

# **The Art and Purpose of Public Prayer**

by  
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Welcome to Worship Shorts! These Shorts are made for Worship, and that's just what they'll do!

Over many weeks, I've been presenting this 5-minute (or less) interlude explaining various aspects of Jewish and Messianic Jewish worship encountered at Ohev Yisrael. The explanations are to assure some listeners that we have a genuine interest in honoring the traditions of our fathers and grandfathers going back throughout many generations. At the same time, we want to assure those who are new to Messianic Jewish worship, that we have not abandoned or ignored New Covenant realities, or the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit.

In his book, The Art of Public Prayer - Not for Clergy Only, Lawrence Hoffman gives an introduction entitled: "Is Ecstasy Enough?" The author sorts through a number of different types of worship services from various religious traditions, and presents some common threads. The nine chapter titles are revealing:

1. Structuring Time
2. Lost Symbols
3. Worship Systems
4. Mistaking the Code, Mixing Messages, and Managing Change
5. The Presence of God at Worship
6. The Script of Prayer: Words Spoken
7. The Script of Prayer: Words Sung
8. Sacred Space: The Message of Design
9. Fixing the System to Make Worship Work

In the first chapter, Rabbi Hoffman discusses something that was addressed recently by our own Rabbi, the problem of time spent in our worship services. Rabbi Hoffman points out that there are certain misconceptions that some people have about time. For one thing, we tend to think of time as being stretched out in a straight line, and every moment as being equal to every other moment. But Tuesdays aren't like Thursdays, and certain times are more significant than other times. We also tend to view time through the lens of our own private lifetimes, as if we were each, separately the center of our own universe. I've been known to say that half an hour spent in a boring worship service is too much, and three hours spent in an exciting, eventful worship service seems too little. Rabbi Hoffman would say that structuring our worship time without correcting these misconceptions can only lead to frustration - or worse.

As the elders discuss how best to structure (or perhaps unstructure) our services so as to leave ample room for Spirit-filled worship, why not do some research of your own? Why not reflect on the reason or reasons why YOU participate in our worship services? Why not think about developing a performance measure, like they do in the government: How do you know when you have had a successful worship service? If there are varying degrees of success, what are

they, and what resources are necessary in order to enhance our likelihood of success? Also, rest assured that these kinds of conversations are prevalent in many Jewish congregations in this country, and it may be that OUR answers can help others find their way.

That's enough for today, and thank you for listening to Worship Shorts.