



The Observant Life Book Club

PRAYER

(Source: “Prayer,” Karen G. Reiss Medwed, *The Observant Life*, Martin S. Cohen, Senior Editor, The Rabbinical Assembly, 2012, pp. 5-60)

Task:

Before coming to the book club meeting members should have read the chapter on Prayer and come prepared to share their experiences with prayer and thoughts about it.

To begin the discussion:

Ask each member of the group share his or her most memorable/intense prayer experience.

- What made the experience special?
- When considered as a whole, what do the shared experiences have in common?
- What can we do to achieve prayerful moments more frequently?
- For those who have not had powerful prayer experiences, what would they consider an ideal experience to be?

Text:

“We pray as Jews to feel connected to our common history, to feel attached to Jews throughout the world, and to solidify our sense of belonging to our own communities. We pray as a people eager to communicate with God in the context of an ongoing covenantal relationship, but we also pray as individuals intent on establishing an intimate and wholly personal relationship with God.” (Rabbi Medwed, p. 5)

Response:

Which of these reasons speak to you? Why do you pray? What do you hope to get from prayer?

Text:

“By endorsing the use of set prayers in our service, are we *ipso facto* guaranteeing that some worshippers will be obligated to recite words they do not consider true or meaningful?” (Rabbi Medwed, p. 8). Rabbi Medwed takes the position that “the good that derives from fostering communal prayer far outweighs the problems it entails.”

Response:

Have you had the experience of not finding the traditional liturgy meaningful or true? Which parts?

Do you agree or disagree with Rabbi Medwed’s assertion that the good effect of prayer outweighs any problems it entails?

What are the arguments for a fixed communal liturgy? (keva)

What are the arguments for spontaneous prayer? (kavvanah)

Can these two types of prayer be balanced?

Text:

Rabbi Medwed describes the physical motions of prayer (p. 13), proper attire (p. 21) and the ritual items associated with prayer (pp. 21-28).

Response:

Were any of the details new to you? Did any details stand out for you? Why?
How do the motions, attire, and ritual items impact your prayer experience?

Text:

One of the best known prayers is the Sh'ma (see p. 31).

Response:

Why do you think it is such a central prayer and so well known?
How might you incorporate saying the Sh'ma into your life and the life of your family?

Text:

“Many acts in our lives that might otherwise strike us as mundane, or which we might not notice at all, are thus brought to our attention by the simple obligation to recite the blessing or prayer attached to them by tradition.” (p. 60)

Response:

Does this point resonate with you? Have you had the experience of noticing acts in your life because of the blessings or prayers associated with them?
Through reading this material did you learn about mundane acts that have prayers associated with them? What were they and did they surprise you? If so, why?
Are there moments in your life you wish were marked by a prayer? What would they be?
What prayer would you want to say?