



Carnegie Shul Chatter

January 10, 2019



Light Candles 5:04pm Shabbat Services 9:20am

The Language of Prayer

Every Tuesday, Ellen attends Torah and Tea at the Chabad here in Lakewood Ranch. This week, the topic of study turned to Prayer, and the Rebbetzin, who leads the class and discussion, said that although Hashem can understand prayer in any language, it is best that prayers be said in the Holy Language, Hebrew. She also said that, if you cannot read the prayer well enough in Hebrew, you should read a transliteration, if available, rather than praying in English.

Tradition... or Innovation?

While researching the main topic of today's Chatter, I came upon an interesting statement in an article by Rabbi Harold Kushner on myjewishlearning.com.

In his article, Rabbi Kushner says, "When a hundred Jews are chanting a prayer in Hebrew, they are welded into a single congregation. When, instead of chanting the Hebrew, they contemplate the English translation (usually offered on the facing page of the Hebrew prayer book), that unity is lost as every one of them begins to challenge and analyze what he has just been saying. That is why congregations get so upset when the cantor introduces a new melody for a familiar prayer. It is not the meaning of the words that matters to us; it is the emotional-aesthetic, right-brain experience we crave."

There was a time that an Ashkenazic Jew could go into an Ashkenazic synagogue almost anywhere and find a service remarkably like the one with which he was familiar. And he could immediately join in the singing of such songs as "Lecha Dodi" or "Ein Keloheinu." But, sadly, that is no longer the case. As Rabbi Kushner alludes, many cantors seem to want to introduce their own tunes and, alas, if you try singing the traditional tune, you will find that you are out of step with the congregation.

Some people like things to always be new and changing. Me? I prefer TRADITION when I go to shul.

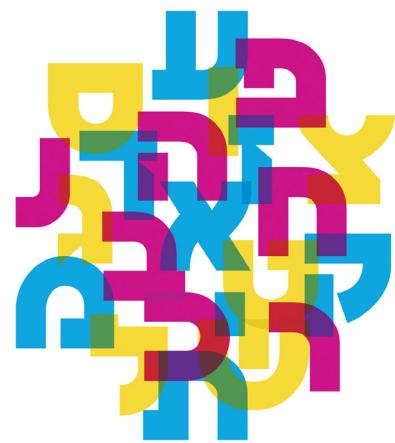
Personally, I daven many prayers in Hebrew, and although I cannot translate them as I read them, I have read these prayers many times in English, so I pretty much know what I am saying.

But some prayers, like the Amidah, are hard for me to do entirely In Hebrew, so I do part of the prayer that I am most comfortable with in Hebrew, then switch to English for the remainder.

I also find transliterations difficult to read and I cannot keep up with the service as well as if I had read the same thing in English.

But that is just me.

Here are what some web sites have to say about the topic.

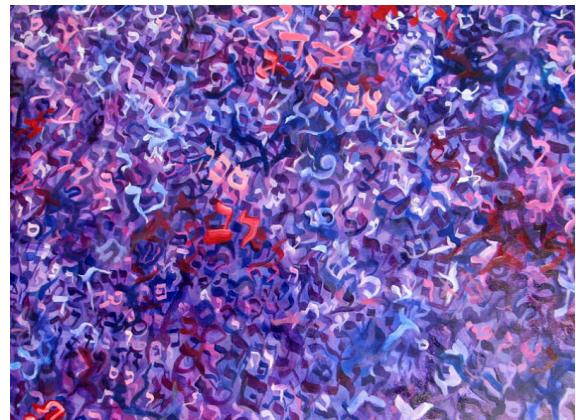


First, from chabad.org:

Should I Pray in Hebrew if I Don't Understand?

By Yehuda Shurpin

As you can read in "Why Is Hebrew Called the "Holy Tongue?" one cannot minimize the importance and sanctity of the Hebrew language. It is the language of creation, prophecy and all spiritual energy. Additionally, the prayers were composed by the Men of the Great Assembly in Hebrew, and no translation is ever a perfectly accurate substitute for the original. So if you understand Hebrew, you should pray in Hebrew. And if you don't understand Hebrew, you should at least try to learn the meaning of the prayers so you know what you're saying.



But if someone doesn't yet understand the prayers, should he nevertheless pray in Hebrew?

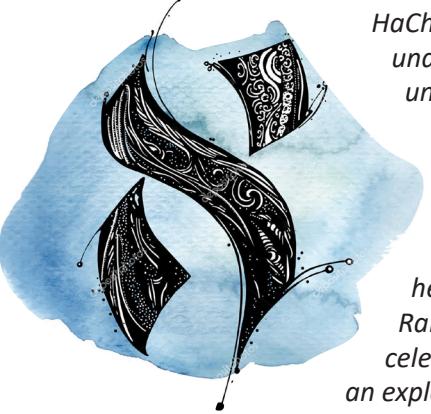
There seem to be two schools of thought.

Pray in Hebrew

Many, including most notably Rabbi Yisroel Meir Kagan (in his work Mishnah Berurah), are of the opinion that due to the holiness of prayer in its original Hebrew language, if one is able to pray in Hebrew, he should do so, even if he doesn't understand what he is saying.

Understand What You're Saying

Others, including the Magen Avraham and Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi (in his Shulchan Aruch Harav), take a different approach. While conceding that the common custom is to pray in Hebrew regardless of comprehension, Rabbi Schneur Zalman writes that if one does not understand the meanings of Grace after Meals, Shema, Amidah and Hallel, he should not recite them in the Holy Tongue, but in a language he does understand. And though there is room to allow the recitation of other blessings in the Holy Tongue, one should still preferably recite them in a language that he understands because "prayer without concentration is not considered prayer."



This view follows that of the earlier mystics, most notably Rabbi Yehuda HaChassid ("the Pious"), who writes regarding people who do not understand Hebrew: "Teach them to pray in the language that they understand, for 'prayer is only in the heart,' and if the heart does not understand what comes out of the mouth, what benefit is there? Therefore, it is proper that they pray in the language that they understand."

Indeed, this strong emphasis on prayer being the "service of the heart" over mere lip service is what led Rabbi Dovber (son of Rabbi Schneur Zalman Liadi, and whose birthday and yahrtzeit we celebrate on the 9th of Kislev) to write a work called Pirush Hamilot, an explanation of the words of prayer based on Chassidic teachings.

This was in addition to arranging his father's discourses around the text of his Siddur, and publishing it under the name "Siddur im Dach."

May the words of our heart pierce the heavens and all of our prayers be answered, including the ultimate prayer for the coming of Moshiach speedily in our days!

Next, from thejewishhome.org:

Hebrew: The Language for Prayer

The Talmud states that it is permissible to pray in any language that you can understand; however, traditional Judaism has always stressed the importance of praying in Hebrew.

A traditional Chasidic story speaks glowingly of the prayer of an uneducated Jew who wanted to pray but did not speak Hebrew. The man began to recite the only Hebrew he knew: the alphabet.

He recited it over and over again, until a rabbi asked what he was doing. The man told the rabbi, "The Holy One, Blessed is He, knows what is in my heart. I will give Him the letters, and He can put the words together."

There are many good reasons for praying in Hebrew: it gives you an incentive for learning Hebrew, which might otherwise be forgotten; it provides a link to Jews all over the world; it is the language in which the covenant with God was formed, etc. To me however, the most important reason to pray in Hebrew is that Hebrew is the language of Jewish thought. Any language other than Hebrew is laden



down with the connotations of that language's culture and religion. When you translate a Hebrew word, you lose subtle shadings of Jewish ideas and add ideas that are foreign to Judaism. Only in Hebrew can pure essence of Jewish thought be preserved and properly understood. For example, the English word "commandment" connotes an order imposed upon us by a stern and punishing God while the Hebrew word "mitzvah" implies an honor and privilege given to us, a responsibility that we undertook as part of the covenant we made with God, a good deed that we are eager to perform.

This is not to suggest that praying in Hebrew is more important than understanding what you are praying about. If you are in synagogue and you don't know Hebrew well enough, you can listen to the Hebrew while looking at the translation. If you are reciting a prayer or blessing alone, you should get a general idea of its meaning from translation before attempting to recite it in Hebrew. But even if you do not fully understand Hebrew at this time, you should try to hear the prayer, experience the prayer, in Hebrew.



Yahrzeit Plaques

Commemorate a loved one by dedicating a yahrzeit plaque in his or her memory at the Carnegie Shul. These beautiful plaques, mounted on the sanctuary walls, are lit on the loved one's yahrzeit, Yom Kippur, and days when Yizkor is recited. The names are also read aloud from the Bimah during services on the Sabbath of the yahrzeit and on Yom Kippur. To purchase a plaque, for only \$175, please email Mike Roteman at mrmike7777@yahoo.com.



Sponsor a Kiddush



Please consider sponsoring a Kiddush in honor or in memory of a loved one, for only \$36. Your sponsorship will be announced from the bimah and in the weekly Chatter. To sponsor a Kiddush, email mrmike7777@yahoo.com.



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Six Sundays beginning February 10

10:15-11:30 AM
Chabad of South Hills

or

Six Tuesdays beginning February 5

7:30-9:00 PM
South Hills JCC

\$95/individual \$170/couple (includes textbooks)

For info or to register, call 412.344.2424 or visit www.chabadsh.com/jli

**Carnegie Stage (Off the Wall Theater), in cooperation with
Classrooms Without Borders, presents**

Etty

A moving one-woman play set during the Holocaust

Adapted and performed by Susan Stein • Directed by Austin Pendleton



Etty Hillesum's life ended at Auschwitz when she was only 29 years old. In the play, drawn entirely from Hillesum's diaries and letters of 1941-1943, we meet a remarkable young Dutch woman: insightful, determined, poetic, sensual. Through the voice of actress Susan Stein, Hillesum speaks directly to her audience, frankly, and with compassion — even for the enemy. Seeking the meaning of her life — and all life — during the terror of Nazi occupation, Hillesum discovers a reality she calls God and opens herself to the power of being fully alive and present, bearing witness to the catastrophe unfolding around her. In her gentle yet forthright way, Hillesum asks us not to leave her at Auschwitz, but to let her have a "little bit of a say" in what she hopes will be a new world.

February 7, 7pm

February 8 & 9, 8pm

For more information and tickets: <https://www.carnegiestage.com/etty-the-play>

Carnegie Stage

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Welcomes JFunds to the South Hills!*

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FREE and open to the entire community. You do not have to be Jewish to attend.

Register: southhillsjewishpittsburgh.org/jfunds



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