

Hadracha Choveret



תנועת בני עקיבא
BNEI AKIVA
UNITED KINGDOM

BNEI AKIVA'S WEEKLY EDUCATIONAL HANDBOOK FOR MADRICHIM

Tefilla-Prayer



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Dear members of the community,

This week we take a look at an important part of being Jewish...Tefilla. As you'll see below it's not necessarily the easiest part of Judaism, and is often something that we can struggle with.

That being said however, we as Madrichim in Bnei Akiva have the opportunity to turn the perception of davening as a chore and as boring 180 degrees.

It's something I would recommend every week, but this week in particular it may be nice to take your Chanichim into Mincha this week as the time may coincide with Sviva.

Bhatzlacha!

Bevirkat Chaverim l'Torah v'Avodah

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Aims:

- **To understand how tefilla is an essential part of being Jewish.**
- **To realise how tefilla works and the structure of some of our tefillot.**
- **To realise how we must re-ignite the community aspect of going to shul by making tefilla more accessible.**

Davening in Shul is a big part of our lives as Jews. The problem is, *because* it is such a regular part of our lives, it became a simple part of a routine of Judaism and led to it being degraded as a vital part of our religion. Through this demotion of prayer from the top of the hierarchy of our religious practice, people stopped attending synagogues regularly, stating “I do the important stuff like Yom Kippur and Seder Night, who cares if I don’t go to shul this week? There are loads of people there anyway – it’s not like it’s going to be empty!”

This attitude, alongside the failure of communities to make their shul an attractive option for the younger generation, has created the situation we find ourselves in today. On a weekly basis, many big shuls are almost empty (apart from a few OAPs!) but then on Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur they are full to the brim with thousands of disillusioned Jews attending their bi-annual pilgrimage, not understanding a word they are saying or why they are saying them in the first place.

In Bnei Akiva we try as hard as we can to make Tefilla an attractive option, to make it accessible to all of our chanichim and to make sure they understand its importance. This initiative must start with Svivot (that’s you guys!) and the fact that you are based in your community’s shul puts you in a very privileged position to put your shul and davening inside it back on our chanichim’s agenda! Additionally there’s a new Tefilla initiative heading your way soon.....watch this space!

Bnei Akiva’s positive outlook towards davening can really change things within our communities – it could be through training our chaverim to lead the tefilla in youth services; by teaching them the tunes (and actions that always make it more fun!) or through so many other methods available to us as informal educators, to put davening back on our chanichim’s agenda.

Additionally, we’ve got to emphasise the part of Israel in our tefillot – at least three times a day we mention our yearning to return to the Holy Land and for all the Jews in the four corners of the earth to come back to their homeland. Surely this is one obvious example of how thousands of years of our tefillot have contributed to our actually returning to our own state! We must also realise that even though we might be happy in our own lives, that is no reason not to pray. So many of our tefillot are in the plural – we are davening for the whole of the Jewish people. As the precious few Jews who still hold tefilla close to our hearts, we’ve got to make a difference – and we cannot waste any time doing it!

So the odds are that most of your Chanichim haven't a clue what it's all about. Well, here's your chance to sort that out. I don't want you to go through the Siddur, boring yourselves and your Chanichim to tears, this is your chance to show that Tefilla is a useful, accessible thing they should all be relishing the opportunity to do. There is value in Tefilla, and this should be put over to the Chanichim in the most favourable light possible. They should try and understand the reasons why we pray and the meaning behind a few important prayers.

REMEMBER – If your Chanichim start participating in shul, attend more frequently or start to understand a bit about what they are talking about, then you can give yourselves a pat on the back and be very proud of yourselves.

THERE ARE SEVERAL AIMS TO THIS MEETING BUT THERE IS ONE UNDERCURRENT THEME, WHICH IS THE FOCAL POINT:

*Davening is a great opportunity for us
and has many more benefits than just shul
service.*



There are four main reasons why we pray:

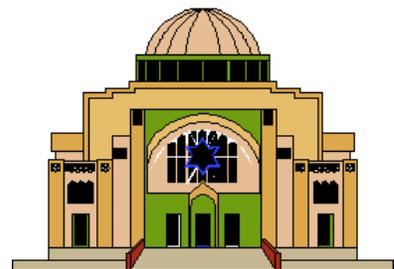
Self – judgement

Request-making (both asking for lots of things, and for forgiveness).

To bring ourselves **closer to God**

To become part of the **community**

The Synagogue



Self-judgement

Apart from praising God etc. by davening we are also judging ourselves (an inexpensive form of self-evaluation)

The Hebrew verb, **lehitpallel** (to pray), actually comes from the root “pallel”, meaning, “to assess”. By telling God that we are doing wrong, that our lives are only short and that we are mere puppies in the Lord’s kennel, we encourage ourselves to do more, sin less, and generally be far nicer people! Davening also reminds us not to take things for granted. We remember that we are mere *shnips* before the Almighty Creator, and that we owe our every breath to Him.

By continued reminders that we are sinning, prayer encourages us to always repent and change.

Request-making

We all ask for things, apologise, and show love to our parents. Here’s the chance to do all three to our ginormous Father (aka God).

The Amidah is split up into three parts:

- 1) Praise
- 2) Request
- 3) Thanks

Part un – Praising God – It is only natural to praise someone before you ask them for something. How many times have you wanted something from your parents, and you act all lovey-dovey before you pop the question? The same is true with God – We praise Him before we ask Him for anything.

Part deux – Requesting – Once we have praised God, we ask Him for several things, be it, health, sustenance, forgiveness, whatever – we ask God for many things.

Part trois – Thanks – Once we have finished, we thank God for all that he has done and we hope that our prayers have been successful.

We can bring ourselves closer to God

How do we see our prayers in relation to God? Do we think of prayers as a direct “phone-line”, or as a type of correspondence course? Is Hashem only reading our letters, and will reply if they make the grade?

God’s ears are open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week etdc. By regularly conversing with Hashem, we can come closer to Him.

Remember – He’s always there for us – any problem, request, anything!

A few Frequently Asked Questions about Tefilla

1. Why can’t I daven alone?

The reason is that Judaism is a communal religion. We encourage Achdut (unity). However, individuality is not frowned upon – it is removing oneself from one’s community that is: for example, in the average Jewish family, togetherness is encouraged, be it Shabbat, Chagim etc.

Virtually all our prayers end in NU (in Hebrew, “Nu” is plural) e.g. Selach Lanu, Aleinu, Refainu, Modim Anachnu,. The only prayer that doesn’t have the “nu” connotation is Tachanun – it is said with our heads bowed because we are ashamed to be davening for ourselves.

Believe it or not, peer-pressure also encourages us to daven harder – seeing our mates praying really hard helps us – of course we can’t see them if we daven at home!

2. Why can’t I daven in English?

The answer is....you can! One can certainly daven in English but there are a few qualifications.





If one can, it is certainly better to daven in Hebrew since it is the “Holy language”, more poetic and generally more respectful (if you went to see an English king who happened to know Italian, it is more likely you’d speak in English, even if you were Italian yourself). Also, some Hebrew words and concepts cannot be translated accurately into another language – that’s why we can only daven the Shema in Hebrew. Davening in Hebrew unites Jews all over the world. You could go to a shul in Mexico or Mozambique and still be able to follow the service. This enforces the idea of Achdut.

The qualifications – if you daven in English, it should only really be done if you can’t read the Hebrew at all. It is considered better to read slowly in Hebrew than cover twice the amount in English. Also if you don’t know exactly what you’re saying in Hebrew, it is not enormously important as the fact that you’re using Lashon HaKodesh is a good thing in itself. If you daven in English, however, you must concentrate on every word. This is why the translated siddurim have become very popular nowadays, to get the best of both worlds!



‘The Praying Mantis’ – we know that we must mirror Hashem’s creations in our actions. As if we needed any more of a proof for the importance of prayer

It is important to realise that many of your Chanichim may not be able to read properly, especially in the younger groups. With them, stress the positive sides of praying in English – as opposed to not at all. For the Chanichim more experienced with Tefilla, try to stress the value of not only davening in Hebrew, but also trying to understand what they’re saying e.g. by reading the English while the Chazan is doing the repetition.

3. Why can’t I make up my own prayers?

The answer can be partly illustrated with a parable.....

If one needs to speak to a friend in Australia, you can go about it in two ways. Either you can use existing phone lines, or you can set up your own network, with wires, satellites etc. Would you use a



working, set-up, effective, recognised system, or one you cannot even be sure will work? Surely the former!

Similarly with our prayers.

However, it's important to stress that individual prayers are encouraged during certain parts of davening, e.g. Shema Koleinu, and after Yehi Ratzon (at the end of the Amidah).

Israel In Our Prayers **by Rabbi Efraim Davidson**

While we enjoy the tasty falafel and the Israeli music let us not lose sight of what Israel is about and what it means to us Jews that a Jewish state exists.

While we make many references to Israel and Jerusalem throughout the siddur, the decision was made to include a specific prayer for the well-being of the State of Israel. The prayer has been adopted by many traditional synagogues throughout the world. In making this decision as a community we combined the best of who we are and who we are to be. We recognise that the re-establishment of a Jewish state in Eretz Yisrael has strong spiritual and historical significance. Far from being an extension of 19th century European nationalism, the rebirth of the Jewish presence and independence in the Land of Israel seems to be in keeping with the promises that Hashem made to our forefathers. In the desert He told us, "See! I have given the Land before you; come and possess the Land that Hashem swore to your forefathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them and their children after them." Furthermore we see the return of the exiles prophesied in Ezekiel, wherein the prophet, speaking in the name of Hashem, states, "I will gather you from the nations, and assemble you from the lands where you have been scattered, and I will give you the Land of Israel." Whether our current State of Israel is the fulfillment of these - and many other - prophetic statements remains to be seen. However it is undeniable that the re-establishment of Jewish sovereignty in Israel is a gift from God. It is incumbent upon us to first and foremost show our gratitude to Hashem for His kindness in allowing us access to Israel in a way that our grandparents could hardly even imagine. Beyond that simple recognition is a deeper understanding of the role that Israel and Jerusalem has played in our spiritual history. The tradition speaks of the three essential elements of our ideal existence: Am Yisrael, Torat Yisrael, and Eretz Yisrael. This means that we are as we should be when the *People of Israel* is observing the *Torah of Israel* while living in the *Land of Israel*; all, of course, under the watchful eye of Hashem. This is the ideal Jewish existence. This model has defined the formation of our intellectual pursuits - our halachic,



philosophic and ethical literature - as well as the timeless content of our liturgy, and has served as the vision that gives strength, hope and courage to our people when that vision and trust is all that remains. Our existence is complete and perfect only when all three of these elements are brought together.



As King Solomon said, “a three-strand cord is unbreakable.” It is critical that we move towards greater observance of Torah and Mitzvot, and that we understand the spiritual importance of Eretz Yisrael. Over the last 2000 years, the soul of the Nation of Israel thrived on Torah, but was weak because of our exile. Now the body has been revived but is weak because of secular

nationalism. We cannot settle for substitutes. Our job is to bring together body and soul to recreate the perfect spiritual reality of the Jewish People living an authentic Torah Life in the Jewish Land. This is what we must pray for and work towards. This is the eternal covenant of God and the Jews. This is who we are and who we must become.

Speaking of Israel....if we are to speak about it think about it in our tefillot, we should probably know what we're talking about. A great way of learning about Israel is by coming to Israel Wednesdays (see below)...!



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Israel Wednesdays

THROUGHOUT FEBRUARY 2013



Bnei Akiva is proudly at the forefront of Israel education.

Join us on Wednesdays throughout February for a series of top speakers who will put Israel in the spotlight and update you on the challenges and opportunities facing the country.



6 February 2013
Alan Johnson, BICOM
The challenges facing Israel in 2013



13 February 2013
Iris Ambor, Embassy of Israel
The religious-secular divide through the lens of Israeli film



20 February 2013
Luke Akehurst, We Believe in Israel
How we can support and defend Israel in the UK



27 February 2013
Calev Ben-Dor, Israel's Foreign Ministry
The impact of the Israel Election results on the peace process

For details call Gideon on 020 8209 1319 ext 7, email israel@bauk.org, or see the Facebook event





A Final Thought

*So, we've been given an insight into what prayer is for and why we do it; we've looked into some FAQ's about tefilla and we've seen the part of Israel in our tefilla and our lives. As if Rabbi Davidson's words were not strong enough - **through our tefillot and proactive outlook all of the above have come into being.** I reiterate: through tefilla alone we cannot achieve our goals. We must also put in our own efforts (I refer you to story #3745 "the bloke drowning in the sea then the helicopter comes...").*

Have you ever thought - your actions might even be the answer to someone else's prayers?

By helping someone else, you might be fulfilling tefillot that they've been saying for ages. It could be said that God works through people who are lucky enough to be in a position to help those less fortunate.

Obviously, you cannot for certain say that when you do something you are a "Shaliach Hashem" (God's messenger)". However, it may be something to bear in mind if you need some extra encouragement when you next can't be bothered to get up and do some superhero-esque world-saving.

**Have a great meeting people and remember:-
"WE NEED YOU; WE NEED YOUR TEFILLA..." (© Miami Boys Choir 1865)**

Peula Ideas

-KVUTSAH PLANNING SHEET-

