

## Prayer (Part 2)

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The last time I spoke on *Shabbat*, I led a panel discussion in which two Ohev couples, the Caldwells and the Lees, candidly explained how they approach God in prayer. Both said they employ unstructured prayer to a degree and *Siddur* prayer to a degree, but they differed in how much of each and on which occasions each was used. Although one of the couples used the *Siddur* extensively and the other notably less so, they were agreed in their need for the Holy Spirit to meet them and guide them whenever they prayed.

After the service, I received a number of positive comments and also a few criticisms. To some it seemed that too much favor was awarded to the *Siddur* which, after all, is a prayer book and not Scripture, and also a book that comes out of the part of the Jewish world that rejected Yeshua. It was also pointed out to me that I did not conclude the session with my own views on the subject, and there were two persons I spoke with who said they did not understand the reason for having the panel discussion in the first place.

I explained to them as I now explain to you, that all of your elders are competent to teach from the *bima* but, because I am the Congregational Leader, I am uniquely able to use this platform to exhort the congregation to redirection, and to make certain kinds of corrections. Consequently, when it is my turn to preach, I sometimes use my message time to speak to you, my fellow congregants, in ways that the other elders are less able. So, having given you this background, I will now attempt to clarify what I apparently did not make clear several weeks ago, and which I consider vitally important for our congregation's spiritual health as we move forward.

When I came to Ohev about five years ago, I found a congregation that was somewhat divided in its preferences, practices and, to an extent even socially, regarding certain Jewish practices and the two major approaches to prayer – liturgical prayer from the *Siddur*, and prayer that is largely unstructured. There were currents of critical things being said about these two approaches to prayer and, while some sought to bring more Jewish liturgy into Ohev, others did what they could to hold it to a minimum.

I could see there was an aspect to this where people who held different views did not fully understand each other and were not dialoging. In my conversations with Ohev members about this phenomenon, a few expressed their belief that relying heavily on the *Siddur* did not allow the Holy Spirit to lead and, from the contrary position, there was a growing worry that Jewish-style prayer at Ohev would eventually yield to more Christian styles, and that the Jewishness of Ohev's services would diminish. Folks who held either view expressed concern for Jewish visitors. If services were too liturgically Jewish, secular Jews who had little taste for synagogue worship would not want to come back, and if services were too charismatically Christian, synagogue-affiliated Jews would not come back. You can see how these different points of view created a problem of how to move forward and so, after much prayer and discussion with the elders and others, I concluded that it was better to promote diversity of choice and opportunity rather than try to move Ohev in a single direction. For awhile, we actually spoke of Ohev as having two expressions – contemporary and traditional. But we soon noticed that, while people

continued to lean one way or the other, because they felt increasingly secure that their preferred way of praying (and by extension way of living) would not be snatched away, critical rhetoric stopped, common ground was rediscovered, and unity was largely restored. Things are a whole lot better now, but we are not yet entirely out of the woods on this, and that was my reason for the panel presentation – to illustrate two couples who tend to pray differently, yet are unified in seeking the Holy Spirit, and in respecting each other's differences.

Before I go further, let me share a few Scriptures about prayer from both a liturgical and non-liturgical perspective. How can I go wrong by starting with what we call the Lord's Prayer – the *Tefilah Adonai*, Matthew 6:9-13?

*"In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen."*

Is this prayer intended to be liturgy? To be read word for word at services and on other occasions of prayer? Perhaps your answer is "no" because it begins "In this manner, therefore, pray," and so you say that it is only instructing us to pray the essence of the prayer and not necessarily to be read verbatim.

Very well, but now let's look at how the same prayer is rendered in Luke 11:2-4:

*"So He said to them, "When you pray, say: Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us day by day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."*

Here, Scripture doesn't say "In this manner, therefore pray ..." It says – "When you pray, say ..." – and you are then given the exact words to pray. Now that is what liturgy is – prescribed words or actions that are said or done uniformly and repeatedly by a praying community.

Let us remember that the Jerusalem Temple was still operational in the First Century, and that God's instructions to the *kohanim* were precise – in other words, they were liturgical. On the other hand, the Israelites who came to sacrifice had to first repent of their sins, and there is no precise instruction or formula given in the *Torah* to guide them in how to do that. So whatever they said to God and to the *kohanim* was not liturgical; it was unstructured. Now here are some New Covenant Scriptures that seem to encourage spontaneous prayer using ordinary speech:

Philippians 4:6-7: *"Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Messiah Yeshua."*

James 1:5-6: “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind.”

James 5:16: “Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.”

1 John 5:14-15: “Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.”

My conclusion from all I see in Scripture is that there are appropriate times and places for both unstructured prayer and also for liturgy. Now since liturgy to a modern Jew means praying from the *Siddur*, I want to return to what I did not do the last time I spoke, which is to give you my own thoughts on prayer and on *Siddur* prayer in particular.

Praying from the *Siddur* is NOT my favorite way to pray, and yet I believe that praying certain selections from the *Siddur* during *Shabbat* services and at other times is incumbent upon me because the *Siddur* is the prayer book of my people. Christians believe the Bible, Muslims revere the Bible, and even pagans sometimes study the Bible, but the *Siddur* belongs uniquely to the Jews. If you see a Jew in the street carrying a book on his way to synagogue, it is almost certainly not a Bible he is carrying; it is a *Siddur*. And if a secular Jew, by reading the Scriptures, develops a repentant heart toward God and seeks affiliation with the most reform synagogue he can find, both a *Siddur* and a *Tanakh* await him at his pew, and the *Siddur* will, without doubt, show the most wear. The Jewish sense of membership in an ancient people is foreign to most Christians whose affiliation of antiquity is to a Church – not to a people. That is why, when a Jew finds Yeshua in the context of a Christian church, the pastor usually does not have the understanding needed to nurture him in his Jewish identity and covenant responsibilities. Were he to have that understanding, among the ancient writings the pastor would expose him to would most certainly be the prayers of the *Siddur*.

Now if you are concluding from what I have just said that I pray a lot from the *Siddur* you would be wrong because, as I said earlier, praying the *Siddur* is not my preferred way to pray. But neither is pausing at scheduled times during the day for unstructured prayer. My favorite way to pray is to dialog with God continuously and non-verbally throughout the day as I walk by the way. Non-verbally, because I find that language (Tongues exempted) gets in my way and slows down the communication; tongues doesn't do that. I am aware that God knows my thoughts even before I think them, so I just throw them out there in the raw, undeveloped and often unorganized, and I listen for a response which I almost always get, also non-verbally, but much more coherent. I can and do pray in other ways, but this way is my staple, and the Scripture I model my way of praying after is 1Thessalonians 5:16-18:

*“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Messiah Yeshua for you.”*

In the time I have left for this message, I want to touch very briefly on four other subjects:

1. I want to compare the value of liturgical prayer with unstructured prayer.
2. I want to provide guidance on how and to what extent we ought to adopt prayer liturgies promulgated by rabbis who we know rejected both Yeshua and the New Covenant.
3. I want to explain the value I see of praying in tongues.
4. I want to conclude with a word about the importance of *kavanah*.

First, number 1. The value of unstructured prayer is obvious in that you, in conjunction with the Holy Spirit, are its sole authors, and you are therefore in control of what you pray. You can speak to God exactly what is on your heart, in your own words, in your own time, and for as long as you like, and God responds in whatever way He chooses as well, so the end result is unfettered one-on-one communication that is tailored to the moment or the need. Ironically, though, the strength of this mode of prayer is also its limitation because it is exceedingly personal, and God instructs us to pray to Him as a people in addition to individually; for example:

*2 Chronicles 7:14: "if My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land."*

*Jeremiah 29:12-14: "Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart. I will be found by you, says the LORD, and I will bring you back from your captivity; I will gather you from all the nations and from all the places where I have driven you, says the LORD, and I will bring you to the place from which I cause you to be carried away captive."*

When Jews gather, they can pray in an unstructured way and that is good. But the Jewish People are disbursed around the globe, so how then can we pray as a united people? One answer is that we can pray prayers from the *Siddur* (which is available to all Jews everywhere), at the same time of the day, day of the week, and season of the year as all other Jews in the world are praying; in this way we can pray as a people while living in distant lands. Of great assistance in doing this, is the fact that all *Siddurim*, despite translation and denominational differences, contain essentially the same prayers, universally powerful prayers, that have stood the test of time, and have been set in a universal order so that a Jew who prays from any *Siddur* in a traditional manner, joins with his people who, somewhere in the world, are praying similarly.

Now point number 2 – the extent to which we ought to adopt liturgies promulgated by rabbis whom we know rejected both Yeshua and the New Covenant. The way I see it, the *Siddur* is like the nation of Israel, in that neither is at its godly potential, but that God has used both in the survival and preservation of the Jewish people against all odds. Knowing that the traditional *Siddur* contains a few biblical errors (very few by the way), we must correct them or not use those parts. Knowing also that traditional *Siddurim* contain no New Covenant Scriptures or references to Yeshua, we must supplement them liberally with New Covenant material – both

New Testament Scriptures as well as prayers that are newly written. We are blessed, by the way, to be living at a time when several Messianic Jewish *Siddurim* have been published, and it would be well if each of us owned one. There is one other thing connected with the *Siddur* that we ought to correct, and that is to invite the Holy Spirit into its use. We must remember that most *Siddurim* do not anticipate that prayers to God can be a two-way conversation, so traditional practices surrounding *Siddur* use do not provide for times of listening and departing from the usual order of service if the *Ruach* pays a visit. That is easy to correct, but we must be sensitive to the Spirit, and remember to do it.

Now point number 3 – praying in “Tongues.” By “Tongues,” we mean prophetic speech in either a national language that is not known to the speaker, or a language that is God-given, and is not naturally known at all. Tongues is too large a subject for this message, but it needs to be touched upon nevertheless, because it is mentioned in Scripture as a prayer language that is associated with the New Covenant and the Holy Spirit, and that was first spoken in Jerusalem by Jews who were gathering for *Shavuot*. Most of what is said about Tongues in Scripture is related to the “gift of Tongues,” to “speaking in Tongues,” to the “*Mikvah* of the *Ruach HaKodesh*,” and to praying in the Spirit which is related, but there is very little in Scripture that explicitly mentions praying in Tongues. As a gift, Tongues does not seem to be possessed by all, but as a prayer language, it may be available to all, yet we know that all do not have it or know that they have it. Here is a Scripture that, without ambiguity, alludes to praying in tongues:

*1 Corinthians 14:14-15: “For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my understanding is unfruitful. What is the conclusion then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding. I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding.”*

For the purposes of this message, I will limit my teaching on tongues to telling you how I pray in tongues to advantage. There are times when a situation requires prayer, but I don’t know how to pray or what to pray for. This can happen when praying for one thing would result in your praying against another thing, and that that second thing may be the one that God wants. On such occasions, I pray in Tongues without knowing what I am praying, in the belief that God will fill in the blanks.

Another way I use Tongues, is as a way to pray without having to take my concentration away from something else. 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 was mentioned earlier, but it bears repeating here because praying in tongues is one way that we can pray without ceasing; the Scripture says:

*“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Messiah Yeshua for you.”*

Continuously dialoging with God, and praying in Tongues are the two ways I try to pray without ceasing.

Finally, number 4 – *Kavanah*. The Hebrew word *kavanah* means maintaining a mindset in prayer that focuses on God. Whether unstructured or with a *Siddur*, our prayers are woefully inadequate if they lack *kavanah*. Even while I am praying in Tongues in the midst of doing

something else, I find it possible to keep in contact with God in the background, and doing so should be our goal always.

To review:

- I explained why my messages are sometimes different than those of the other elders;
- I gave a little of the history of Ohev's wrestling with liturgy vs. unstructured prayer, and gave examples from the Bible of each;
- I compared liturgical prayer with unstructured prayer, and described each of their values;
- I offered guidance for how we can make use of liturgy that lacks New Covenant content, and that was handed down to us from unbelievers in both Yeshua and the New Covenant;
- I explained when and why I pray in tongues;
- And I urged an attitude of *kavanah* while engaged in all forms of prayer.

If there is only one thing that Ohev congregants take away from this message today, I want it to be that each of us gains a renewed appreciation for those who pray differently from the way we do, and an assurance that there is ample room within Messianic Judaism for expressions of prayer.