

A Hebraic Perspective on How to Pray (PDF download 20 A4 pages) The Hebrew word for prayer is tefilah. It is derived from the root Peh-Lamed-Lamed and the word lhitpalel, meaning to judge oneself. This surprising word origin provides insight into the purpose of Jewish prayer. The most important part of any Jewish prayer, whether it be a prayer of petition, of thanksgiving, of praise of YHWH, or of confession, is the introspection it provides, the moment that we spend looking inside ourselves, seeing our role in the universe and our relationship to YHWH. Many people today do not see the need for regular, formal prayer. I pray when I feel inspired to, when it is meaningful to me, they say. This attitude overlooks two important things: the purpose of prayer, and the need for practice. Observant Jews are constantly reminded of YHWH's presence and of their relationship with YHWH, because they are continually praying to Him. Their first thought in the morning, even before they get out of bed, is a prayer thanking YHWH for returning their souls to them. The mindset for prayer is referred to as kavanah, which is generally translated as concentration or intent. The minimum level of kavanah is an awareness that one is speaking to YHWH and an intention to fulfill the obligation to pray. Many English-speaking people find the idea of berachot very confusing. To them, the word blessing seems to imply that the person saying the blessing is conferring some benefit on the person he is speaking to. For example, in Catholic tradition, a person making a confession begins by asking the priest to bless him. Yet in a berachah, the person saying the blessing is speaking to YHWH. The question is, how can the creation confer a benefit upon the Creator? This confusion stems largely from difficulties in the translation. The Hebrew word baruch is not a verb describing what we do to YHWH; it is an adjective describing YHWH as the source of all blessings. When we recite a berachah, we are not blessing YHWH at all; we are expressing wonder at how blessed YHWH is. With that as opening the heavenly door to prayer, come journey with me so that we penetrate the truth about Jewish prayers... We inform, you choose...

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