



Carnegie Shul Chatter

January 21, 2021



Light candles 5:08pm

Services on Zoom 10am

Zoom in for Services

We invite you to join in our abbreviated Shabbos service, beginning at 10 am and lasting for approximately an hour, by clicking this link:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88460450873?pwd=YTYydTRP RnJRUIlrRktHNzJKT1MyZz09>

Find the Birnbaum siddur at: <https://opensiddur.org/compilations/liturgical/siddurim/kol-bo/hasiddur-hashalem-by-paltiel-birnbaum-1949/>

Renewed hope

How many of you knew that the first mitzvah to be given to the Children of Israel was to establish a calendar based upon the monthly rebirth of the moon? I certainly did not, and so I searched for an answer.

According to aish.com, "Waxing and waning, the moon reminds us that strength is rarely static: there are times when nations and people are strong and times when they are weaker. These changes remind us that even when we seem down and hopeless, change is around the corner. Celebrating the New Moon reminded us that our work on behalf of those who are weaker than us is never done."

What a wonderful thought – Even when we seem down and hopeless, change is around the corner. In these troubled times, as the pandemic continues to take lives and as so many struggle to make ends meet, change is just around the corner. Things will get better. We will wear our masks. We will social distance. We will get our shots. And, with God's blessing things WILL get better.

Bo in a Nutshell

Exodus 10:1-13:16

Below is this week's Parshah in a Nutshell from chabad.org.

The last three of the Ten Plagues are visited on Egypt: a swarm of locusts devours all the crops and greenery; a thick, palpable darkness envelops the land; and all the firstborn of Egypt are killed at the stroke of midnight of the 15th of the month of Nissan.



G-d commands the first mitzvah to be given to the people of Israel: to establish a calendar based on the monthly rebirth of the moon. The Israelites are also instructed to bring a "Passover offering" to G-d: a lamb or kid is to be slaughtered and its blood sprinkled on the doorposts and lintel of every Israelite home, so that G-d should pass over these homes when He comes to kill the Egyptian firstborn. The roasted meat of the offering is to be eaten that night together with matzah (unleavened bread) and bitter herbs.

The death of the firstborn finally breaks Pharaoh's resistance and he literally drives the Children of Israel from his land. So hastily do they depart, there is no time for their dough to rise, and the only provisions they take along are unleavened. Before they go, they ask their Egyptian neighbors for gold, silver and garments, draining Egypt of its wealth.

The Children of Israel are commanded to consecrate all firstborn and to observe the anniversary of the Exodus each year by removing all leaven from their possession for seven days, eating matzah, and telling the story of their redemption to their children. They are also commanded to wear tefillin on the arm and head as a reminder of the Exodus and their resultant commitment to G-d.

Recent Donations to the Carnegie Shul

General Fund:

Carl and Roni Schiffman

Yahrzeits:

Marcia Steinberger, for Steinberger Family yahrzeits

Lillian Levitt, for the yahrzeit of Harry Levitt

Roger Wilk, for the yahrzeit of Leona Wilk

Howard & Shelley Miller, for the yahrzeit of Brenda Cramer Miller

Thank you!

Why Do We Pray As We Do?

In last week's Chatter we talked about the Shemoneh Esreh, one of Judaism's most important prayers. But why do Jews pray the way we do? Why do we pray together, in a synagogue, as part of a minyan?

Here is what Philip Birnbaum has to say about Jewish prayer in the Introduction to our Siddur, pages XIV to XVI.



Hebrew prayers are for the most part in the first person plural, because the Jewish people have always been intensely group conscious. In the synagogue there has been no room for selfish prayers. The watchword of Jewish solidarity and mutual responsibility is found in these Talmudic statements: "All the people of Israel are companions; all members of Israel are responsible for one another."

The essence of the synagogue is congregational worship and edification, conducted by the congregation and its own members. Jewish life was able to survive the destruction of the Temple because the synagogue had been prepared to take the whole burden and carry it onward for generations to come. As a place of congregational prayer and public instruction, the synagogue has always been the spiritual home of the Jew; hence, the various titles by which it has been known: house of prayer, house of study, assembly house, people's house, little sanctuary and schul (school). In olden days, strangers were even fed there, and so the custom arose of reciting the Kiddush in the synagogue as part of the Sabbath and festival evening services, except the first night of Pesach, when all strangers were given hospitality in private homes.

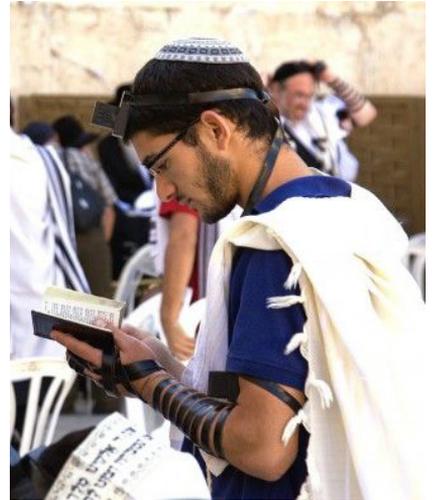
The sages of the Talmud praised congregational worship in the most elaborate terms. They said: "A man's prayer is heard only in the synagogue... When a man leaves the synagogue, he should not march with hasty steps; but when he goes to the synagogue, it is right to run. The Shekhinah (Divine Presence) is in the synagogue...even when one man is there...He who does not worship in the synagogue of his own town is called a bad neighbour."

The minimum number required for congregational prayer is ten adult Jews, referred to as minyan (number, quorum). The Hasidic tsaddik Rabbi Nahman of Bratslav (1772-1811) was in the habit of saying: "Nine tsaddikim cannot make a minyan, but if one common man joins them, he completes the minyan." The service held by a minyan or more people together is termed tefillah b'tsibbu (congregational prayer). Maimonides writes: "The hazzan (reader) acts on behalf of the assembled congregation. When, for example, he recites the prayers and the people listen and respond Amen after each blessing, it is as if they are praying. This only applies to one who does not know how to worship; but one who does know fails in his duty

unless he recites the prayer himself... The appointed congregational reader should be known for his knowledge and good conduct... An effort should be made to secure one who has a pleasant voice and is fluent in reading..."

In ancient times, the hazzan's duties included that of sexton, taking care of the synagogue and its contents, as well as that of an elementary school teacher. In the Middle Ages, the hazzan was often a combination of payyetan (liturgical poet), composer and singer, whose melodies have been preserved down to our times. In the twelfth-century work, Sefer Hasidim, there is a statement which reads: "If you cannot concentrate when you pray, search for melodies and choose a tune you like. Your heart will then feel what you say, for it is the song that makes your heart respond."

The concept of kavvanah (intention) is stressed by the rabbis as the chief requirement of prayer. They would prefer less prayer with kavvanah to much prayer without it. Rabbi Bahya ibn Pakuda, of eleventh-century Spain, states in his Hovoth ha-Levavoth (Duties of the Heart) that even the practical, outward duties cannot be adequately performed without a sincere and reverent heart. The concept of kavvanah occupies a remarkably significant position in kabbalistic literature. The introductory meditations in the prayer books are marked by a deep spirituality. For example, the meditation before putting on the tefillin contains the thought that by wearing them on the head and near the heart, the worshiper becomes conscious of his duty to employ his thoughts and emotions in the service of God.



Though prayer without inner intent is said to be of little worth, Maimonides points out that a man is prompted to act or not to act in accordance with the good or the harm which may result. Hence, he loses nothing by shaping his conduct with a view to gaining reward and avoiding punishment until, by habit and zeal, he arrives at an understanding of the truth and serves God purely out of love.

Prayer is the natural expression of the religious feelings of man. Our prayers in the synagogue are primarily meant to convey to us certain fundamental truths, preparing us for the trials and complex temptations of daily life. Occasionally, prayer helps us in a purely personal way, as when pent-up emotion chokes our power of expression, so that we cannot speak; prayer speaks for us, and in it we feel repose. We breathe our feelings and our emotions into the classical forms of the traditional prayers. In the synagogue, the individual is merged in the united chorus of Israel. As each worshiper adds his voice to that of his neighbour, he receives in turn the inspiration that enriches his own devotion. There is that devotional give-and-take between him and every member of the congregation, that unfailing sense of infinite brotherhood.