

GATHER THE PEOPLE

Torah-Based Community Organizing and Development

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FAMILY SIDDUR STUDY: LESSON PLAN 1

THIS IS THE FIRST GATHERING OF OUR FAMILIES TO STUDY THE *SIDDUR* (סידור), WHICH IS THE HEBREW NAME FOR OUR PRAYER BOOK.

- In Jewish life, when we come together for religious services, our tradition teaches us that to pray a complete service we need to have a “מנין” of 10 adult Jews.
- מנין is the Hebrew word for the English word “quorum,” which means the minimum number of people that must be present to carry on a particular activity.
- *But why should we need to have at least ten people of bar or bat mitzvah age—12 for girls and 13 for boys—to pray the complete service? Why not just two or three or even a half-dozen?*
- One explanation is that our basic job as Jews is to stand up for justice and loving-kindness throughout our lives, no matter what else we’re doing—and that’s often very difficult, something for which we need to learn and act with others, with a community dedicated to those purposes.
- Our Torah tradition teaches that it requires at least ten others.
- If you have ever had to stand up to a bully, whether as a child or an adult, you know how much better it is to not be alone but instead to have the support of a community.
- In the sessions we’ll be learning:
 1. About some of the deeper meanings of the prayers that relate to how we live our lives, and how we can be happier and more fulfilled;
 2. Some תחנון or musical cantillation, the way we chant or sing the prayers—which in some congregations is mostly sung by a חזן or cantor; and
 3. Some of what we call synagogue etiquette—when to stand, and when, how, and why to bow, and so on.
- In the time we have, we will only scratch the surface of the Friday evening services.
- But if you become more familiar with some of the deeper meanings of the תפילות services, seeing their relevance and value because they help us

to live more fulfilled lives, you may find yourself wanting to come back and keep on learning long after this course has ended.

BEFORE WE GET STARTED, HOWEVER, LET’S TAKE A FEW MINUTES TO TALK ABOUT WHAT WE HOPE TO GET OUT OF OUR STUDY TOGETHER.

- We’re going to take turns to tell just a little bit about anything we would like to *learn* about the **תּוֹרָה** services and what, if anything, in the past we *didn’t like* about the experience of attending services. Let’s start with examples of things you didn’t like about services.
 1. The services are too long.
 2. Too much is in Hebrew, which I didn’t understand.
 3. The prayers, even when in English, are boring, and I don’t know the tunes.
- So, right now, we’re going to take a minute or so to give you a chance to think about those two things—what you would like to learn and what you haven’t liked about Shabbat services.
- *Who’s willing to go first?*

TO GET STARTED, LET’S TALK A FEW MINUTES ABOUT **תּוֹרָה IN GENERAL.**

- *Does anyone know the meaning of the word “תּוֹרָה”?*
- It has many meanings, among which are:
 1. Stopping work
 2. Stopping certain specific kinds of activity, such as creating or building things
 3. Engaging in other kinds of activity, such as learning and family get-togethers
- *What unusually happens in your life on Friday night and Saturday?*
- *If instead, we celebrate תּוֹרָה, what would we be celebrating?*
- The basic idea is that God created the universe and then rested or stopped creating. Although it looks like the universe is constantly changing, the most important part of the universe, the laws that govern our material world, like gravity, and the laws of morality that govern things like lying and stealing—these laws of God control how everything works—stay the same.
- This teaches us that God not only had the power to create the lawfulness of the universe but also to control what had been created. So it also teaches us that we too are creations of God and subject to God’s laws.
- *But why should we want to stop doing the things we usually do on תּוֹרָה because we are creations of God subject to God’s law?*

- Maybe the most basic reason is that much often goes haywire in our lives, such that we find ourselves confused, frustrated, disappointed, angry and hurt.
- **תּוֹשָׁב** is a 25-hour period when we can see what the world would be like if everyone were to follow God’s law, treating everyone else fairly and with kindness—a world with no bullies, no meanness, and no cruelty—everyone being the best they can be.
- ***Why should we want to do this on Shabbat?***
- So we can teach ourselves what’s possible the other six days in the week.

WHY DO WE COME TO SYNAGOGUE ON SHABBAT?

- Because, as we have already said, if we really want to be the best we can be six days in the week, not just on **תּוֹשָׁב**, that isn’t easy.
- So we come to synagogue for at least four reasons:
 1. We come to learn Torah, which tells us how to be better people and save ourselves from a lot of heartache.
 2. We come to pray, because our prayers *remind* us in many ways of *how* to be better people, what we have to do differently to be happy.
 3. ***Can you think of anything in the prayers that remind you to be a better person?***
 4. We come to synagogue to celebrate the good things in our life—like the joy of *unselfishly* loving and being loved, which come from learning and living as the Torah teaches us.
 5. We come to synagogue to be with other people who also want to be the best they can be all week long, so we can support and encourage one another.

IT HELPS TO UNDERSTAND HOW WE’RE GOING TO GET SOMEWHERE IF WE NOT ONLY HAVE WORD-OF-MOUTH DIRECTIONS—LIKE, GO RIGHT, GO LEFT, TURN HERE, TURN THERE—BUT ALSO A *MAP* THAT SHOWS THE ROUTE FROM WHERE WE ARE TO WHERE WE WANT TO GO. [USE HANDOUT SHOWING HIGHLIGHTS OF SERVICE AS CONNECTED BLOCKS]

- So before we actually begin talking about the individual parts of the Friday evening **תּוֹשָׁב** service, we’re going to look at a kind of map—it shows the main parts of the service.
- In a way it’s like looking at a map of the United States—it’s hard to keep track of all the small towns, so we get a sense of the whole thing by looking at the big cities.
- In a similar way, we can talk a bit about some of the main parts of the Friday night services.

- Keeping in mind that this list leaves out many important parts of the service, here's a very rough map:
 1. קִבְּלַת שַׁבָּת—this is the first of two services on Friday evening, which helps us to get ready to welcome שַׁבָּת and pray with a congregation.
 2. לְכָה דוּדֵי—this is where we welcome שַׁבָּת, the point when we remind ourselves that שַׁבָּת has actually begun.
 3. מַעֲרִיב—this is the Hebrew name for the second service on Friday evening, which is the main evening service.
 4. בְּרָכוּ—here's where we call ourselves, all of us who are present, to worship God, to tell one another that we will support each other in our belief in God and in doing what God asks of us.
 5. שְׁמַע—here's where we remind ourselves and everyone else that God is One, only One, that there is no other god and there is nothing beside what God creates and directs.
 6. קְדִישׁ קְדִישׁ—here's where we take a brief pause, a kind of short break between two important parts of the service, when we tell of our hope that what God wants for all people will be accepted in our lifetimes.
 7. עֲמִידָה (the Hebrew word for “standing”)—here's where we rise and pray seven blessings silently, bowing when we begin, in the middle, and at the end.
 8. Closing prayers—here's where we recognize that we're coming close to the end of the Friday evening services.
 9. עֲלֵינוּ—here's where we're reminded of reasons why it's our *duty* to praise God and not lose hope that what God wants for all people will come to pass.
 10. קְדִישׁ יְתוּם (Mourner's Kaddish)—here's where members of the congregation who have lost a close family member recall that loss and remind themselves that, despite their pain, God's goodness and love still exists and prevails in the world.
 11. יְגִדֵּל—here's where we remind ourselves of the basic things we are taught to believe as Jews.