

# Syllabus

## The Making Prayer Real Course

### Module 1: Engaging Prayer

*Pesukei d'Zimra* (Verses of Song; Opening Prayers)

#### Lesson Plans

##### 1. The Difficulty of Prayer

The MPR Course begins with a surprisingly honest evaluation of the obstacles to Jewish prayer. Students are moved by the discovery that clergy “get it.”

##### 2. When Prayer "Works" and *Mochin d'Gadlut*

This critical lesson outlines a “spiritual dynamics” approach to learning prayer and facilitates the students’ setting of goals for the MPR Course.

##### 3. Yearning: Psalms and the Stirrings of the Heart

In this session we explore the emotional sources of prayer. If gratitude is a response to what is, yearning expresses a desire for what isn't. We explore the nuances of yearning, appreciate the artistry of the Psalms, and consider, “How can prayer help us to channel desire into holy desire?”

##### 4. The Life of Gratitude

Seeing the world as a cup “half full” is not a controversial idea. But the gap between knowledge and practice can be hard to bridge. In this session, we present the value and explore the means of cultivating a daily practice of gratitude.

#### Videos

- The Difficulties with Prayer
- The Goals of Jewish Prayer
- Yearning: The Stirrings of the Heart
- Psalms
- The Life of Gratitude

#### Conversations

- Why Prayer is Difficult
- The Goals of Jewish Prayer
- Yearning: The Stirrings of the Heart
- Gratitude and Prayer
- The Heart of the Psalmist

### Module 2: Foundations

*Bircot haShachar* (Morning Blessings)

#### Lesson Plans

##### 1. Prayer as a Practice

Together with “When Prayer Works and *Mochin d'Gadlut*,” this session relates the MPR approach to learning prayer and deepening one's prayer life.

##### 2. The Art of Blessing

We learn the basics of blessings, beginning with the *baruch ata* formula and the role of blessings in Jewish liturgy. Using our spiritual dynamics

approach, we ask, “What is the purpose of praying a blessing?”

##### 3. Creating Sacred Space with Response Blessings

Unbeknownst to many, the vast majority of traditional blessings are said *after* an event and unconnected to ritual. We consider the value of “response” blessings, and following Martin Buber, explore the role of blessings in creating sacred space.

#### 4. Bringing Our Bodies into Prayer

Reflecting on current knowledge of the mind/body connection and the role of music in synagogue services, we learn the advantages of consciously involving our bodies in prayer, and new ways to do it.

#### Videos

- The Spiritual Dynamics of Blessings
- The Art of Blessing

- The Morning Blessings (*Bircot haShachar*)
- Response Blessings
- Bringing Our Bodies into Prayer

#### Conversations

- Spontaneity and Fixed Prayer
- The Art of Blessings
- The Spiritual Dynamics of Blessings
- Our Bodies Matter

## Module 3: Listening Deeply

The *Shema* and Her Blessings

### Lesson Plans

#### 1. Mindfulness: Listen Before You Speak

A wise person listens before they speak, says the old adage, but rarely do daveners take the time to do so. Listening to our hearts and to the world around us—listening for God—is a skill that relatively few have devoted time to refining. We study mindfulness with leading teachers from the Institute for Jewish Spirituality, and we learn the basics of sacred, Hebrew chant with Rabbi Shefa Gold.

#### 2. Tradition! The Benefits of Liturgical Prayer

We apply our spiritual dynamics approach to liturgical prayer. How does communal, traditional prayer connect us to God and otherwise “work” in ways that other modalities do not? We learn how the MPR contributors work with liturgy through various interpretative techniques.

#### 3. *Shema* 1: A Narrative Approach to Liturgy

Exploring Joel Grishaver’s narrative approach to the Siddur, we consider the stories behind our tradition’s prayers, particularly the *Shema*, and how they affect our praying. We enter the Actor’s Studio to learn how we might be sacred

actors in a sacred drama, speaking a holy script.

#### 4. *Shema* 2: Meaning and Interpretation

Using simple literary techniques, we analyze the *Shema* and her blessings as a unit before considering the meanings of monotheism and the various intentions one might bring to praying the *Shema*.

#### Videos

- Mindfulness
- An Introduction to Hebrew Chant with Rabbi Shefa Gold
- *Ozi v’Zimrat Yah*: A Demonstration of Hebrew Chant with Rabbi Shefa Gold
- Why a Liturgy?
- Interpreting the Siddur
- Oneness
- *Kavanot* for Saying the *Shema*
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#### Conversations

- Mindfulness and Prayer
- Tradition! Why We Pray a Liturgy
- How to Interpret a Line of Liturgy
- Oneness
- *Kavanot* for Saying the *Shema*

## Module 4: Personal Prayer

*Teshuvah* and Introspection

### Lesson Plans

#### 1. The Challenge of Personal Prayer

Unscripted prayer raises obstacles, from simple unfamiliarity to the serious questions about theology that cannot be avoided when composing one's own prayers. We explore the obstacles to personal prayer, and offer strategies to overcome them.

#### 2. Cultivating Your Personal Prayer Voice

Students learn several modalities to discover or deepen the experience of personal, unscripted prayer.

#### 3. *Teshuvah*: Introspection for Change

Throughout the MPR Course we have been exploring the effects of prayer. Now we zero in on what many consider the key question. How does prayer change us? We consider the characteristics of transformative prayer.

#### 4. Discerning Divinity: Listening for a Response to Prayer

The elephant in the room, the issue of God's response to prayer, is often circumvented. The MPR contributors share their experience and their thinking. You might be surprised.

### Videos

- The Challenge of Personal Prayer
- Personal Prayer to an Impersonal God
- Rabbi Nachman's *Hitbodedut*
- *Teshuvah*
- *Teshuvah* and Prayer
- Discerning Divinity: Listening for a Response to Prayer

### Conversations

- I Don't Believe in God. Can I pray?
- A Personal Relationship with Impersonal God.
- Does God Respond to Prayer?
- *Teshuvah*: Turning to God
- Can Prayer Change Us?

## Module 5: Growing and Healing Through Prayer

The *Amidah*, *Mi sh'Berach* and *Kaddish*

### Lesson Plans

#### 1. Exploring the *Amidah*

We learn and investigate the structure of the *Amidah*, focusing on the first three and the last three blessings in the rabbinic and mystical traditions. Then we discover our own interpretations.

#### 2. The *Amidah* and Me

After studying the weekday intermediate blessings and learning the historical background, we return to the way people prayed in Talmudic times. Ending each blessing with the traditional

formula, students create a personal *Amidah*.

#### 3. Coping with Illness and Loss

Does prayer heal? The MPR contributors speak from the heart. We explore prayer practices for healing.

#### 4. Mourning and *Kaddish*

Rabbi Anne Brener explores the nuances of grief, and how prayer might catalyze the mourning process. The MPR contributors speak about *Kaddish* and mourning.

## Videos

- The *Amidah*: The First Three Blessings
- The *Amidah*: The Last Three Blessings
- The *Amidah*: History and Halacha
- Ways into the *Amidah*
- Coping with Loss and Healing
- Mourning and *Kaddish*

## Conversations

- Understanding the *Amidah*
- Ways into the *Amidah*
- Does Prayer Heal?
- *Kaddish*

## Video Contributors

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