

# GATHER THE PEOPLE

Torah-Based Community Organizing and Development

[www.gatherthepeople.org](http://www.gatherthepeople.org)

## FAMILY SIDDIR STUDY: LESSON PLAN 16

**TODAY WE'RE GOING TO BEGIN TALKING ABOUT THE עֲמִידָה, ON PAGE 35B, WHICH IS AT THE HEART OF THE PRAYER SERVICE.**

- *What do we mean when we say we want to get to the “heart” of something, or when we say something is at “the heart of the matter”?*
- That’s a way to think about the עֲמִידָה prayer as a part of the whole service.
- *Can anyone teach us what “עֲמִידָה” means?*
  1. The name עֲמִידָה describes *how* we pray this part of the service.
  2. The שׁוֹרֵשׁ of the word עֲמִידָה is ד-מ-ע, which mean to stand as a way of *getting ready to do something*.
- So this part of the service, which includes a number of blessings, we say while *standing*, with our feet together. [DEMONSTRATE INCORRECT AND CORRECT POSITIONS OF FEET.]
- When we’re praying this part of the service, we don’t say the words aloud, we whisper them.
- *Can you think of any reasons we might want to whisper when we pray the עֲמִידָה?*
- Actually, our Jewish tradition—it’s called מְסֻנָּה in Hebrew, which means handed down from generation to generation—teaches that we pray the עֲמִידָה the same way Hannah prayed to God when asking for a child, thousands of years ago—her lips moved but her voice could not be heard.
- The מְסֻנָּה teaches us that her prayer was a prayer of the heart, a personal and private prayer, unlike the prayers we recite as a congregation.
- So when we pray the עֲמִידָה, we stop doing everything else and stand silently before God, and we whisper our prayers.

**SO TO PRAY THIS PART OF THE SERVICE ALL WE HAVE TO DO IS STAND UP AND START PRAYING IN A VERY LOW WHISPER?**

- Well, not exactly.

- Because after we stand up, the first thing we do is take three steps backward and then three steps forward.
- ***But how's that possible when there's hardly any room for three steps between the rows of chairs here in the synagogue?***
- Of course, we take very small steps!
- ***Why do we do this?!***
  1. Long, long ago, when kings ruled most countries, when someone was going to approach the king in his court, it was done by taking three small steps towards the king.
  2. Now, since we think of God as the Ruler or King over all of the kings on earth, and of course all the rest of us, when we're going to approach God in prayer, we take three small steps forward.
  3. But when there's very little space to move forward, we first take three small steps backward and *then* three forward.

### **THERE'S SOMETHING ELSE SPECIAL ABOUT PRAYING THE הַתְּפִלָּה.**

- We don't allow anyone to interrupt us while we're saying the prayers.
- And of course we don't interrupt anyone else who is saying the prayer.
- ***What if someone interrupts you by yelling, God forbid, that the building is on fire?***
- ***But what are the more common ways that someone might interrupt you while you're praying the הַתְּפִלָּה?***
- ***What's the right thing to do if that happens?***

### **AND THERE'S EVEN SOMETHING ELSE THAT'S SPECIAL ABOUT THE הַתְּפִלָּה.**

- At all the services *other* than Friday night—the morning service, the afternoon service, and so on—the person who is leading the prayers repeats the whole Amidah *aloud!*
- ***Why do you imagine we do that?***
- We do that because some people don't know how to say the הַתְּפִלָּה, so the leader says the prayers for them.
- And the person who doesn't know the prayers, by saying אָמֵן at the end of each blessing, has joined in the הַתְּפִלָּה with the rest of the people.
- What does “אָמֵן” mean?
  1. The שׁוֹרֵץ of the word is א-מ-א.
  2. The basic meaning is that we can rely or depend upon the words which have just been recited.

**THE עֲמִידָה PRAYERS THAT WE SAY ON FRIDAY NIGHT ARE SOMEWHAT DIFFERENT THAN THOSE WE SAY AT MORNING AND AFTERNOON SERVICES.**

- At morning and afternoon services, the עֲמִידָה has 19 blessings.
- But on Friday night it has only seven blessings.
- ***What happened to the other 12 blessings?***
- The sages—the very wise leaders of Israel who arranged the prayer service a very long time ago—wanted to make the Friday evening service shorter, so it would take less time.
- We’re not really sure why they wanted it to be shorter, but maybe it was because people didn’t have lights at night and it was very hard to get around after dark.
- So at that time it was okay for the service to be much shorter.

**OKAY, LET’S ACTUALLY GET INTO THE עֲמִידָה PRAYERS!**

- What’s the very first line of the prayers on page 35a?
- Someone read it in Hebrew for us: אָדֹנָי, שְׂפָתַי תִּפְתָּח וּפִי יִגִּיד תְּהִלָּתְךָ.
- Now someone read the English on page 35b.
- ***Why do we pray, “Adonai, open my lips so I may speak your praise”?***
  - 1. Do we need God to open our mouths for us or can we do that by ourselves?***
  - 2. And can’t we sing praises to God on our own?***
- But sometimes when we come to services we don’t feel like praying.
  1. Maybe something bad happened to us that day.
  2. Maybe we’re feeling kind of sick.
  3. Maybe we’re just bored and want to be somewhere else doing something else, like shopping or playing golf or a new video game.
- So at the very beginning of the עֲמִידָה prayers, we admit to ourselves and to God that *we are not ready* to pray.
- And we begin by praying for God’s help so that we can pray the rest of the עֲמִידָה.