyond any measure then my reliance and dependence upon that person brings the two people closer and makes the connection between them stronger.

In a relationship, it is the constant and unconditional giving that grows love. The partner has to be a willing recipient of that giving and aware of the source. On an even deeper level though, the giver wants to be “wanted”, He/she desires the expression of love and dependence from the receiver.

The same is true with God. Hashem is so willing so shower blessing and revealed goodness upon us at every moment in our lives. So often though, we as people are unable to make the connection between the goodness and blessing in our lives and the source of that blessing- God. When we thank/ask Hashem for Health, wealth, intellect, wisdom, RAIN etc we are establishing that it is God who is the source of those things.

That realization brings us so much closer to God, after all it is Him who breathes life into us every second of our lives: God wants us to be here, He wants us to KNOW that He wants us to be here. And in a way Hashem “wants” to be wanted by us... He wants us to desire His presence in our lives and in this world.

You can conclude the discussion by re-emphasizing the point that Hashem constantly wants to give to us, it is with the tool of prayer that we align ourselves with this blessing and are then able to receive it. Prayer allows us to appreciate how much we actually need something and understand that it is Hashem who is the sole provider of that need. 3 times a day we meditate on this, In the Amidah we meditate on the various different expression of blessing in our lives : Health, understanding, peace, Israel, Forgiveness, heritage etc. In the mornings we begin our day by focusing our attention on these blessings with the Birchot Hashachar. ( You can go through it briefly with them).

### Part 3

- Allow everyone the time to daven from the Siddur.
- Encourage them to do Shema and Admida
- Place special emphasis on the “Mashiv Haruach” prayer

## A note on the Siddur

Many of the workshops in this booklet have emphasised prayer within an unstructured and personal context. This is largely attributable to our role as informal educators in providing a supplementary and sometimes foundational content to learners that the formal educative environment is often not able to provide. "Personal prayer" is one such example of something that has not been sufficiently emphasised in schools, thereby placing us with the responsibility to make sure that these students have had exposure to not only the mandatory and formalised type prayer but also the basic and inherent premises which underlies all forms of prayer.

So while it is mainly through the exercises and ideas of personal prayer that we develop that basic understanding, our duty would not be fulfilled if we did not ultimately make the connection between a basic affinity to prayer and a fluency and familiarity with the Siddur.

In its essential form, The Siddur is probably the most potent and direct instrument we have for communicating with Hashem. The Siddur as we know it today was structured and assembled by prophets known as The "Men of the Great Assembly" (c. 260 BCE). When compiling it, they had the needs of the entire nation in mind, for *all* generations. They weren't just directing us in prayer; they were teaching us what counts most in life to the Jew. Furthermore, they included certain mystical and esoteric elements provide the user with immeasurable benefits. While slight variations exist, the Siddur has remained true to its original structure and content for two thousand years.

It is of great despair then that many Jews in the Diaspora communities often report that they find the Siddur to be inaccessible, complicated and irrelevant. They argue that the Siddur is antiquated and does not accurately reflect the challenges and mindsets of life lived in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The reasons for this heartbreaking trend are vast but thank Hashem, there are many educators and organisations out there working hard to remedy it. What is of immediate concern for us however, is that many of the sentiments expressed above are shared by the learners of the King David and other Jewish day schools of South Africa.

Many kids at this age are either disinterested or even discouraged from using the Siddur in a regular and meaningful way. Those kids that have a positive and favourable view of the Siddur are often motivated by a genuine desire to connect to Hashem in whatever way possible. It is often the case that for even these kids, the process of praying from the Siddur, while providing pockets of meaning and inspiration, it is not experienced in the fully fulfilling and enjoyable way

it should be. As is in most instances, the Siddur of choice for Jewish Day schools around the world is the Artscroll Siddur. With its easy-to-use format and authentic translation, This Siddur has been revolutionary in making the cornerstone of prayer accessible to thousands of Jews in North America, The United Kingdom, South Africa and Australia. So why then are we confronted with problems we mentioned earlier on so many of the programs, shabbatonim and workshops that we run? Is it something inherent within the Siddur that 'turns them off' or could it be that problem lies with the way that learners are 'taught' the Siddur? I would suggest that the answer lies in the latter.

As mentioned earlier, the Men of the great assembly had the needs of the entire nation for all generations in mind when they assembled the Siddur. That means that within its pages, there is deep relevance to be found for every single Jew, young and old, man and woman, observant and non-observant. Therefore we must be determined to remove all of the extraneous variables that prevent our kids from realising the true beauty and personal significance of the Siddur. One of those 'extraneous variables' is the convoluted English which while providing an accurate translation of the original text, sometimes serves to further complicate the meaning. This is especially so for primary to junior school students who understand less of the English than they do of the Hebrew! The best solution for this, I believe would be to translate the Siddur into an English which while being completely authentic, is nonetheless more accessible and contemporary. However, until resources are allocated to this project an alternative solution is needed. The exercise below is an attempt at making the essential meaning of a prayer clearer. The first step in this exercise and others like it is to validate the feelings that participant has towards a specific prayer. In so doing you are allowing them to move past those feeling without it being contingent on receiving an answer. The next step is to help the participant derive meaning from the text by exploring the core ideas without relying on the English translation too heavily. Once the basic message is grasped, the participant is able to generalise it and apply it to his/her daily life thereby gaining new insight into the significance and relevance of the prayer. Exercises like these are simple in their technique but powerful in their result. That is generally the rule for effectual exercises, the simpler they are and the more you allow the participant to come to the intended message through self discovery, the more impacting and long lasting the learning will be.

This prologue has not been written to introduce a set of programs but rather to encourage you to create more exercises and workshops that are tailor made for the different kids you intend to work with. A knowledge of who your participants are, along with a general sense of intuition ( a.k.a. s'yata d'shmaya) will allow you to bring your kids to new levels of understanding and appreciation for prayer.

## Grade 8 - Tefillah Workshop: Day 2

Hi! In today's workshop, the kids will have the opportunity to further explore their own individual connection to prayer. Too often the standardised form of the Siddur leads us to a prayer which is un-inspired and bland. Instead of a service of the heart, the amida can become a service of the lips. The next exercise will hopefully introduce the kids to the personalised element of communal prayer from the Siddur (you will need Siddurim and Pens&Paper):

### WRITE YOUR OWN PRAYER

The difference between the words on the page and those in your heart is your understanding of how they are one and the same.

The "Men of the Great Assembly" (c. 260 BCE) who assembled the prayer book were prophets, and they had the needs of the entire nation in mind, for *all* generations. They weren't just directing us in prayer; they were teaching us what counts most in life to the Jew. If the words seem foreign to us, it is because we have yet to see their words through our own eyes.

But, that is the goal. And, when one achieves this, prayer becomes a completely personalized experience, and, *enjoyable*. So, you might as well try this next step and enhance your prayer experience.

*(As the advisor, you should help the kids answer the questions below and try explain some of the prayers. If you feel that your knowledge of the different prayers is not sufficient then don't worry, the main aim of this exercise is for the kids to express their frustration in not being able to 'get' them. Your main aim is just to validate their frustration and encourage them to search for the answers. Any extra information you may know is a bonus.)*

1. Choose a prayer from any part of the prayer service, from a section that you don't understand .
2. Ask yourself, "What does this prayer ask for?".
3. Ask yourself, "How would such an idea benefit the world?"
4. Ask yourself, "How would my life improve from such an idea?"
5. Write a short paragraph "justifying" the request of this prayer. If necessary, find adequate sources on prayer, and do research.

If you do this, the next time you say these words in prayer, you will immediately connect to them, and you will feel "lifted" because of them. You will begin to feel close to God, and this will enhance your entire prayer experience. Some people even write little notes on the pages of their prayer books just to remind themselves at the time of prayer of the conclusions they reached through this type of analysis.

You could do this for every individual prayer, and spend the rest of your life doing nothing but this. However, very few people have the luxury of spending so much time on such a project. Nevertheless, it has been my experience, and that of others who have tried this, performing the five steps above at least a couple of times, makes them somewhat automatic, even during times of prayer, until the entire prayer service itself becomes your own.

## Grade 9 – Tefillah Workshop

### Day 1

The purpose of this Tefillah workshop is to bring up some basic and essential questions about Judaism and see what the kids think and show them what the torah thinksō Judaism is about relationships. (Adapted from a shiur by Rabbi Lawrence Keleman)

*For the advisor:*

"Moses took the book of the covenant and read it to the nation, and they said everything that Hashem tells us we shall keep and receive+- Na'ase VeNishmaq The Gemara in Shabbat (88A) regards this statement given by the Jewish people as a great virtue, a secret given only to the angles. The Jews were willing to accept the Torah even before knowing what it was all about!

When asking the kids the following questions, ask them as if you are also puzzled by the questions.

1. We know that when G-d gave the Jews the torah, we accepted it with the words "Na'ase Venishma" we will do and we will hear. Isn't that cult-like? How can we blindly accept something without questioning it? We aren't robots so why must we do all these actions like a robot?  
**So, we must ask ourselves: What is this Na'ase Venishma Business?**

2. 613 commandments – are these all necessary? I'm sure this has bothered you too. EVERYTHING we do has a law behind it. From washing our hands to going to the toilet, to eating food. There are laws upon laws upon laws. For example, Shabbat is ONE commandment in the torah, but it is derived into 39 separate things that we cannot do. And even with these 39 melachot there are even more subcategories. It is weird how Judaism is so fixated on tiny details with millions of laws that seem to make no sense at all.

**So, we must ask ourselves: What is all this detail in Judaism?**

3. If Hashem is all-knowing and all-seeing surely He knows exactly what I'm thinking. What is the reason I have to stand up, rock back and forth, and actually speak the words in the Siddur? Why can't I just sit down on a couch and think for a minute . that will be my prayer. It seems completely unnecessary for us to go through all these motions if G-d knows what we are thinking anyway.

**So, we must ask ourselves: Why do we pray out loud?**

Explain to the kids that a rabbi name rabbi Lawrence Keleman once asked that question and he answered: if you are asking those questions . it means that you don't understand the basic meaning of life.

Ask them: what do they think is the meaning of life?

Rabbi keleman says that the meaning of life is to build relationships –

Life is all about relationships. The whole meaning of life is to get to know people, become close to people and allow people to come close to us. To make friends, boyfriends, girlfriends, wives, husbands, and most importantly to become close to G-d and build a relationship with Him.

Our relationship with Hashem is similar to our relationships with all other people. A relationship is a relationship. How do we build a relationship with a significant other? Well, there are three main things to remember, which funnily enough coincide with the 3 questions that we just asked.

1) How can we blindly accept the torah?

Rabbi Keleman tells a story:

I work in Nivei in Harnof in Jerusalem. However I live half an hour away and I take the bus there and back every day. One day, I finished quite late, and I was exhausted. All I felt like doing was getting in the shower and then going to sleep. I got on the bus and ten minutes into the journey, my wife called me on my cell phone. "Hi Honey, could you pick up some whole wheat rye bread on your way home?" Now my wife is a health food nut. I didn't even know what whole wheat rye was!!! Why couldn't she eat normal brown bread? That's healthy too! Or she could just get it herself. Now what would you do in this situation? "GO GET YOUR OWN RYE BREAD IF YOU NEED IT SO BADLY!!! I'VE HAD A LONG DAY!!! I JUST WANT TO COME HOME AND SLEEP!!!"

But I didn't see it that way. Here was my wife . a woman who never asks for anything. She is completely undemanding. Whenever I want to buy her a present she refuses to admit wanting anything. This is one time she actually asks for something and I was ready, willing and able to help her.

I got off the bus at the nearest stop, and I went into the nearest bakery. I asked for the bread and the baker told me that it was a special kind of bread that no normal bakery makes. "Great" I thought. He told me that the nearest place where I might find the bread was a specialist health food store 45 minutes away in the opposite direction to home. At this point it was already dark, but I hopped onto the nearest bus in the opposite direction and off I went on my quest to find rye bread.

I eventually found the store and the bread and in the check-out queue to pay I saw carob chocolate bars. My wife LOOOOOVES those so I grabbed a whole handful of bars and went to pay. On the way home I got her a bunch of roses and I rocked up at home like a young boy going to the prom with flowers and carob chocolates and of course, rye bread.

Now his wife had no idea about the lengths that he went to get her the bread. She never has to know. It's not important. What's important is that she wanted something and he got it for her.

The first rule in a relationship is never to question each other. If something means a lot to my wife/husband/girlfriend/boyfriend and I cannot understand why, It doesn't matter. Because it means a lot to her/him, it means a lot to me. No argument. This unconditional devotion shows true love. It is easy to help someone if you understand why. If we want to strengthen our relationship with him, we will do what he wants without understanding. "Na'ase Venishma".

*For the advisor*

It is possible to bring another way of looking at the concept of the Jews doing without understanding.

Another example is when you take medicine, you take it without knowing how it works on your system. The doctor tells you what to take and you trust him. There is a relationship with the doctor and an understanding that he is more knowledgeable than you and has your best interests at heart. So too, the Jewish nation trusted in the system, in G-d. This doesn't mean that you cannot try and learn about what you are doing, but your doing is not dependent on your understanding since you have faith/trust in the ultimate good.

Think about the other 2 questions: we will deal with them in tomorrow's Tefillah workshop.

## Grade 9 – Tefillah Workshop

### Day 2

Let's talk about what we said yesterday:

We asked three questions:

- 1) How could we have accepted the mitzvot so blindly?
- 2) Why is Judaism so centered on details?
- 3) Why do we pray?

Recap the answers from yesterday for the first question: the whole of Judaism is based on our relationship with G-d.

In question one we told the story about the rye bread and how in a relationship we want to give even if we don't always understand why.

Now let's see how that answers question two and three.

#### **2) What is all this detail in Judaism?**

The way to make a successful relationship is to pay attention to details. Think about your own relationships. We love the little things that people do for us. We love them

because they show sincerity. Big extravagant displays of love like sky writing or a room full of roses may be visually breathtaking, but they say I am intentionally trying to impress you. These big displays lack true sincerity.

Little things that someone's wife does for you show that they are sincerely thinking about you. If your mother makes your favourite food for you, or if a friend buys a book for you just cause she knows you like the author, (get the kids to give their own examples of small actions that show real love)

A relationship is a relationship. In our relationship with Hashem it is no different. G-d is amazed when we do incredibly huge things like save a life or fast yom kippur. But Hashem sees our true love for him when we pay attention to detail. When we ensure that we do little things and to the little things He wants from us. That is how we strengthen our relationship with Hashem.

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**For the advisor – there are two stories that follow which show how important details are:**

**Story 1:**

Some guy wrote an e-mail to a rabbi where he asked the rabbi why in Judaism there are so many laws, so many details! - The way you put on your shoes, to they way you dress, and don't tear toilet paper on shabbos etc. A week later the rabbi gets another letter from the same person where he wrote:

"Finally rabbi I prove my point. You didn't reply to my mail- that proves that you don't have a clue what your talking about. All of judaism is a one big load of rubbish." So the rabbi replied to him saying- you are right I don't have answers for everything. But in this

case I did reply. I wrote you a reply on email- and I sent it to [jack@hotmail.com](mailto:jack@hotmail.com)- oh OOPS! I maybe just forgot a small little dot before the COM. Sorry! It's just something small and insignificant .

Just like in the physical world, a dot on the computer or different letter will prevent you from getting to where you want to go, even more so in the spiritual world .

## Story 2

The Maggid of Dubno, Rabbi Yaakov Kranz was very famous for his parables. One parable he was known to tell was the one about the architect and his apprentice. Once, the architect was commissioned to design a very elaborate building. Since he was a busy man, he drew up the plans and diagrams, and left to work on some other important commissions. He instructed his new apprentice to copy the plans, and to render a faithful copy of the blueprints to the foreman of the construction crew. The master architect then left the job in the hands of his assistant, returning only for the dedication of the building on the day of its completion.

As the esteemed architect began his dedication speech, standing before Europe's finest dignitaries and ambassadors, suddenly the dome of his gorgeous building collapsed, utterly destroying all floors below! All the attending dignitaries and notables ran away in fright, and the architect was left to survey the ruin of his masterpiece, his magnum opus. As the crew cleared away the rubble, the architect and his assistant pored over the blueprints.

"What happened to this section of the blueprint?" the master asked his assistant. "Didn't you implement my design here?"

"This section? But all you have there are tiny dots!"

"You idiot! Those dots are the pillars that hold up the entire building!"

We, here on this earth, see only some little dots. We don't know G-d's plans. We can't read the blueprints. (Or as others might say today: we don't have the source code.) We don't know what those dots mean. We have to faithfully render the work given us. We have to know that the plan was drawn up by the Master, that the blueprints are perfect in every painstaking detail. We cannot, on our own initiative, implement changes or delete items according to our own understanding. We must follow the plan, because we don't know what's big or small.

Who's to say what's little and what's big? How do you indeed know that what **you** consider small is small in the eyes of G-d?

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In Judaism, greatness lies in the details. So too in nature or technology, a computer missing one tiny microchip probably won't work at all. Try tuning into a radio station to a close frequency but not the exact one. The result is an awful lot of noise. Try baking a cake at 450 when it was supposed to be baked at 400. Instead of a tasty dish we get a burnt cinder.

New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani turned New York around, dramatically reducing crime, by paying attention to the detail. He treated small felonies as major felonies, by coming down harshly on vandalism. He understood the concept that it's all about the small things and the detail.

Spirituality is the same. Harmonizing ourselves with spirituality requires that we tune in exactly to the right station. It requires a focus on details. The devil is in the details, as they say, but so is the spirituality. This is how G-d made His world and He therefore cares very much about the details. It makes sense that if G-d made the physical world that way, He also made the spiritual world that way.

And why did He create it so? Because the real test for us is not whether we can do something heroic and get a medal. We are all capable of running to help the little, old lady who fell down in the street. The heroic moment brings the best out of most of us. But, can we sustain this sensitivity and relating day in and day out? We are all capable of smiling some of the time. The great person always smiles when it is appropriate. We all have a great prayer . maybe when we really need something. The great person prays like that three times a day. He/she is always patient when he/she needs to be, always connecting with the pain and the joy of others, never over-reacting. Oh yes . greatness is in the thousands of little everyday realities. And that's just what G-d is looking for.

### **3) Why do we pray out loud and why do we whisper when we pray if G-d knows what we are thinking?**

In a relationship, why do we need to talk? Why does a man need to talk to his wife? Why do you need to tell people that you love them? They know you love them! Why do you say thank you to your parents? They know you are grateful!!! What people really want is for you to show that you are consciously aware of the relationship. Saying things, talking . shows that you are making effort. Open communication is vital to maintaining a healthy relationship with anyone. YOU NEEDED TO TALK!!! Rabbi Kelemen talks about how he makes sure that he talks to his wife:

Once a week every week I go out with my wife for dinner. I take her to a nice quiet restaurant, where we have our own private little table. I sit across from her and stare into her eyes and let her know that I love her, and whisper my private conversation. By talking, we involve each other in our lives. By being private and whispering it makes our relationship more intimate and closer. By the end of the night, after having whispered to and listened to and shared conversation, we both feel closer and stronger together.

Ask the kids how they can relate this to Tefillah. When we take three steps back and three steps forward, we enter a private little corner with someone we love: "Hashem". We then talk. We show that we are making an effort. We physically move our lips- whisper everything. WE tell our love how we feel, what we want and what we regret. EVERYTHING. And this is a personal private time with Hashem. This is what brings us closer to Hashem. This is why we move our lips when we pray and this is why we pray. The only reason for prayer is to talk to Hashem . to work on this very special relationship, and bring us closer to him.

To sum up: the whole point of life is to build relationships. We must make strong relationships with the people we love and of course with Hashem.

How do we do this?

- 1) We don't attempt to understand what drives the people we love . if it's important to them its important to us.
- 2) The little things count
- 3) Open and intimate communication

## Grade 10- Tefillah Workshop

### Day 1

**Are our prayers answered?**

#### **Trigger**

Pass around prayers that kids have asked G-d... let the kids laugh at the requests. Go through the prayers, when the circle is finished, return to one of the prayers - "dear g-d please make me a bird, I promise if you do this not to ask for anything else, love Jake. I am 5." Ask the chanichim:

If they were G-d or his father, would they answer his prayer?

We probably wouldn't, being older and wiser; we realize that there are great chances and opportunities waiting ahead of us as humans, ones which birds cannot have. Jake is too young to know this now, all he know is that his prayer was not answered.

#### **Then read this story:**

I live in Israel, I had 3 sons. My sons served their country in the Golani Brigade and I was so proud.

Nachshon was our youngest son. After having served in the army for a little over a year, with two stints in Lebanon, Nachshon came home on a week's leave, Friday October 7 1994

just before Shabbat. On Saturday night he got a call from the army informing him that the following day- Sunday, he was to attend a course up North, where he and another soldier from his unit would learn to operate a special military vehicle and in a one-day course receive a license.

Nachshon got a ride with a friend to take the course up north. He left late Saturday night and told us he would be back home the following night.

Nachshon did not come home on Sunday night. When by midnight Nachshon did not call or arrive home, I feared the worst. We notified the military authorities, we traced his movements, and we spoke to his army friends. We discovered from one of them that he had been dropped off after completing the course at the Bnai Atarot junction- where he would either catch a bus or hitchhike (As most soldier do) to Jerusalem.

On Monday we sent out search parties to the area where he had last been seen. At this point the army was still unconcerned, even though I thought that my son was dead.

On Tuesday we were contacted by Israeli television, who told us that they had received a video tape from a Reuters photographer showing my son being held hostage by Hamas terrorists. They said that they were coming directly to our home to show us the footage before broadcasting it to the entire nation and the world.

On that video tape, Nachshon was seen, bound hand and foot, with a terrorist whose face was covered with a kaffiya holding up Nachshon's identity card. The terrorist recited his home address, identity number, and then Nachshon spoke at gunpoint. He said that he had been kidnapped by the Hamas, who were demanding the release of their spiritual leader, Achmed Yassin, from an Israeli prison, as well as the release of 200 other imprisoned Hamas terrorists.

If their demands were not met he would be executed on Friday at 8:00 PM.

We were all mobilized for the next four days, 24 hours a day, to do everything in our power to save our son. Prime Minister Rabin said that he would not yield to blackmail, We announced Nachshons' American citizenship and President Clinton intervened,. Arafat called our home and said that he would not leave a stone unturned/.. We appealed to the media and Moslem leaders.

But mostly we appealed to our fellow brethren and asked them to pray for our son.. The chief rabbi dedicated 3 psalms to be said everyday. People everywhere, including school children who had never prayed before did so for the sake of our son. Women throughout the world lit an extra Sabbath candle for my son. From the 30 000 letters that poured into our home, I learned of thousands of women who had never lit Shabbat candles who did so for our son. On Thursday night, 24 hours before the ultimatum, a prayer vigil was held at the western wall and at the same hour prayer vigils were held throughout the world in shuls, schools, street squares and churches.

ON Friday night we ushered in the Shabbat. We did not know that the intelligence had discovered that Nachshon was being held in a village called Bir Nabbalah. We did not know that the army had planned to launch a military action to attempt to rescue our son.

At the hour of the ultimatum, General Yoram Yair came through our door and told us that the rescue had failed. Nachshon had been killed and so had the rescue commander.

The same microcosm of our people who had come to pray for Nachshon at the western wall came to Nachshon's funeral.

My husband asked Nachshon's Rosh Yeshiva, Rav Elon to please tell the people that G-d DID listen to our prayers and that He collected our tears.

My husband's great concern when burying his son was that there would be a crisis in faith. He asked Rav Elon to tell everyone that our father in Heaven heard our prayers and though we might not understand why- his answer was "no".

## Discussion:

1) Does G-d hear our prayers?

### Ideas to bring up

- our own parents hear us when we ask for stuff but just because they don't act on it, it doesn't mean they didn't hear us
- G-d WANTS us to pray- he WANTS to hear us so that we can build a relationship with him.
- We cannot see the bigger picture, like a child. We are looking through a key hole, cannot see the whole room.

2) What value does communal prayer have?

- the tfillot are in plural- we ask as part of a bigger nation
- Does G-d answer when more people ask?

3) How do we react when we don't get an answer?

- accepting
- Do we get angry with G-d? with ourselves?

## Grade 10 - Day 2 (a)

This workshop is run just before the “cookout ” program on the last day of shabbaton. The idea behind the cookout is to introduce the concept of ‘flow’ to the kids. Flow is defined as “the [mental state](#) of operation in which a person in an activity is fully immersed in a feeling of energized focus, full involvement, and success in the process of the activity. Proposed by [Mihály Csíkszentmihályi](#), the [positive psychology](#) concept has been widely referenced across a variety of fields” ( see Mihály Csíkszentmihályi’s book on “Finding Flow”). The program is intended to allow the kids to experience flow in a fun and appealing way. The task of cooking your own food with the bare minimum requirements, thereby fully immersing oneself in the task at hand, will often lead to a feeling of accomplishment and appreciation especially when the product of your labour is a source of satisfaction for you and your friends.

As a precursor to the program, this workshop will focus on ‘Mindful eating’ ( The mindful eating exercise is similar to the one done Encounter Day 3, therefore discretion is needed before choosing to do this Therefore while the exercise is powerful and to certain extent transformational, it may be a better idea to rather use [Grade 10- Day 2 \(b\)](#) which is not repeated on Encounter.)

### Introduction

. (Make sure that you have a plate of fruit from the kitchen ready)

**Explain:** As we have been discussing, there is so much that we do in our daily lives, that because of our inability to focus our attention and to simply just *be* in the moment, is not experienced to it’s full potential. Even the simple act of eating has turned into an automatic almost unconscious movement, below is an adaptation of an article written by Ticht Naht Han who is a world famous teacher of mindfulness meditation:

## Mindful Eating

Mindful eating is very pleasant. We sit beautifully. We are aware of the people that are sitting around us. We are aware of the food on our plates. This is a deep practice. Each morsel of food is representative of God's wondrous universe. When we pick up a piece of a fruit, we look at it for half a second. We look mindfully to really recognize the piece of food, the piece of pineapple or grape. We should know that this is a piece of pineapple or grape. We identify it with our mindfulness: "I know this is a grape. This is a piece of pineapple." It only takes a fraction of a second.

When we are mindful, we recognize what we are picking up. When we put it into our mouth, we know what we are putting into our mouth. When we chew it, we know what we are chewing. It's very simple.

Some of us, while looking at a piece of carrot, can see the whole universe in it, can see the sunshine in it, can see the earth in it. It has come from God for our nourishment.

You may like to smile to it before you put it in your mouth. When you chew it, you are aware that you are chewing a piece of fruit. Don't put anything else into your mouth, like your projects, your worries, your fear, just put the carrot in.

And when you chew, chew only the grape, not your projects or your ideas. You are capable of living in the present moment, in the here and the now. It is simple, but you need some training to just enjoy the piece of carrot. This is a miracle.

I often teach "orange meditation" to my students. We spend time sitting together, each enjoying an orange.

Placing the orange on the palm of our hand, we look at it while breathing in and out, so that the orange becomes a reality. If we are not here, totally present, the orange isn't here either.

There are some people who eat an orange but don't really eat it. They eat their sorrow, fear, anger, past, and future. They are not really present, with body and mind united.

When you practice mindful breathing, you become truly present. If you are here, life is also here. The orange is the ambassador of life. When you look at the orange, you discover that it is nothing less than fruit growing, turning yellow, becoming orange, the acid becoming sugar. The orange tree took time to create this masterpiece.

When you are truly here, contemplating the orange, breathing and smiling, the orange becomes a miracle. It is enough to bring you a lot of happiness. You peel the orange, smell it, take a section, and put it in your mouth mindfully, fully aware of the juice on your tongue. This is eating an orange in mindfulness. It makes the miracle of life possible. It makes joy possible.

We are then able to fully appreciate the gift that God has given us.

As Jews we are able to add another powerful step to this process. When we say a brocha before we eat, we are bringing the awareness of God into this small act of eating. We are essentially infusing that piece of food with tremendous holiness and uplifting the whole moment. The fact that Chazal instituted both brocha rishona ( Before blessing) and achrona ( after blessing) for eating is a clear sign that we as Jews need to bring the consciousness of Hashem and his creation into every act.

Once you have explained this idea to the kids, allow each one of them to take a piece of fruit from the plate.

Tell them not to eat the fruit until you say so. First they should observe the fruit:

- What does it look like?
- How does it feel?

- How did it get to my hand?

Now, we will say the bracha together word by word. Once you have said it give them the signal to put it into their mouths by being the first to do it.

- Just as they begin eating it, tell them to close their eyes and think only of the fruit in their mouths:
- The texture.....
- The taste.....
- The different flavors. Sweet? Sour? Tart? Juicy?

## Conclusion

After this exercise we have hopefully gained insight into the benefit of experiencing simple acts in a mindful and present way. By doing this we are then able to be sincerely grateful for that which Hashem has given us.

## Garde 10- Day 2(b)

### Introduction

This workshop will focus on the very simple yet essential awareness of 'being alive'. Our existence should not be a jumble of different experiences, all sown together in a random and haphazard way, Rather our lives should be lived consciously and purposely, always aware of the fact that we are here because 'we are meant to be here'. The first step to living as opposed to existing is a basic awareness of the life-force energy which *pulses* through our bodies:

### Exercise 1

- Ask participants to close their eyes.
- Begin a deep breathing exercise ( for an outline of how to do this see the appendix)
- Carry on with the deep breathing for at least a minute
- Now instruct participant to take their ring hand and place it on their left breast, right in top of your heart.
- Tell them to slowly move their hand to the right of their chest until their finger tips can feel a heart beat. ( You may need to push with pressure in order to feel the actual beat)
- Participants must now feel the beat of their heart for the next 2 minutes.
- Before they do this, explain to them that they will need to try clear their minds of all thoughts. This will be made easier by the deep breathing done beforehand, but the

most effective way to not let your mind drift is to constantly keep re focusing on the feel and sound of the heart beat.

- So for the next 2 minutes, each person will just be aware of their heart beats. The feelings that should come to mind are:
  - A sense of aliveness
  - An awareness of your body
  - A sense of thankfulness for being alive
  - Many other thoughts, feelings.

## Discussion

- Ask the group just to look around the circle and notice each person
- Go around the circle now, asking each person to talk about what they felt during the exercise
- Feedback may range from ‘Wow it was so powerful’ to ‘Im not sure what we were supposed to feel, but I felt nothing’
- Direct the conversation to the subject of being alive and living and we can be thankful for that.
- We must wake up every day with the understanding that “God wants me here”.
- We must wake up knowing that while we may go off our paths from time to time, we are none the less given life by Hashem because He so strongly believes in us. He not only believes but *knows* that we can complete our mission in this world.
- This is seen so beautifully in Modeh Ani:

מוֹדָה אֲנִי לְפָנֶיךָ  
מֶלֶךְ חַי וְקַיִם  
שֶׁהַחַיָּוִת בֵּי נַשְׁמָתֵי בְּחַמְלָה -  
רַבָּה אֱמוּנָתֶךָ.

- 
- In the last line it reads “ Rabah Emunatecha”, meaning great is Your faith
- It is not our faith that we are speaking about here but rather Hashem’s faith that He has for us
- He has so much faith in us that he gives us another day of life to live and to get another step closer in accomplishing your own personal mission.

### Discussion and conclusion

- Asher Yatzar is a prayer that is said upon waking, straight after modeh ani, that expresses our gratitude to Hashem for giving us a functioning body:

Having returned from the unconscious world of slumber, we become aware of one of the greatest miracles of this universe: Our physical body, with all its fine and delicately constructed organs and vessels. The daily rebirth of our physical powers moves us to sing God’s praises long before we realize the greatness of the creator through the wonders of nature in the world around us.

The feeling of being healthy, refreshed and possessing the strength and ability to live a healthy physical life call forth our gratitude to the creator. The simple processes of respiration, digestion and all other normal function of our body are miracles of divine wisdom; we hardly think of them unless, God forbid, anything goes wrong. We would be ingrates if we were to take these blessing for granted and not thank Hashem every morning for His care as the Healer of all flesh.  
(My Prayer – Nissan Mindel)



You may notice that some of the exercises and ideas used in the workshops are similar to those used on other programs. While those workshops may have been suggested for use with particular shabbatonim, their usability and effectiveness are applicable to all user groups, no matter the age . This does not mean that I have simply copied those exercises for inclusion here but rather I have carefully adapted them trying to ensure relevance and maximum effectiveness. It is so important that you familiarize yourself with all the workshops you plan to run, both by reading and experiencing them before the week of encounter and by attending the briefing sessions the night or morning before Tefillah workshops are run . As mentioned in the introduction, your comments, suggestions and feedback would be greatly appreciated.

## Day 1

### Part 1

We will begin with a simple breathing exercise that will hopefully move each one of the participants, including yourself, to a more relaxed, focused and aware state. You might want

to begin each one of your sessions in this manner as it is an important first step to any experiential workshop.

Start by getting the kids sitting in an as perfect circle as possible. Make sure that there are no gaps, unequal surfaces and that you can make undisturbed eye contact with each person.

Mention to the kids that we are going to start off the Tefillah group today with a brief yet powerful meditation. Meditation has meant many different things for many different people in different cultures, religions and lands. What's important to understand about meditation for this session is that it gives an individual the key to her subconscious. There is so much that we do in our day to day lives that goes 'unnoticed' by our minds. We miss out on the beauty and meaning of so much because of our inability to focus and direct our mind's gaze to the present. From relaxation, prayer and reflection to homework, eating and conversations, meditation empowers us to be fully immersed in the here and now, experiencing each moment without any filter, distraction or judgment.

In this exercise we will use a simple breathing meditation (10min):

- Start by asking everyone to take a deep breath in for 6 seconds hold for 6 seconds & then breath out for 6 seconds. Ask them to repeat this cycle ( The correct practice is to breath in through your nose and out through your mouth, breaths should not be forced or strained.)
- While they are doing the deep breathing, tell them that they should try and let their thoughts flow and not to concentrate on any specific thought.
- "Close your eyes"
- "Bring focus to sound of the breath rushing in, and then rushing out. Think of nothing else except for the sound of your breath. Let your mind be filled with nothing but thought of your breathing. Let that thought bring you to the present moment."
- Keep this cycle for 5 minutes
- They can now begin to open their eyes.

## Part 2

- Ask the kids to write down one word that comes to mind when you say the word “God”
- Go around the circle and ask each of them to state their word.
- Ask each one of them why they chose to write that word. ( As the advisor, you must not respond with any judgment, just reflect what they are saying. They must feel that they are being heard by you.)
- Discuss: what has influenced us in our lives to see God the way we do?
  - Past experiences
  - Parents
  - School
  - Rabbi
  - Shul
  - Books

### Elokei Avraham, Elokei Yitzchak, Ve’Elokie Ya’akov

In the opening lines of the amida we read the above line. It brings to realization an ever important and beautiful teaching: The verse reads “ The God of Avraham, The God Yitzchak and the God of Yaakov”. But would it not make more sense if the verse would be “ The God of Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov” Why the seemingly redundant “God of”? . What we learn from this is that God had a personal, intimate and individual relationship with each one of our forefathers, its as if to say that The God of Avraham was not the same as the God of Yitzchak and the God of Yitzchak was different to the God of Ya’akov. This of course does

not mean that there were 3 different God's but rather that God in His infinite nature is able and *wants* to have a unique relationship with each one of us.

Pose this question: is the way you relate to "David" the same as the way "Mark" relates to David? Would it be fair if you made up your mind about the way you should relate to David based on Mark and David's relationship? No! Each one of you relates to David in a different way, the combination of your unique personalities and character traits, your likes and dislikes, your hobbies etc. form a relationship that is like no other.

The same is true with our relationship with God. The only way we can come to a true understanding of God is by ME knowing HIM. There have been many great wise people that have had a very intimate, awe-full and deep relationship with God, they have written books and given lectures about what God is to them, we should learn from these great masters and value their teachings but always understand that it is only you that can Meet God, no one else can do that for you. The laws of our relating to God, as given to us by the sages, gives us a framework of laws to create a loving, respectful and meaningful relationship but this framework is of no use if we don't use it properly to create a relationship.

### Part 3

Discuss the following questions with the kids:

- How does one start a relationship?
- How does one maintain a relationship?

While there are many different answers to these questions, today we will deal with the aspect of communication. Communication is integral to any relationship. Whether in the form of speaking, writing or signaling, it is essential that we communicate our essence to the other in a relationship. But before we get to that stage, the relationship needs to be

established. Very often it is a good idea to introduce yourself to the person before you begin the conversation. The main thing is that you present yourself as a ready, willing and open partner .

## Part 4

- Go out, find a secluded place, sit down and introduce yourself to God.
- If one of the kids doesn't feel comfortable to do that yet, then offer the opportunity for him/her to go introduce themselves to themselves. Meaning begin an internal dialogue.

## Conclusion

- Call the kids who have finished back to the circle.
- Ask them to share their experience and what they have learned with the rest of the group.
- End off in the way you feel appropriate

## Encounter - Tefillah Day 2

The power of personal prayer cannot be underestimated. After yesterday's session, the kids will have hopefully gotten a taste of what it might mean to enter into and maintain a relationship with God. In today's workshop we will journey further into the soul and hopefully discover what our "inner song" is- what we are sincerely striving for at this moment. Along with this realization, the session will also introduce the concept of "Chaveirut" Freindship through an exercise of praying for one another.

As per usual- we will begin the session with a meditation exercise:

### **3 Column Meditation**

- You will be provided with a piece of paper which has 3 columns on it: Memory, words & Picture.
- Once each kid has paper, ask each of them to place an object in front of them ( Watch, rock, flower, cup... anything).
- For 1 minute they must focus their gaze on the object. ( The aim is not to think *about* the object but rather just to stare at it)
- While focusing, ask them to tick a column every time a thought comes into their mind. If they notice a thought of words then tick the words column, if they think of a memory or are reminded to do something like “ Oh ya I must call Greg!” then tick the memory column and if they have a visual thought then tick the picture column.
- The point is not to try stop thought but rather to become aware of the numerous thoughts that we think from moment to moment, so encourage them to try and be as sensitive as possible to every single thought.
- It is not a competition
- After 1 minute they should have several ticks in each column.

### **Discussion:**

At any given moment in a day, our minds are incredibly active: Recording what is going on, recalling past experiences, observing the present moment, forecasting what is going to happen etc. Even when we make an attempt concentrate, are minds are unable to devote more than a a small percent of “energy”. There is great benefit in quieting the mind and just observing what kind of thoughts are flying around in our head. After doing this for a few moments, you will notice that the rate and frequency of thought begins to get lesser. With that type of clarity we can begin to devote our attention more effectively to whatever we choose.

- We will now spend 3 minutes doing a simple breathing exercise which will help quit the mind.

### **Part 2- Hearing your inner song**

“We can only pray the way we are supposed to when we recognize that in fact the soul is always praying.

Without stop, the soul soars and yearns for its Beloved. It is at the time of outward prayer, that the perpetual prayer of the soul reveals itself in the realm of action.

This is prayer's pleasure and joy, its glory and beauty. It is like a rose, opening its elegant petals towards the dew, facing the rays of the sun as they shine over it with the sun's light. “

*Rav Kook*

We call out to God 'in truth' when we pray, not for the fleeting and insignificant, but for that which is true and eternal. Prayer in truth aspires to uncover the inner meaning of our existence, the very essence of our lives. "Return us, our Father, to Your Torah. Draw us near, our King, to Your service" (from the Amidah prayer). When we pray to find our purpose in life and our path to serve God, such a prayer is an authentic reflection of the soul's inner desires. We must strive to hear the song that our soul is singing, is it a song of bliss **and joy** or one of **pain and hurt**, is it a song of **praise or one of request**, one of **love or of anger**? At different times in our life we call for different songs, what song is your soul singing this morning?

- Ask the kids to write down on a piece of paper one thing that they are hoping for at this present moment. It could be something about their family, studies, friends, health, a clarity on a problem they are presently facing... anything! Remind them that this present space is a safe one: Confidential, understanding and loving.
- Encourage them to be as sincere as possible... it will only be to their benefit if they do
- Once everyone has written something, go around the circle and ask those that are comfortable to share what they wrote.
  - Make sure to speak in a slightly quieter tone
  - It is so important to simply **reflect** what each person says, without judgment or answering them just let them know that they are being *felt and heard*

- As the leader of the group you should lead the group by sharing what you wrote.

### **Part 3- There for each other**

After sharing our inner hopes and desires, the group will hopefully be in a warmer and more personal space. Tefillah workshops offer an opportunity for close bonding between each of the participants in the group. The more we share, the more we feel connected and comfortable with one another. In these groups, we have the potential to really strengthen and sometimes transform the friendships that are present in the group. This next exercise will attempt to achieve such a thing:

It is so powerful to ask and pray for those things that each of us wrote down. God responds so dearly to those that express themselves sincerely to Him. There is however something even more powerful... To pray for one another.

A Gemarah in Bava Kama tells us that a person who prays for his friend will have his friend and his own prayers answered first, meaning that there is tremendous influence in the prayer we pray for another. When we are faced with a specific challenge, we uniquely understand the pain of someone in similar position and therefore our prayers for them are most genuine and meaningful.

More than this, True friendship is all about being there for one another.....

- Explain that we will now go around the group again, asking each person to disclose what they wrote but this time as each person reads, another person in the group will volunteer to pray for them.
  - All that the volunteer needs to do is raise his or her hand after the friend disclosing has read.
  - You as the leader should start.

- At the end of this, give each person the opportunity to go and pray. They can choose to make use of a Siddur but if they prefer to, a personal prayer is more than fine. In this prayer they should include the request of their friend. (10 minutes)

## Conclusion

- Simply conclude by reviewing what you did in the session:
  - The concept of connecting to your inner prayer
  - Our souls are always praying
  - God loves it when we express our sincere needs and wants to Him
  - Focus on the idea of friendship, that we should feel comfortable to share what we are hoping for with our friends. True friendship is about being there for each other, not only by jumping for a mate in a fight or giving them a shoulder to cry on but even more so by helping each other to achieve and accomplish their goals.
  - Let this workshop be the start of a powerful journey of friendship and trust in Hashem to listen us, what we are saying, what we are crying for, what are we singing for and what we are living for.
  -

## Day 3

*Welcome to Day 3 of Tefillah ☺ Today we will delve into the concept of appreciation. We will begin with an eating exercise which will build on the practice of mindfulness which we have been experimenting with the past 2 days:*

### Mmmm How yummy!

(Make sure that you have a plate of fruit from the kitchen ready)

**Explain:** As we have been discussing, there is so much that we do in our daily lives, that because of our inability to focus our attention and to simply just *be* in the moment, is not experienced to its full potential. Even the simple act of eating has turned into an automatic almost unconscious movement, below is an adaptation of an article written by Ticht Naht Han who is a world famous teacher of mindfulness meditation:

## Mindful Eating

Mindful eating is very pleasant. We sit beautifully. We are aware of the people that are sitting around us. We are aware of the food on our plates. This is a deep practice. Each morsel of food is representative of God's wondrous universe. When we pick up a piece of a fruit, we look at it for half a second. We look mindfully to really recognize the piece of food, the piece of pineapple or grape. We should know that this is a piece of pineapple or grape. We identify it with our mindfulness: "I know this is a grape. This is a piece of pineapple." It only takes a fraction of a second.

When we are mindful, we recognize what we are picking up. When we put it into our mouth, we know what we are putting into our mouth. When we chew it, we know what we are chewing. It's very simple.

Some of us, while looking at a piece of carrot, can see the whole universe in it, can see the sunshine in it, can see the earth in it. It has come from God for our nourishment.

You may like to smile to it before you put it in your mouth. When you chew it, you are aware that you are chewing a piece of fruit. Don't put anything else into your mouth, like your projects, your worries, your fear, just put the carrot in.

And when you chew, chew only the grape, not your projects or your ideas. You are capable of living in the present moment, in the here and the now. It is simple, but you need some training to just enjoy the piece of carrot. This is a miracle.

I often teach "orange meditation" to my students. We spend time sitting together, each enjoying an orange. Placing the orange on the palm of our hand, we look at it while breathing in and out, so that the orange becomes a reality. If we are not here, totally present, the orange isn't here either.

There are some people who eat an orange but don't really eat it. They eat their sorrow, fear, anger, past, and future. They are not really present, with body and mind united.

When you practice mindful breathing, you become truly present. If you are here, life is also here. The orange is the ambassador of life. When you look at the orange, you discover that it is nothing less than fruit growing, turning yellow, becoming orange, the acid becoming sugar. The orange tree took time to create this masterpiece.

When you are truly here, contemplating the orange, breathing and smiling, the orange becomes a miracle. It is enough to bring you a lot of happiness. You peel the orange, smell it, take a section, and put it in your mouth mindfully, fully aware of the juice on your tongue. This is eating an orange in mindfulness. It makes the miracle of life possible. It makes joy possible.

We are then able to fully appreciate the gift that God has given us.

*As Jew we are able to add another powerful step to this process. When we say a brocha before we eat, we are bringing the awareness of God into this small act of eating. We are essentially infusing that piece of food with tremendous holiness and uplifting the whole moment. The fact that Chazal instituted both brocha rishona ( Before blessing) and achrona ( after blessing) for eating is a clear sign that we as Jews need to bring the consciousness of Hashem and his creation into every act.*

Once you have explained this idea to the kids, allow each one of them to take a piece of fruit from the plate.

Tell them not to eat the fruit until you say so. First they should observe the fruit:

- What does it look like?
- How does it feel?
- How did it get to my hand?

Now, we will say the brocha together word by word. Once you have said it give them the signal to put it into their mouths by being the first to do it.

- Just as they begin eating it, tell them to close their eyes and think only of the fruit in their mouths:
- The texture
- The taste
- The different flavors. Sweet? Sour? Tart? Juicy?

## Conclude Part 1

After this exercise we have hopefully gained insight into the benefit of experiencing simple acts in a mindful and present way. By doing this we are then able to be sincerely grateful for that which Hashem has given us.

## Part 2

- Ask participants to pair up and sit back to back
- Explain to them that you will whisper one phrase into the ear of each partner.
- Once they have heard that phrase they will say it aloud so that the person sitting behind them can hear it.

- Now the other person, upon hearing his partner say it will respond by repeating that phrase.
- Now that both of them have said it, they each of two more chances to say it to each other in however long intervals they want.

### Part 3

- Now ask the participants to repeat this exercise but this time instead of sitting back to back they will sit **facing** each other.

Give each pair the opportunity to relate their experience to the rest of the group. It will probably be quite difficult to articulate the emotions and thoughts that the exercise evoked for each person, this is because the nature of the “thanking” came from a very deep and emotional level one that is beyond words. T

While some people may have been thanking their partner for specific things that they had in mind, others may have simply been thanking their partner for being their friend, in the most sincere way possible.

### Part 4- Modeh Ani

- From the previous exercise we would have hopefully seen how powerful the simple act of thanking can be. This thanking does not have to be contingent upon anything, rather it is a thanking that comes from the deepest sense of appreciation for the other being just ‘being’.

The first words that we utter when waking is a direct expression of this appreciation:

מוֹדָה אֲנִי לְפָנֶיךָ  
מֶלֶךְ חַי וְקַיִם  
שֶׁהַחַיְתָּה בֵּי נַשְׁמָתִי בְּחַמְלָה -  
רַבָּה אֲמוּנָתְךָ.

For now though, lets focus on just the first two words “Modeh Ani”

Grammatically it would make more sense to say “ Ani Modeh” – I thank you, in this verse however, this seemingly strange sentence construct brings expresses a very beautiful idea:

- How would you like to begin each new precious day? What is the first word that one should say? Bearing in mind that this word would set the tone for the rest of your day....

If that first word would be “Ani” then we would be starting the day with an emphasis on “ME” “I”...this day is going to be all about me. However, by choosing our

## Day 4

***Do not forsake your Friend or the Friend of your father- Mishlei 27:10***

Mind Speak Meditation (5min)

*The first exercise further develops an awareness of our minds.*

As we have been discussing, our minds are a hive of activity filled with so many thoughts at any given point in the day. By simply becoming aware of our thought activity, what we are thinking and how we are thinking it, we begin to slowly gain control of the infinitude of our minds. This might seem all a little airy fairy but with this next exercise we will hopefully experience this concept first hand.

Mind Speak is simply the speech of our minds. Now if we were to ask ourselves whether or not we are aware of what we are thinking most of us would answer ‘yes’. There are however many different levels of thought, levels that ascend higher and higher and higher, passing through sub conscious thought and then eventually to the sublime and almost inexplicable level of the source of all thought. Our goal for this exercise is to delve only *slightly* deeper into our minds and gain awareness into the often interesting and very telling “Mind Speak”.

- Ask the kids to open up their “Me, my soul and I” books to a blank page.
- Spend 2 minutes briefing them on the above idea, all the while leading them to a more relaxed and centered place.
- We will now close our eyes, take a pen and then simply write every single thought that comes into mind.
  - The writing does not have to be legible
  - They must not think about what they are writing
  - They should imagine themselves as external observers of their thoughts.
  - WRITE ABSOLUTELY EVERYTHING EVEN IF IT DOES NOT MAKE SENSE
  - Allow 2 minutes for this exercise

The very act of allowing those often suppressed thoughts to be voiced can be a very moving experience. By writing your inner most feelings and speech, Its almost as if this is the first time you are telling anyone those things. More than this, it’s the first time **you** are hearing **you**. Its at a moment like this that the very sensitive feelings of

trusting oneself and being your own best friend, are evoked. The next level to this realization will be explored in the next exercise.

## Part 2- My friend

- Start off by handing out the “my friend” questionnaire to the kids ( To be found in the appendix).
- Ask them to think of their closest friend when answering the questions.

### Discussion(5min)

- What makes a “friend”?
  - The length of time you have know each other for?
  - How much they know about me?
  - How much time I spend with them?
  - The different emotions I can feel in front of him/ger
- What do I need to do in order to maintain that friendship?
  - Communication?
  - Showing Respect?
  - Expressing Gratitude?
  - Expressing our Love and care?

### Exercise 2(5min)

- Hand out a new set of “my friend” questionnaires
- This time though, ask the kids to write down “Hashem” as the name of their friend.
- Ask them to answer the questions now but with Hashem as their friend.

- They may find this difficult or strange but encourage them to answer in the best way they can.

### **Discussion(15min)**

- One by one compare the answers given for the first questionnaire, to the answers given to the second time they answered with Hashem as their friend.
- Listed below are 10 selected questions which highlight the central themes of the workshop.

(spend 1-1.5 min on each question)

#### *11. How long have you known each other for?*

- Hashem has known you since before you were born. How long have you known Him? (ie. How long have you been aware of His being there)

#### *12. What do you think your friend likes about you most?*

- What qualities do you think Hashem likes about you?
- Are you generous, caring, humble, honest, giving, warm?
- If people are speaking badly about Him, will you speak out and stand up for Hashem?
- Do you treat His creations nicely?

#### *13. What do you like about your friend?*

- There are so many attributes of Hashem for us to connect to and admire and appreciate, here are just a few of them:
- Somech Noflim(support the fallen) , Rofeh Cholim (Heal the sick)
- Melech Ozer Umoshia Umagen
- He creates miracles for people that need them?
- He stands up for the downtrodden, widows and orphans?

*14. How often do you speak to your friend?*

- If your friend is there for you 24/7, and not only is he there for you but he is able AND WILLING to help you with absolutely everything, every problem, every need, every situation, would you not speak to him at least every day? NB: they may answer “No, I would only speak to him every few days”. Explain to them that the 3 times daily mitzvah of tefillah does not stem from our relation to Hashem as our friend but rather as our Father.
- What does stem from our relationship to Hashem as a friend is the necessity to have personal confinement and disclosure with Hashem on a regular basis. The concept of talking to Hashem in a non- scripted way similar to “hitbodedut”(Personal prayer by Rebbe Nachman) , is very relevant here. The last exercise of this workshop will apply the idea.

*15. Try remembering your happiest memory...was your friend there with you at the time?*

- Of course Hashem was there with me. He was there sharing in the happiness and joy, smiling along with you.

*16. Try remembering a very difficult time in your life...was your friend there with you?*

- Indeed Hashem was there with you. He felt the same pain you felt, He cried when He say how hurt you were.

*17. Do you feel comfortable to express all your emotions in front of your friend?*

- Ask the kids to count the amount of different emotions that they feel “in front” of Hashem.
- Do they express their love, appreciation, anger, frustration to Hashem?
- Do they verbally communicate these feelings? Even though Hashem knows exactly how we are feeling and why at all times throughout our

lives, He still wants us to express them to Him. After all it wouldn't be a proper friendship if we wouldn't be able to do so.

- Be that as it may, just as a close friend picks up on our feelings without us having to overtly state them, Hashem knows if we are angry or happy.

*18. Does your friend forgive you easily?*

- “El Rachum VeChanun”, even more than you would ever expect from your best friend, Hashem is always ready to forgive you if you do something wrong to Him.

*19. What do you think your friendship needs right now?*

- In every friendship, there is always room for growth and improvement.
- Ask the kids to think of 1 thing that they could be doing to make their relationship with Hashem better? Eg: Speak to Him more? Trust Him more? More honesty? More commitment ?

*20. What would you like to thank him/her for?*

- Appreciation is the foundation of any meaningful relationship.
- It is essential that we express to Hashem our gratitude for everything that He does for us, everything that He helps us with (Ha El Yisha-eteinu Ve Ezrateinu). The key however in a relationship is to not only thank through words but through actions too. After all, expressing appreciation is actually a joyous and pleasurable experience (L'cha Nae Lehodot- It is a pleasure to thank you Hashem).

### **Conclusion & Exercise (15min)**

- We relate to Hashem in many different ways. As our King, Father, Savior , Helper etc.

- We learn from the pasuk “Do not forsake your Friend or the Friend of your father”- Mishlei 27:10, that Hashem is also our Friend. Especially at this age, when the kids are entering into a difficult stage of life and are facing issues of growing up, they need a friend more than ever.
- We conclude with a simple but powerful exercise: Encourage the kids to, as they did yesterday, go out and find a place where no one can hear them.
- They can take a Siddur with them and daven Shmonah Esrei, being aware of all the things they you have just spoken about. Encourage them to take their time, we will not start breakfast without them 😊

## Day 5

*Hi and welcome to the final day of experiential Teillah workshops! You need to spend the majority of this workshop discussing and encouraging them to reflect their experience. The goal here is to give them tangible and practical tools for prayer after Encounter.*

## Part 1

Over the past few days we have explored and hopefully gained deeper insight into the concepts of prayer and meditation. We have learned that before one can pray full heartedly, one needs to be willing and wanting to connect to Hashem. Personal prayer is integral in this relationship building process as it allows us to enter into communication with Hashem.

With this concept in mind it is important that we conclude these workshops with a brief discussion on communal and prescribed prayer ie praying with the Siddur. The desire to connect to Hashem via personal prayer is only valuable if it is found within the context of formalised prayer. Why and how is this so?

- First and foremost, the mitzvah to pray everyday specifically refers to Shacharit, Mincha and Maariv. While there are many sources that point to the importance and specialness of personal prayer, there is no doubt that it does in no way replace formal prayer
- When our prayers are only of a personal nature, we are limiting ourselves to our own personal desires, even if they may be altruistic. There is no sense of going beyond one's own grasp and understanding, we are rather confining ourselves to a relatively limited connection with Hashem.
- Formalised prayer gives us the opportunity to express our inner most feelings and desires but within in a deeply unifying and powerful framework. By saying the same words at the same time in the same place, we are bringing down tremendous amounts of Divine light into this world.
- The Siddur itself is a masterpiece. It was created by the men of the great assembly in an effort to ensure that gift of prayer would not be lost to time. On a deeper level

though, the Siddur is essentially a 3 times daily meditation. Just like in a mantra meditation where you repeat one word or a phrase over and over again and allow that phrase or word to utterly become 1 with you so too is this the case with the with the amida.

- The words contain within them unbelievable power. At every utterance of a word from the amida, one is influencing and changing the word as we know it. The Baal Shem Tov speaks about how one should only focus on the actual letters of the words during the amida. He maintained that that even the slightest thought of “I am praying” can steer you away from the ideal state of being during prayer . Therefore he suggested complete and absolute focus on nothing else but the letters of the words that make up the Amida. The letters themselves hold tremendous power and depth that is in truth far beyond our limited understanding, but bearing in mind that we do not need to know *all* that in order to open this idea up.

**If we just go through the first paragraph of the Amida, we are able to see a beautiful sensitivity within the words and phrases. We will only mention two connected ideas for now:**

- “Baruch Atah Hashem”- discuss the concept of referring to God as ‘YOU’- Atah. You can only say “You” to someone who is right in front of you. God is at all time in front of us.
- In fact God is so close to you during prayer that you don’t have to speak any louder than a whisper for Him to here you.

## Part 2

## WRITE YOUR OWN PRAYER

The difference between the words on the page and those in your heart is your understanding of how they are one and the same.

The "Men of the Great Assembly" (c. 260 BCE) who assembled the prayer book were prophets, and they had the needs of the entire nation in mind, for *all* generations. They weren't just directing us in prayer; they were teaching us what counts most in life to the Jew. If the words seem foreign to us, it is because we have yet to see their words through our own eyes.

But, that is the goal. And, when one achieves this, prayer becomes a completely personalized experience, and, *enjoyable*. So, you might as well try this next step and enhance your prayer experience.

6. Choose a short prayer from any part of the prayer service, from a section that you don't feel comfortable with.
7. Ask yourself, "What does this prayer ask for?" and answer the question.
8. Ask yourself, "How does such an idea benefit the world?"
9. Ask yourself, "How would my life improve from such an idea?"
10. Write a short paragraph "justifying" the request of this prayer. If necessary, find adequate sources on prayer, and do research.

If you do this, the next time you say these words in prayer, you will immediately connect to them, and you will feel "lifted" because of them. You will begin to feel close to God, and this will enhance your entire prayer experience. Some people even write little notes on the pages of their prayer books just to remind themselves at the time of prayer of the conclusions they reached through this type of analysis.

You could do this for every individual prayer, and spend the rest of your life doing nothing but this. However, very few people have the luxury of spending so much time on such a

project. Nevertheless, it has been my experience, and that of others who have tried this, performing the five steps above at least a couple of times, makes them somewhat automatic, even during times of prayer, until the entire prayer service itself becomes your own.

## Conclude

- Spontaneous personal prayer is so loved by Hashem.
- He wants us also to work with Him in this world by incorporating daily formalised Tefillah.
- Mediation can and should be used to prepare yourself for prayer especially if it is from a Siddur ( Letter visualisation)
- God is holding you hand through out the way.

## Day 6 – Optional session for Girls

### **Intro**

When Hashem created the world, He created dry land on the third day. With that he planted the grass and the trees. Rashi (One of our most famous commentators on the

Torah) emphasises the words ‘He planted”, meaning that the grass and trees had not yet grown beyond the point of the ground. He continues to say that on the sixth day the plants had still not sprouted until finally man was created. Adam instinctually realized that something was needed to bring about the growth of these seeds and thus turned to Hashem to pray for rain.

We learn that just as there were seeds lingering just below the surface of the ground, so too, every one of us has a gate in heaven behind which multitudes of blessing and goodness are waiting to be showered upon us. And just as Adam had to pray for rain in order to reap the benefits of the grass and trees, so too, we have to pray to Hashem and use our prayers as the key to unlock this gate so as to actualise our treasures that lie behind it.

### **READ STORY FROM ‘THE COMMITTED LIFE’ REBBETZIN JUNGREIS**

#### **Discussion after story**

All that we mentioned above (in the intro) is illustrated so clearly in this story. Harry eventually realized how much blessing and goodness Hashem was storing for him behind his gate in shamayim. He realized that only he himself could find this key to unlock the gate. This came through his slow but eventual return to daily prayer and faith in Hashem.

Hashem is waiting so patiently for each one of us to find the key to our personal gate in Shamayim so that he can bestow his kindness on us which he so wishes to do.

### **THE POWER OF WOMAN’S PRAYER AND OUR INHERENT ABILITY TO BREAK DOWN THE GATES OF SHAMAYIM.**

#### **The prayer of women in the Tanach**

An amazing story is told of **Chuldah** the prophetess that shows us the amazing power of women’s prayer.

King Yoshiyahu who was the king of the Jewish people at the time, wanted to make repairs on the Beit Hamikdash. He called on one of his servants to go to the Cohen Gadol who had been collecting money for these repairs. When the Cohen Gadol went to

fetch the money, he noticed that there was an open Torah lying under the place where the money was kept. The Torah was open to a specific verse, which spoke of the Jewish king and his people being defeated by an unknown nation.

This caused the Cohen Gadol and the king's servant to become extremely fearful. Their immediate reaction was to go speak to Yirmiyahu or Chuldah who were the prophets of their time. After little debate they chose to go to Chuldah the prophetess. Why did they choose her over Yirmiyahu? What made them so sure that she would be the one to save the Jewish nation? Our Sages answered " Because women are compassionate, and because they are compassionate, they will automatically pray and ask for compassion to change the situation from bad to good". The Cohen Gadol and the servant knew that not only would she give them the information they needed to know about the future, but more importantly that she would Daven for the people and that the power of a woman's prayer could transform the fearful situation of the nation.

Our sages say:

**WOMEN HAVE A GREAT TALENT AND POWER TO DO SO MUCH FOR THEMSELVES, SO MUCH FOR THEIR FRIENDS AND SO MUCH FOR THE ENTIRE NATION.**

Its incredible to look through the Tanach and to take note that in almost every event and story that we learn of, Davening to Hashem, either in a context of joy or anguish, is a prominent feature.

**Some examples:**

**Rivkah** called out in confusion to Hashem when she felt her two sons fighting within her womb. She went straight to Hashem for clarity and understanding of her situation.

**Miriam** in her painful and ashamed state Davened for Hashem to cure her from tzaraat/leprosy after speaking Lashon Harah about Moshe. Miriam also led the women in song and dance, praising Hashem for their redemption from the hands of Pharaoh and his armies.

**Dvorah** the prophetess also praised Hashem in song and gratitude after winning the war against their enemies. Chizkiyahu, who was the king at the time, was criticised for failing to praise Hashem after their victory. Dvorah however portrayed to the entire nation that their victory was a result of Hashem's kindness and that Jewish history is Godly history.

**Channah** being barren davened at the Mishkan every day for many years. Hashem answered her prayers and blessed her with a son, Samuel/Shmuel. It was through Shmuel that the Kingdom of David and the Beit Hamikdash were actualised.

**But what was so special about the Tfillot of all the righteous women in the Tanach? What can we ourselves do to ensure that our tfillot are answered as theirs were?**

THE CHAFETZ CHAYIM TEACHES US A LESSON THAT ANSWERS THIS QUESTION SO CLEARLY FOR US.

He says as follows: Imagine that you want to build a table. You find a hammer, but the hammer has no handle. You find a saw, but the saw has no teeth. There's no way you'll be able to build a perfect table. Your table will be skew, strange looking and even dysfunctional.

He continues to say that every word of Tfillah creates an angel. This angel takes your prayers straight up to Hashem. But when you use your mouth for lying, for lashon harah, for false flattery, for swearing etc it's almost as if you're taking the hammer and breaking off the handle, which would only lead to building a crooked angel.

If we want our tfillot to be answered we have to fix the instrument with which we pray. We have to perfect our mouths so as to create perfect angels. We have to ensure that we use our mouths and our blessing of speech for all the right reasons. And then we shall please G-d merit from our prayers and the effort we put into them.

The righteous women of the tanach used their instrument of prayer, their mouths, in the correct and respectful way. And thus their prayers were always answered for the good.

Another reason why these great women's prayers were answered was a result of their sincere belief that Hashem was listening to their cries and requests.

We read in Ashrei every day. "Hashem is close to all who call upon Him, to all who call upon him **sincerely.**"

When we daven and ask for something, we must try as best we can to show Hashem that we truly believe He is listening and that we believe in the power of our tfillot. When we Daven with faith and sincerity, our prayers will surely be answered.

## CONCLUSION

There was once a boy in Matric named Jim. He waited patiently the whole year till he finally got his driver's license. He was most excited, and drove around all day in a 1962 mustard yellow Datsun. Even though the windows couldn't open, the radio didn't work and it didn't go faster than 40km an hour, Jim still loved his little car.

On the morning of his 19<sup>th</sup> birthday he went to the garage and found that his Datsun had been replaced by a brand new, black, BMW 1 series with a huge red ribbon tied around it. He realized it was for him, jumped inside and took it for its first ride.

Jim however had become accustomed to the very few working features of his Datsun, and as a result, didn't take note of what his BMW had to offer. There he was cruising down the streets at 40km an hour, on a boiling hot day with his windows closed, with no music to be heard. When he stopped at a red robot he noticed that all the pedestrians were pointing at him and laughing. He was very disturbed by this and opened his window to call over one of the bystanders. He asked him, "Why is everyone laughing at me? What is it that I'm doing that is so funny?" The bystander smiled and answered. "Do you understand the power of your car? Do you know how fast it can go? Do you know that you have a sun roof and air conditioning to cool you off on a day like this? Do you know that your car has the most incredible music system? Why aren't you using any of these powerful features? Why don't you use your car to the max?"

And so it is with our davening. If only we understood the power of our prayers. If only we knew how much it could do for our lives. If only we understood how important it is and how much we're missing out on by not using it to the max. If only we went full speed. We are all accustomed to our daily routine, our daily davening. We feel bored and frustrated. We need to learn to use the most precious gift we have and we will soon see the results it has on our lives.

## **Day 6**

*Upon the utterance of the first word of the first beracha in the Amida: 'Baruch', we are instructed to bow. This instruction is then repeated several times for the blessing of Magen Avraham, Vechol Ha'Chaim and then finally Oseh Shalom. What is the significance of this*

action? This workshop will explore one possible explanation based on a teaching of Rav David Aaron. Please read the following excerpt before teaching the workshop.

## To bow or not to bow that is the question

According to Jewish we bow at the beginning of the first benediction and at the end. There are only two more times in the entire *amidah* at the beginning and end of the benediction before the last one. The Talmud teaches that if you see a person bowing more than the four required times then teach him not to do it. Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook explains in his commentary on the *Siddur* why the Talmud says "teach him not to do it" rather than "tell him not to do it; tell him it is the law." Rabbi Kook explains that we bow before *Hashem* only as a preparation to stand before *Hashem*. The bowing is only a preparation to accomplish the goal which is to stand before *Hashem*. Bowing is only necessary so that we will stand before *Hashem* with the proper humility but still nonetheless confidently stand.

The first person who we see pray in the Torah is Avraham. The Torah depicts how his prayer experience was dialectical. First he boldly approaches *Hashem* and asserts himself. "Will the Judge of the entire earth not act justly?" But then he humbly retreats saying "What am I? I am but dust and ashes." But that does not prevent him from His continued attempt to challenge *Hashem* and petition Him to change His decision to destroy Sodom. Abraham struggles in his prayer. He oscillates between powerful assertiveness and total surrender. He exudes tremendous power and confidence in affirming and asserting himself and also humbleness.

Rav Kook explains why you teach a person rather than just tell him because obviously if you see a person bowing too much he is confused about who he is and the nature of his relationship to *Hashem*. It is not enough to just tell him the law you must help him understand that the goal of Judaism is to confidently and comfortably stand before *Hashem* and not be stooped over with low self esteem in His presence. *Hashem* empowers us to stand confidently in His presence. He doesn't want us to be a nebeshes saying oh yes, yes, yes.

If a person is bowing too much in his *tefillah* he has it all wrong. He thinks Judaism is about bowing. He thinks the goal of life is to be subordinate to *Hashem*. But that is incorrect the goal is to stand before God. The goal is *Amidah*. The means, however, is to first bow so that when you stand confidently in your relationship with *Hashem* you will still stand humbly with appropriate reverence.

There was once a Hassidic Rabbi who would advise his student to always carry in on pocket a precious gem but in the other pocket a piece of dirt. If you are ever feeling low self-esteem you should reach in to your pocket with the gem and realize you too are a rare gem. But at times

when you feel self-inflated you should reach into the pocket with the dirt and realize you are also a piece of dirt.

## Introduction

- Begin a discussion with the group:
  - Ask them what is the ‘action’ that stands out for them in the Amidah?
  - What do they think the significance of this action is ( ask each person)
  - **What feelings does the action of bowing evoke for each person in the group?**

## Exercise 1

- On a piece of paper ( preferably in the me, my soul and I booklet) draw a line separating the page into two columns
- Entitle the first column: “What makes me big” & the second: “What makes me small”.
- Under the column “ What makes me big”, participants must write at least 5 things that they feel special and significant (affirmations) eg: God purposefully created me, God loves me, My friends love am strong, I have a good voice, I am good at maths, My girlfriend/boyfriend loves me, My parents care about me.
- Under the column “ What makes me small”, participants must write at least 3 things that make them feel insignificant and humble ( Note, these are not statements that are negative of self-damning , but rather a form of affirmation that makes an individual realize how insignificant they relative to the universe) eg: I cannot live forever, there are billions of people in this world each of whom lives a complex life, compared to the rest of the universe the world is like a grain of sand on an entire beach. The point here is not necessarily to list actual things but rather to ponder the idea of the immense expanse of the world relative to our own fragile lives.
- With this in mind, participants will now recite a statement from each column while doing the bowing action. i.e. When standing upright a “what makes me big “ statement is recited, after that the participant bows his/her head and then recites one from the “what makes me small” column.
- The statements must be said in a tone that is only audible to the person saying it.
- What must be stressed is that it is not necessarily the actual statements that are important here but rather the thoughts that accompany them.

- Participants are encouraged to ponder these two contrasting self-concepts in this exercise.

## Conclusion

- In your own words, speak about Rav Aaron's approach to bowing in the amidah.
- As the leader, you are encouraged to identify key points that resonate for you and then to discuss them with the group.
- A nice way to end off this session would be to read to the group the story of the Chassidic rabbi with two pockets as mentioned in the introduction.

## **Final day Tefillah workshop**

### Introduction

This workshop only provides a broad framework with which to run the session. After having run Tefillah for your group every day for the past 6 days, you should have an idea of how to conclude this journey . The main objectives for this session are:

- To bring a sense of closure to the Encounter Tefillah program
- To initiate the participants personal journey of prayer after encounter.
- To develop a set of personal and group goals for Tefillah.
- To promote a feeling of sister/brother hood and shared responsibility in achieving those goals.

## Suggested outline

- Initiate a general discussion about what each participant feels and thinks about the past week.
- Go around and ask each one of them to tell the group 3 things that they have learned from the Tefillah workshops. The question needs to be broad enough so that they don't feel limited in expressing what they have learned.
- After this ask each them to mention 3 things that they still struggle with in Tefillah . It is not necessary to address these points, all that you should do is reflect and thereby validate their feelings. By doing this you are helping them to understand that it is OK to have issues and struggles in Tefillah, not everything has to be answered immediately. You may want to discuss this specific point at the end of the session.
- It's important that they are not only speaking to you but to their fellow friends as well.
- After each person says their points, it would be really powerful if you could mention some things that you have learned from that person. It could take the form of a specific compliment or something which you have really learned from them without them knowing.
- Now, participants can write one personal goal that they have for their own personal journeys in Tefillah.

- Encourage them to also come up with one group goal in Tefillah. E.g. Not talking to each during school davening, praying for each other on a regular basis, going to shul together.

## Conclusion

- Give each participant a Siddur.
- Recite the Shema together out loud .
- Encourage them go and find 'a place' to pray.
- The praying can combine both a formal prayer i.e. the amidah , and a personal prayer/conversation with Hashem.

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## Suggested reading

- Tefillah Training - David Aaron
- A guide to Jewish meditation –Aryeh Kaplan
- <http://www.jewishmeditation.org.il/index.php/courses-gg/basic>
- The World of Prayer- Elie Munk
- A Guide to Jewish Prayer- Adin Steinsaltz
- The Thirteen Petalled Rose – Adin Steinsaltz
- Talelei Oros, the prayer anthology- Yissachar Dov Rubin
- The secret life of God- David Aaron
- Baal Shem Tov on Tefillah

## A simple breathing exercise

1. Sit in a comfortable position on the floor or in a chair. Sit upright, with your back straight (but not uncomfortably so).
2. Gently bring your attention to your breath. There's no need to change how you are breathing in any way, but just notice each breath as you inhale and exhale.
3. Be aware of the sensations in your body as you breathe; observe what parts of your body move as you breathe.
4. If other thoughts come in to your mind as you practice, acknowledge them and then gently shift your awareness back to your breathing again.
5. Continue for 2 to 3 minutes or more, as you like.

## **Guided Meditation --Hitbodedut Dwelling in God**

### **Presence**

The Rabbis taught: "A person should always consider that one's rewardable acts and one's punishable acts are equally balanced, so that any single rewardable act will tip the scales to one's favor, while any punishable act will tip the scales the other way, [Thus making every sin-gle act crucial.]" Babylonian Talmud: Kiddushin 40b

One of the best known forms of Jewish meditative prayer is called hitbodedut. It comes from the Hebrew root bodad (to be isolated), and it means to seclude oneself- in essence, to be alone with God. It is a very simple technique that is also quite effective. One merely speaks out whatever happens to be on one's mind to the Creator of the universe.

It is important to be alone so that you can use your voice without worrying about others listening in. You can do the meditation at home, if you feel comfortable there, but it is often recommended that one be in nature when doing hitbodedut. The most famous hassidic leader who used and taught this method- Rabbi Nachman of Breslov- suggested that people should go into the woods, especially at night, to do this practice.

Many people shy away from speaking directly to God; they often feel embarrassed, unworthy, or unbelieving. The important aspect of this method is that anything becomes grist for the mill. An integral part of the hitbodedut practice is to speak out loud- do not merely think the thought. In kabbalistic terms, actually speaking the words carries much more emotional content than thinking the words. In Jewish mysticism, prayer needs to be articulated; the combination of sounds will reverberate throughout the universe and have more impact than thought waves.

When you feel like communing directly with the Divine, hitbodedut is an excellent method. Although it is often done standing or walking, you can also sit quietly to enhance the inner power of the meditation. If you are at home, please try to find a place where you will not be interrupted and where you cannot be heard by others in the house.

1. Begin with the basic sitting technique: relaxed, eyes closed. Try to sit fairly straight without effort. Breathe normally. Notice the rising and falling of the chest with the breath.

2. Now, find your own words to express one of the following ideas:

Whatever is at the center of creation, whatever you call yourself, if there is any way that you can do this, please help me believe that I can really communicate with you.

God, Presence, I am not really sure who or what you are; please help me feel your presence.

3. If you are unable to experience anything at all, you can either continue asking for help, or you can literally pretend, use your imagination, and imagine being cradled or hugged by a warm, loving entity of some type. Imagine that you are in the arms of pure love. In essence, pretend that you are talking to a loving source, speaking your heart's deepest secrets, asking for whatever you need to get an inner healing. Being held like this, close, secure, loved, let yourself speak out in your own words- let your heart flow with whatever is in it. You will discover along the way that although this process may begin as an exercise in pretending, it will ultimately become an experience of great healing -it really works! Try it.

4. When you are ready, please finish with a request, something like the following:

- a) Oh, I want to be free- please help me be free.
- b) I need to feel better- please help me feel better.
- c) If only I could have peace- please help me find peace.

Once you have completed this exercise, even though it may feel strange at first, simply notice brief memories that may arise of the experience over the next few days. Try to do this hitbodedut meditation at least once a week for a few months, and in between the practice sessions, keep noticing how the mind occasionally turns to the memories. Eventually barriers will begin to fall and you will most likely find greater comfort in the practice. Slowly it will bring you closer to connecting with something mysterious, which will lead to a letting go of some boundaries so that you will be able to have a sense of greater peace. This is a major practice for ultimately attaining devekut, merging with the Divine, and is highly recommended.

## Tefillah Motivation through Relationship Building and Role Modeling: One Rabbi's Approach

Moshe Drelich

*Rabbi Moshe Drelich is the Associate Principal for the Junior High School at SAR Academy in Riverdale, NY. He has two decades of experience conducting tefillah services for youth, and is pursuing a doctorate in education at the Azrieli Graduate School.*

I was raised in an observant home my entire life. I attended yeshiva from grade 1 through 12. Yet, I was 18 before I prayed every word of *Shaharit* for the very first time.

How could it be that I had to wait until I was 18 and studying in Israel to experience and engage in meaningful *tefillah*? I think my experience is not unique and is probably the rule more than the exception among many children. I offer my reflections to help frame the challenge and suggest some successful strategies to help transform *tefillah* into a positive, inspiring spiritual experience.

How do we make *davening* meaningful to our students? How can we help them take ownership of it? In what manner, shape or form do we, as role models, demonstrate "our" attitude and approach to *tefillah*? What is *tefillah* and how can we give our students the ability to make it a personal time of meaningful spiritual growth and connection to God? I have no doubt that teachers and administrators regularly struggle with this question, and can all share their stories of frustration.

I have the responsibility of overseeing and running a 7<sup>th</sup> grade *minyan*. I see my role as a conductor of a large orchestra, made up of many individual musicians with their own unique style of playing many diverse instruments. Following the musical notes takes great coordination and discipline of focus. The job of the conductor is to get the best from his musicians and lead the orchestra in the program to create a beautiful symphony of sound and emotion. When we run a *minyan*, as 'conductors', we try to create a beautiful symphony of words.

The first challenge we must face is our attitude towards the placement of *tefillah* in the school day. Where does it fit in? What is its function vis-à-vis our students and the school day? I'd like to illustrate this point through a personal experience during a *tefillah* workshop I was giving for Jewish Day School Teachers.

### **Partnering and mirroring with students**

Almost all of the twenty participants in the workshop identified *tefillah* as their least favorite part of their school day. One teacher commented that supervising *davening* was as enjoyable as covering lunch duty! This truthful revelation is at the root of the basic dilemma. *Davening* is meant to transform and elevate us. *Davening* is rich with the basic Jewish fundamentals of faith – trust in God, love of God, love of Israel, integrity, honesty, etc. These concepts are supposed to penetrate our consciousness during *tefillah*. If we

relate to *davening* time as something we need to hurry through, like lunch duty, then this is will be the message we convey to our students. If at the conclusion of *davening* the teacher did not feel "elevated," then both teacher and students probably have missed the spiritual experience of *tefillah*.

If a teacher perceives leading children in *tefillah* as a chore, it will be impossible for the teacher to convey the joy and warmth of davening to his/ her students. I often speak of the "mirror effect." If the teacher demonstrates a sincere desire to connect to God, the students may try to imitate you and channel their energies towards this goal as well.

Honesty is a crucial element if teachers are to inspire and motivate their students. Once the students are settled in their seats, usually before the beginning of *pesukei dezimra*, I will often share my personal "inner" feelings with them, whether I am struggling with my own *davening* and asking God for help, or whether I am feeling energized and grateful and desire to express it during *tefillah*. It's important that teachers not be afraid to share their personal spiritual struggles with students. Many students welcome it and often relate it to their feelings of spiritual striving as well. Children, like adults, are spiritual beings. We have to partner with our students and introduce and acquaint them with their spiritual voice.

One useful exercise I use is to give students two minutes of quiet time to reflect about something in their life they would like to either change or improve. After that I tell them to focus on it and to ask for God's guidance and partnership. This brief spiritual reflective moment can sometimes set the correct tone for the rest of *tefillah*.

### **Discipline and talking**

I am often asked about control and discipline during *tefillah*. Again, I am a strong believer in partnering with the student. We need to balance between setting clear expectations of them as young Jewish adolescents and trying to achieve and maintain the proper decorum and atmosphere of the *minyan*. Outside of the school environment, many of our students are barraged by and immersed in activities, images and experiences which often run counter to healthy Jewish values. Creating and having a welcoming and inspiring *makom tefillah* as a sanctuary, both literally and figuratively, from the assault on the *neshamah*, can serve a valuable function in this area. The sanctuary is a safe place where worshippers can escape from outside distractions and concentrate on connecting with God.

Talking during *davening* is a chronic problem for most *minyanim* (including adult *minyanim*). The key to deal with this problem is patience and persistence. When leading *tefillah*, I try to remember that I am God's representative. If the students are talking during *tefillah*, I need to ask myself why they are talking. What is distracting them? Are they bored? Is there something troubling them? Did they have a difficult start to their morning? In order to be an effective *tefillah* leader one must be sensitive to the many possible, yet unknown factors. Students should always be treated with respect. In my many years of leading *tefillah* I have found that punishing or berating students has never been an effective method of cultivating a love for *tefillah*. There are calm and polite ways to

encourage students to focus on *tefillah*. Sometimes all that is necessary to help a talking student focus on *tefillah* is placing a finger on closed lips or a fix your eyes on the student until they stop.

Teachers need not be afraid to say "the only talking during *tefillah* should be between you and God." I explain to students that talking to their friends during *davening* is a selfish act because it hinders others from forming their relationship with God. There are two images I regularly use to convey the negative impact talking during *tefillah* has on a *minyan*. One is the image of "second hand smoke," harmful not only to the smoker but to everyone in their environment. The other is ripples in a pond. Every interruption in the calm of the *tefillah* has a ripple effect on the rest of the group.

If the student persists, in the short term I may change their seat. For a more substantive approach, I will wait until *davening* is over and all the students have left the room and will then sit with the student, discuss the situation and together try to create a solution. By bringing them into the process; they then can take ownership of the issue. It empowers them to find the solution and become an active player in their own spiritual journey. By spending a little private time connecting with the student, the teacher demonstrates faith in the student and respect for him/her as a thinking and valued individual.

The need for patience with the students is only heightened by their home experiences with *tefillah*. For those who attend synagogues, many of those very synagogues are far from the models we would want our students to emulate. They find that *tefillah* meaningless, and project it to *tefillah* in general. I recall a letter I received at the end of the year from a student. She writes:

I always have admired how you never gave up on a single 7<sup>th</sup> grader, even when they talked. Because of this, you have helped so many people to *daven* on higher level.

Too many teachers become frustrated when they do not see the results of their efforts in the *tefillah* groups they lead. My experience has taught me that even when I think they are not listening, they really are. Every year I have a few difficult students who seem bent on having it their way. I will dedicate the time necessary to calmly, gently and respectfully connect with the student about the issue. The process may take an entire school year, but these students do mature and begin to take their place in the *minyan* and start own personal dialogue with God. The results may not be immediate, but the ultimate goal is in the long term. And teachers who stay the course to touch their students' hearts can ultimately touch their souls as well.

## Personal focus points

To make *davening* meaningful to the student in the school *minyán*, it has to feel personal and special to them. For many students entering my *tefillah* program it is the first time they will hear that:

**God is your best friend. You can share your secrets and desires with God. God can help you with anything. God is not judgmental. God is eternally patient and slow to anger. God only wants the best for you. God created you so He understands you better than anyone else. ... The silent *amidah* is a moment of intimacy with God. Imagine that you are whispering in God's ear. The conversation is only between the two of you. You have God's full attention!**

As part of guiding the students on their spiritual journeys through *tefillah*, I will intersperse brief explanations of special words, the structure and format of the *tefillot*. Over the course of the year we will discuss from *birkhot haShahar* through the *shir shel yom*. Never overbearing, I usually introduce an average of one idea per *tefillah* and introduce them slowly, one by one, over the course of the year. After each concept is introduced, it will be reinforced on a regular and consistent basis. This includes daily reminders of positive *mitzvot* such as focusing on the unity of God prior to the recitation of the *shema* or remembering the Exodus before *eprat avotenu*. The daily routine helps the students become familiar with the words and assists them in mastery of the sacred texts.

What about the unmotivated student who just doesn't feel or want to *daven*? How can s/he be motivated? Once again, the image of God as being their best friend is powerful. They can speak with God in their own words or just meditate on what they can be grateful for. Friends love to share their thoughts and sometimes real friends don't feel like talking. It is important to allow students to remain silent during *tefillah*, with the proviso that they not disturb other people's prayers.

This image is important for responding to the question of why God does not answer the prayers. True friendships and strong relationships are built on a healthy trust that comes over time. No prayer goes unanswered, but just like a true friend will know what, how and when to respond to a request we make, so too with God. The relationships we wish to help our students forge with God can be modeled by forming the same type of relationship between our students and ourselves. And once again, teacher modeling of this behavior by demonstrating their own personal trust in God is invaluable.

## Personal reflection

Returning to my original question, why did it take me 18 years to achieve a full and meaningful *davening*? I truly believe that somewhere around the time of third grade, the technical skill of *davening* becomes taken for granted. In other words, once we learned the mechanical aspects, such as pronouncing the words or when to stand, sit or bow, it was assumed that we would figure the rest out on our own. We dare not rob our students of the direction to continue their exploration and learning beyond the mechanical.

When I arrived in yeshiva in Israel at age 18, I met my *rebbe*, who taught a course on the meaning of the *amidah*. The experience of this class was transformational; it was as if I was given a key to unlock a precious treasure chest. Yet beyond the wisdom and insights offered in the class, I had the opportunity to witness my *rebbe's* devotion and *deveikut baShem* (cleaving to God) during *tefillah*. This touched and penetrated my heart and soul; I wanted to experience that same intensity and closeness with God as did he.

When I think of *tefillah* I often think about the image of *Yaakov* wrestling. Real and lasting spiritual growth is about wrestling with our own angels. And as teachers of *tefillah*, to model, encourage and empower our students to become wrestlers with their own angels as they embark on their own spiritual journeys.

## Dear God letters for Grade 10 Tefillah Workshop

Dear God,  
please put another holiday between Purim and Pesach. There is nothing good in there now.

Amanda

Dear God,  
Thank you for the baby brother but what I asked for was a puppy. I never asked for anything before. You can look it up.

Joyce

Dear Mr. God,  
I wish you would not make it so easy for people to come apart I had to have 3 stitches and a shot.

Janet

Dear God,  
I read the bible. What does beget mean? Nobody will tell me.

Love Alison

Dear God,  
how did you know you were God? Who told you?

Charlene

Dear God,  
is it true my father won't get in Heaven if he uses his golf words in the house?

Anita

Dear God,  
I bet it's very hard for you to love all of everybody in the whole world. There are only 4 people in our family and I can never do it.

Nancy

Dear God,  
I like the story about Noah the best of all of them. You really made up some good ones. I like walking on water, too.

Glenn

Dear God,  
my Grandpa says you were around when he was a little boy. How far back do you go?

Love, Dennis

Dear God,  
do you draw the lines around the countries? If you don't, who does?  
Nathan

Dear God  
did you mean for giraffes to look like that or was it an accident?  
Norma

Dear God,  
in bible times, did they really talk that fancy?  
Jennifer

Dear God,  
how come you did all those miracles in the old days and don't do any now?  
Billy

Dear God,  
please send Dennis Clark to a different summer camp this year.  
Peter

Dear God,  
maybe Cain and Abel would not kill each other so much if they each had their own  
rooms. It works out OK with me and my brother.  
Larry

Dear God,  
I keep waiting for spring, but it never did come yet. What's up? Don't forget.  
Mark

Dear God,  
my brother told me about how you are born but it just doesn't sound right. What do  
you say?  
Marsha

Dear God,  
if you watch in Church on Sunday I will show you my new shoes.  
Barbara

Dear God,  
is Reverend Coe a friend of yours, or do you just know him through the business?  
Donny

Dear God,

I do not think anybody could be a better God than you. Well, I just want you to know that. I am not just saying that because you are already God.

Charles

Dear God,

it is great the way you always get the stars in the right place. Why can't you do that with the moon?

Jeff

Dear God,

I am doing the best I can. Really !!!!

Frank

Dear God,

I didn't think orange went with purple until I saw the sunset you made on Tuesday night. That was really cool.

Thomas

Dear God, please make me a bird, I promise if you do this, not to ask for anything else, love Jake I am 5.

## My Friend

- How long have you known each other for?
- What do you think your friend likes about you?
- What do you like about your friend?
- How often do you speak to each other?
- Does your friend know the names of the people in your family?
- Does your friend know what makes you happy?
- Try remembering your happiest memory...was your friend there with you at the time?
- Try remembering a very difficult time in your life...was your friend there with you?
- Do you feel comfortable to express all your emotions in front of your friend?
- Does your friend forgive you easily?
- What do you think your friendship needs right now?
- What would you like to thank him/her for?



