

Panel Discussion on Tefilah

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We're going to have some fun now with a panel discussion on prayer; the Hebrew word is *tefilah*. I know I don't have to convince anyone here about the importance of prayer, so that is not what this is meant to get at. What I would like to achieve is airing our understanding about how we approach prayer, and how we deal with prayer from both a Jewish and general perspective. When we hear the term "Jewish prayer," many of us immediately think of praying established prayers from the *Siddur*; that's not wrong, but it's not all of Jewish prayer. Also, when we think of general prayer and especially intercessory prayer, we are likely to think of praying spontaneous words that we hope have been placed in our mouths and hearts by God. And, except perhaps in a *Chassidic* context (akin to Reb Tevia in "Fiddler,") we do not typically think of such prayers as "Jewish."

Now I'm going to tell you a secret. Shh! Don't let this get out, but many of us, both Jews and non-Jews, came to our belief in Yeshua and were initially disciplined in some expression of the Christian Church where we were taught to pray unassisted by a prayer book. Of course, if we came out of certain denominations, we would have encountered their "Book of Common Prayer" and their various hymnals that serve the same purpose as the *Siddur* serves in the synagogue. We might have also come away with some of the same bad habits such as praying prayers in a rote way without internalizing them as our own. You see, that problem is not just a Jewish problem.

So I have assembled this "Blue Ribbon" panel at great effort and expense so that we may hear, first hand, the prayer experiences of four individuals who hail from different backgrounds and, by God's Divine intervention, have come into Messianic Judaism and to Ohev. So let's warmly greet our panel, Steve and Etta Caldwell, and Eric and Willetta Lee.

Before I turn to our panel, I want to say a few words of my own. I believe we, in Messianic Judaism, need to correct a misperception that ways of praying are either "Jewish," or "Holy Spirit," as though they are necessarily either one or the other. My Jewish mother (of blessed memory) who fought against receiving Yeshua until days before she passed on, told me that she spoke to God all the time, and I know that she knew not one word out of the *Siddur*. So was that Jewish prayer or was it not? Was my mom responding to the Holy Spirit without knowing there is a Holy Spirit? The Hebrew word *kavanah* means maintaining a mindset in prayer that focuses on God, and one of the meanings of the term "praying in the Spirit" is allowing our prayers to be Spirit led. With or without a *Siddur*, our prayers are woefully inadequate if they lack either *kavanah* or submission to the Holy Spirit.

There are so many Scriptures in the Bible about prayer that it's impossible to select only a few to serve as a meaningful platform for this discussion; nevertheless, here are some to chew on:

FROM THE TANAKH

1Chronicles 16:8-11: “*Oh, give thanks to the LORD! Call upon His name; Make known His deeds among the peoples! Sing to Him, sing psalms to Him; Talk of all His wondrous works! Glory in His holy name; Let the hearts of those rejoice who seek the LORD! Seek the LORD and His strength; Seek His face evermore!*”

Isaiah 58:6-9: “*Is this not the fast that I have chosen: To loose the bonds of wickedness, To undo the heavy burdens, To let the oppressed go free, And that you break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, And that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out; When you see the naked, that you cover him, And not hide yourself from your own flesh? Then your light shall break forth like the morning, Your healing shall spring forth speedily, And your righteousness shall go before you; The glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard. Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer; You shall cry, and He will say, ‘Here I am.’” If you take away the yoke from your midst, The pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness,...*”

Psalms 32:5-6: “*I acknowledged my sin to You, And my iniquity I have not hidden. I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,’ and You forgave the iniquity of my sin. Selah. For this cause everyone who is godly shall pray to You In a time when You may be found; Surely in a flood of great waters They shall not come near him.*”

Psalms 122:6: “*Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: May they prosper who love you.*”

Proverbs 15:8: “*The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD, But the prayer of the upright is His delight.*”

Proverbs 15:29: “*The LORD is far from the wicked, But He hears the prayer of the righteous.*”

FROM THE K’TVEY B’RIT CHADASHA

Romans 8:26: “*Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.*”

Ephesians 6:17-18 NKJ “*And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints ...*”

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.*”

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.*”

1Timothy 2:8: *“I desire therefore that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting;”*

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.”*

1John 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.”*

QUESTIONS FOR THE PANEL

1. Please briefly describe the way you normally pray that is most comfortable for you.
2. What does “being in the Spirit” mean to each of you?
3. When you begin to pray are you normally in the Spirit, or do you rely on prayer to get you in the Spirit? Otherwise, what do you do to get yourself into a spirit of prayer?
4. How familiar are each of you with the content of the *Siddur*? What do you think is its purpose, and do you see praying from the *Siddur* to be a Jewish obligation?
5. In what way and under what circumstances do you use the *Siddur* in prayer? Do you only pray prayers prescribed for specific times of the day, or do you use it in intercessory prayer or praying for specific situations?
6. What do you think are the strengths and limitations of praying with the *Siddur* and without the *Siddur*? For what kinds of prayer needs would you (1) pray with the *Siddur*, (2) pray without the *Siddur*, or (3) combine both ways?
7. You heard me speak about the importance of *kavanah*. How do you achieve *kavanah*?
8. I don’t know whether any of you pray in tongues, but if you do, please tell us how that manifests in your prayer life and what its value is.
9. Do any of you have any advice to offer the rest of us regarding prayer?