HEBREW UNION COLLEGE - JEWISH INSTITUTE OF RELIGION
NEW YORK SCHOOL

FINAL THESIS APPROVAL FORM

AUTHOR: Nicole Michelle Greninger

TITLE: Believing, Behaving, Belonging:
Tefillah Education in the 21st Century

ok per Jan Katzew 2/4/08
SIGNATURE OF ADVISOR(S) See attached. **Date**

Dvora Lincoln 2/4/08
SIGNATURE OF REGISTRAR **Date**

ALL SIGNATURES MUST BE OBTAINED BEFORE YOUR THESIS WILL BE CONSIDERED ACCEPTED.

PLEASE TYPE OR PRINT ALL INFORMATION ON THIS FORM.

Linsk, Dina

From: Katzew, Rabbi Jan (Education) [JKatzew@urj.org]
Sent: Monday, February 04, 2008 12:05 AM
To: Linsk, Dina; Greninger, Nicole
Subject: RE: approval - fax?

Dear Dina,
I am in receipt of the final and complete version of Nicole Greninger's thesis in partial fulfillment of Ordination and a Masters' Degree in Religious Education. I hereby indicate my approval of this most worthy document.

L'Shalom,
Rabbi Jan Katzew, PhD

From: Linsk, Dina [mailto:dlinsk@huc.edu]
Sent: Fri 2/1/2008 9:01 AM
To: Katzew, Rabbi Jan (Education); Greninger, Nicole
Subject: RE: approval - fax?

Dear Rabbi Katzew:

Please just send me an email and I will attach it to the form.

Rav Todot,

Dina

From: Katzew, Rabbi Jan (Education) [mailto:JKatzew@urj.org]
Sent: Friday, February 01, 2008 1:46 AM
To: Greninger, Nicole
Cc: Linsk, Dina
Subject: RE: approval - fax?

Shalom Dina,
I am writing to you to learn the procedure for approving Nicole Greninger's rabbinic/education thesis. I am in Israel currently and therefore the approval process is somewhat atypical. I understand from the correspondence below that I will have the entire thesis (I have read everything except for the brief concluding chapter.) on Saturday night Israel time. I can approve it on Sunday. Please let me know how to proceed.

Shabbat shalom,
Jan

Rabbi Jan Katzew, PhD
Director, URJ Department of Lifelong Jewish Learning

From: Nicole Greninger [mailto:nicolemichelleg@gmail.com]
Sent: Thu 1/31/2008 10:55 PM
To: Katzew, Rabbi Jan (Education)
Subject: approval - fax?

Believing, Behaving, Belonging : Tefillah Education in the 21st Century

Nicole Michelle Greninger

Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of
Requirements for Ordination and for
Master of Arts in Religious Education Degree

Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion
Graduate Rabbinical Program & School of Education
New York, New York

February 4, 2008
Advisors: Rabbi Jan Katzew, Ph.D.
& Rabbi Lawrence A. Hoffman, Ph.D.

Believing, Behaving, Belonging: Tefillah Education in the 21st Century

By Nicole Michelle Greninger

Advisors: Rabbis Jan Katzew & Larry Hoffman

Though there is very little literature written about the topic, if we take a close look at many supplementary Jewish schools, it seems that tefillah education is a central component of the curriculum. However, one might ask, despite the large amount of time and resources that congregational schools currently dedicate for "tefillah education" (usually in the context of b'nai mitzvah training), why do so many Jews – both children and adults – still feel uncomfortable and incompetent in Jewish worship? I believe that we can do better with tefillah education in the liberal Jewish community in the 21st century, that improving the status quo is both desirable and possible. For that reason, I chose to write a thesis that could begin to answer the question, "How might we better prepare our children for entry into Jewish communal worship throughout their lives?"

My research began with a study of classic rabbinic texts. The world has changed greatly in the last 1500 years, but we nevertheless face the same question today that the Rabbis did in their time: How do we best induct our children into a lifetime of Jewish prayer? The entry for education (חינוך) in the *Encyclopedia Talmudit* became my guide, pointing me to primary rabbinic sources that might help us improve tefillah education in the twenty-first century. **Chapter One** of this thesis takes a step back to address the question of why tefillah matters in the first place, and **Chapter Two** is the result of my investigation into rabbinic teachings on tefillah education.

I came to this thesis with the hope and belief that there are people and places that are highly talented, deeply committed to, and decidedly successful (on their own terms) at tefillah education today. Since it seems, anecdotally, that many non-Orthodox synagogues struggle with tefillah education, I wanted to find congregations that *succeed* in this realm, and then learn from those cases. My advisors pointed me to congregations that are known for their strong, innovative education programs as well as their vibrant worshipping communities, and I narrowed the list down to three synagogues, based on size, location, reputation, and branch of Judaism. **Chapters Three**, **Four**, and **Five** include my findings from the congregations I chose to study – one Reform, one Conservative, and one Reconstructionist. Remarkably, I discovered in the course of conducting these case studies that, despite many areas of divergence among the three synagogues, there were many areas of convergence as well. **Chapter Six** highlights those areas of convergence, and as a result, I hope it will prove helpful to people looking to improve tefillah education at their own synagogues.

It is time we re-consider how our congregations do "tefillah education" and ask ourselves, "Rather than simply giving our students the training and skills they need for the day they become b'nai mitzvah, how could we better prepare our children for a lifetime of prayer, a lifetime of Jewish communal worship?" I hope this research helps us begin to address this question by taking advice from our rabbinic predecessors and by learning best practices from congregations who have, thus far, achieved tremendous successes in tefillah education at the start of the 21st century.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

~ *Acknowledgments* ~

This research would not have been possible without the enthusiastic support of many individuals. First and foremost, I would like to thank Rabbis Jan Katzew and Larry Hoffman for being such wonderful thesis advisors. My thesis came to fruition in large part because of your encouragement, advice, support, and guidance. You model for me what it means to be insightful, intelligent, thoughtful, and compassionate rabbis, and I feel incredibly blessed to have both of you in my life. Jan and Larry, you are my teachers, my mentors, my soon-to-be colleagues, and most importantly, "my rabbis." I look forward to many more years of scholarship, collaboration, and friendship with both of you.

I would also like to thank everyone I met and from whom I learned in the three synagogues I studied. Although I cannot thank each of you by name, I want you to know that it is through your kindness, openness, and honesty that I was able to learn so much about tefillah education in your congregations. Thanks especially to all those who generously agreed to be interviewed, for giving me your time and your thoughtful reflections. To the educators in each congregation, those with whom I worked most closely while conducting my case studies – Rabbi Lev, Tirza, Linda, and Rabbi Suzie – thank you for being outstanding role models. Your insight and *menschlekeit* are unparalleled, and I admire all that you have done with and for your congregations.

To my teachers, mentors, and classmates at HUC: thank you for making the last five years some of the most incredible years of my life. I have learned from each of you, and I am sad that our journey together at HUC is almost over. I hope we will continue to inspire and challenge each other in the years ahead.

To family and friends: thank you for supporting me throughout this research, and for being so understanding when I was unable to see you or respond to your phone calls and e-mails. I appreciate your patience, and I look forward to getting back in touch. Your love and encouragement mean the world to me. To my mom and dad in particular: thank you for your endless support throughout my life, and for your loving embrace of my rabbinic journey. I hope to make you proud!

Most of all, I would like to express my gratitude to my husband, Daniel Adam Greninger. Dan, you are truly the light of my life, the one in whom my soul delights. Your constant encouragement helped me through the long and laborious journey of writing a thesis, and you are the very best editor a rabbi could ask for. I am eternally grateful to have you by my side for this exciting journey we call "life;" I can't wait to see where the road takes us in the years to come. I dedicate my thesis to you, with love.

~ Introduction ~

Tefillah Education:
Welcoming the Next Generation of Jewish Pray-ers

It is 5:30pm on a rainy Tuesday afternoon, and I am sitting with my fifth grade class in the sanctuary of a large urban Reform congregation. All around me kids whisper, giggle, talk, and fidget in the pews. They make inappropriate noises. They pass notes. They play with their cell phones. I do everything I can to get them to pay attention, to join in prayer with the song-leader up front, who is trying valiantly to get the students to notice him. I repeatedly shush the kids. I ask them politely to please stop talking, open their siddurim, and join us in prayer. When that fails, I switch gears and try instead to be a role model, diligently participating in the service myself, as if it were a meaningful, powerful, prayerful experience for me (which, unfortunately, it is not). We run through prayer after prayer, song after song, until finally we dismiss the kids and they run out of the sanctuary as fast as possible.

This scene plays itself out in one way or another in countless synagogues around the country day after day, week after week, year after year. And yet, I wonder, is this how we want our children to learn prayer? Is the scene I describe the image we want our children to associate with Jewish communal worship? Can't we do better than this? Religious school services like the one I describe – in which students are bored and teachers are frustrated – serve as one component of "tefillah education" in most congregational, supplementary schools. Though there is very little literature written about the topic, if we take a close look at many non-Orthodox congregational schools, it seems that tefillah education is in fact a central component of the curriculum (though few, if any, schools label it "tefillah education"). In many synagogues, what I call "tefillah education" for youth – education for entry into a life of Jewish worship – includes weekly religious school services, Hebrew instruction for the sake of learning how to read from the *siddur*, and lessons geared toward greater understanding of key prayers (*Sh'ma & V'ahavta*, *Avot*, *Oseh Shalom*, etc).

In her article "From the Congregational School to the Learning Congregation: Are We Ready for a Paradigm Shift?" Isa Aron explains that "the congregational school of today is the inheritor of [a] dual legacy": the communal Talmud Torah combined with Jewish parents' interest in b'nai mitzvah preparation for their children.[1] Since b'nai mitzvah preparation in particular has been extremely important to Jewish parents over the last few generations, "the bar/bat mitzvah has [become and] remained the focal point of the congregational school, regardless of its official curriculum."[2] Prayer was not one of the primary components of communal Talmud Torah curricula (though "sufficient knowledge of Hebrew" was[3]), but because most students lead part of a Shabbat service for their b'nai mitzvah, the teaching of prayer-book Hebrew and basic competency in key prayers have become significant components of religious school education in most congregations today.

However, one might ask, despite the large amount of time and resources that congregational schools currently dedicate for "tefillah education" (usually in the context of b'nai mitzvah training), why do so many Jews – both children and adults – still feel uncomfortable and incompetent in Jewish worship? Furthermore, given that only a small percentage of liberal Jews in America attend worship services regularly (once/month or more),[4] could it be argued that the lack of regular participation is, in part, due to the absence of high-quality tefillah education? Surely it is true that good worship "does not happen automatically," and unfortunately, as Rabbi Lawrence Hoffman points out,

---

[1] Isa Aron, "From the Congregational School to the Learning Community: Are We Ready for the Paradigm Shift?" in *A Congregation of Learners: Transforming the Synagogue into a Learning Community*, ed. Isa Aron, Sara Lee, and Seymour Rossel (New York: UAHC Press, 1995), 57.
[2] Aron (1995), 61.
[3] Israel Friedlander, "The Problem of Jewish Education for the Children of Immigrants" in *Jewish Education in the United States: A Documentary History*, ed. Lloyd Gartner (New York: Teachers College Press, 1913/1969), 138.
[4] National Jewish Population Study 2000-2001, http://www.ujc.org/page.html?ArticleID=46194.

"much that passes for worship in church or synagogue is baffling or banal to most of the people who find their way there."[5] But, I wonder, as books, synagogue transformation programs, and consultants try to help synagogues improve their worship, where are our communal efforts toward improving *education* for worship? I believe that we can do better with tefillah education in the liberal Jewish community in the twenty-first century, that improving the status quo is both desirable and possible. For that reason, I chose to write a thesis that could begin to answer the question, "How might we better prepare our children for entry into Jewish communal worship throughout their lives?"

My research began with a study of classic rabbinic texts on tefillah education. The world has changed greatly in the last 1500 years, but we nevertheless face the same question today that the Rabbis did in their time: how do we best induct our children into a lifetime of Jewish prayer? The entry for education (חינוך) in the *Encyclopedia Talmudit* became my guide, pointing me to primary sources – from the Tanach, Talmud, Parshanut, Codes, and Responsa – that might help us improve tefillah education in the twenty-first century. Chapter One of this thesis takes a step back to address the question of why tefillah matters in the first place, and Chapter Two is the result of my investigation into rabbinic teachings on tefillah education.

I came to this thesis with the hope and belief that there are people and places that are highly talented, deeply committed to, and decidedly successful (on their own terms) at tefillah education today. Since it seems, anecdotally, that many non-Orthodox synagogues struggle with tefillah education, I wanted to find congregations that *succeed* in this realm, and then learn from those cases. My advisors pointed me to congregations

---

[5] Lawrence A. Hoffman, *The Art of Public Prayer, 2nd Edition: Not for Clergy Only* (Woodstock, VT: SkyLights Paths Publishing, 1999), 10.

that are known in North America for their strong, innovative education programs as well as their vibrant worshipping communities, and I narrowed the list down to three synagogues, based on size, location, reputation, and branch of Judaism. Chapters Three, Four, and Five include my findings from the three congregations I chose to study – one Reform, one Conservative, and one Reconstructionist. I tried to determine how tefillah education happens at each of these congregations: In what ways do education and worship overlap in the synagogue system? How did the current system come to be? What are the congregation's goals for tefillah education? What have been their successes? What are their ongoing challenges? What are the points of convergence and divergence among the three synagogues?

For each case study I conducted intensive interviews, made personal observations, and collected relevant documents. I interviewed the following people in each congregation: the rabbi(s), cantor, educator(s), 1-2 teachers, 1-2 parents, and 1-2 students. In addition, I recorded and transcribed each interview for further examination.[6] Not wanting to rely solely on people's reports of tefillah education at their synagogue, I also observed the following events: Friday night services, Saturday morning services, religious school classes, religious school services, family education programs, and special tefillah program(s), where applicable. Finally, I collected anything that would help me better understand tefillah education in the congregation: the religious school / education handbook, educational mission/vision statements, congregational flyers and newsletters, and educational materials such as books, workbooks, and curricula guides. The

[6] For a list of interview questions, see Appendix. If you are interested in reading original interview transcripts, please contact me directly.

interviews, observations, and collected documents became my source material for the case studies found in Chapters Three, Four, and Five.

Remarkably, I discovered in the course of conducting these case studies that, despite many areas of divergence among the three synagogues, there were many areas of convergence as well. In matters such as leadership, teacher training and recruitment, reflective practice, family involvement, and ongoing challenges in tefillah education, there were many similarities among the three synagogues I chose to study. Chapter Six highlights those areas of convergence, and as a result, I hope it will prove helpful to people looking to improve tefillah education at their own synagogues.

*****

Although many Jewish children become adult worshippers because of their experiences with tefillah at summer camp, youth group events, Israel trips, and/or Hillel, I believe it is nonetheless essential for us to improve tefillah education in our congregational schools. There are two main reasons for this. First, the vast majority of American Jews who receive some kind of Jewish education do so in congregational supplementary schools.[7] Many Jewish children do attend camps, youth groups, and the like, but synagogue-based education currently reaches far more of our youth. Second, and more importantly, tefillah is most often experienced in the context of synagogue life. There are other places were Jewish worship happens, of course, but the synagogue is the primary place that Jewish adults come into contact with communal prayer, and indeed, where they come into contact with Judaism in general. Therefore, I believe we *ought* to do – and we *can* do – a better job within the context of our synagogue schools welcoming and educating the next generation of Jewish pray-ers.

[7] National Jewish Population Study, 2000-2001, http://www.ujc.org/page.html?ArticleID=46234 .

Tefillah education has also become more important in congregational schools in recent years since the nature of tefillah itself has changed, particularly in Reform synagogues. As worship has moved away from classical Reform (in which the rabbi, cantor and choir lead everything, and the worshippers need only to listen and be able to read responsively in English), toward more participatory worship, people need to learn *how* to participate as well as to lead. Many Jews feel uncomfortable and incompetent in contemporary worship services because they were never inducted into a participatory prayer experience, and because their education for prayer was not sufficient. I surmise that many people *want* to participate in contemporary prayer services and that they like the direction worship is moving (the classical model feels too "cold"), but they do not know how to be part of a Jewish prayer community. They need education. The need to educate for tefillah is more important than ever if we want our worship to be participatory. As worship changes in our synagogues, education for worship must change, too.

It is time we re-consider how our congregations do "tefillah education" and ask the following questions: How might we better welcome our youth into Jewish communal prayer? What do we want our students to know, feel, and be able to do in the context of tefillah? Rather than simply giving our students the training and skills they need for the day they become b'nai mitzvah, how could we better prepare our children for a lifetime of prayer, a lifetime of Jewish communal worship? I hope this research helps us begin to address these questions by taking advice from our rabbinic predecessors and by learning best practices from congregations who have, thus far, achieved tremendous successes in tefillah education. As Rabbi Hoffman asserts, "ritual is at the heart of today's synagogue

transformation," and tefillah, as religious ritual, "binds people to tradition, connects them with the transcendent, and bonds them to each other."[8] If these aren't our goals for congregational education in the twenty-first century, then what are?

[8] Lawrence A. Hoffman, *Re-Thinking Synagogues: A New Vocabulary for Congregational Life* (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2006), 107 & 98.

~ Chapter One ~

Why Pray? : The Purpose of Prayer for Modern Liberal Jews

"To live without prayer is to live without God, to live without a soul."[9]

Prayer is as old as human existence, or so people think. Some even claim that prayer is a natural human response to the fact of our being alive. Theologian Henry Slonimsky calls prayer "one of those aboriginal and basic acts of the human soul...an event rooted in the very character of the human spirit, a kind of archetype of the human mind."[10] Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel calls prayer an "ontological necessity," arguing that "he who has never prayed is not fully human."[11] Nevertheless, even if we were to accept the hypothesis that prayer is a universal and naturally-occurring human phenomenon, there are still countless theological problems with prayer. What exactly is "prayer"? Why should we pray? What is the purpose of prayer? To whom should we direct our prayers? Is there a God who actually hears us? Does God want to hear our prayers? Is God able to respond to human prayers? Does God need us to pray? These questions are universal to the human spirit, in no way unique to Judaism. In this chapter, however, my aim is to examine the purpose of *Jewish* prayer ("tefillah") for *modern*

---

[9] Abraham Joshua Heschel, "The Spirit of Jewish Prayer" in *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, ed. Susannah Heschel (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1996), 108

[10] Henry Slonimsky in *Gates of Understanding*, ed. Lawrence A. Hoffman (New York: Central Conference of American Rabbis, 1977), 73.

[11] Heschel (1996), pp. 116; Gendered quotations, in which the speaker refers to persons and God as male, reflect the speakers' original words. I try throughout this work to refer to persons in both male and female terms, and to God in gender-neutral language.

liberal Jews. Only then can we legitimately address the question, "How might we better educate for prayer?"

What is "Prayer"?

One cannot answer the question "Why pray?" without defining the term *prayer*. First, we must acknowledge that "prayer" means something different than "services," "liturgy," or "worship." The term *service* usually refers to the event of communal worship, and *liturgy* is the text used in the act of *worship*. Prayer, on the other hand, can be communal or individual, public or private, ritualized or spontaneous, with or without fixed liturgy.

Commonly, the English word *prayer* is taken to denote a request or supplication, whereas Jewish prayer includes much more than that: it includes "***bakashah*** and ***techinah*** – supplication; *todah* – thanksgiving; *viddui* – confession; *b'racha* – benediction; *limud* – study; *edut* – affirmation; and *tehila* – praise."[12] When we talk about *prayer* in a Jewish context, it refers to "any time man talks directly to God,"[13] for, as Hammer explains, "prayer implies the intention of communicating with God."[14] Jewish tradition uses several Hebrew terms for the English word *prayer*, including *tefillah* (prayer), *avodah* (worship), *avodah shebalev* (worship of the heart), and *l'hitpalel* (to pray). This chapter specifically addresses the purpose of Jewish *communal* prayer (to which I will refer using the Hebrew word *tefillah*), since that is the sort of prayer for which synagogues generally try to educate their youth – even though Jews can and do pray as individuals as well.

---

[12] Earl Klein, "The Philosophy of Prayer" in *Jewish Prayer: Concepts and Customs* (Columbus, OH: Alpha Publishing Company, 1986), 1.
[13] Klein, 53
[14] Reuven Hammer, *Entering Jewish Prayer: A Guide to Personal Devotion and the Worship Service* (New York: Schocken Books, 1994), 27.

Why do traditional Jews pray?

For a traditional (i.e. Orthodox) Jew, the answer to the question "Why pray?" is simple. Jews pray because they are obligated to pray. In fact, *halachah* (Jewish law) is extremely clear about when, where, why, and how to pray.[15] In the Talmud the Rabbis interpreted the biblical verse "You shall serve God with all your heart"[16] to mean that Jews are required by God to pray, defining "service of the heart" as prayer.[17] We serve God through prayer. The Rabbis' task, as they saw it, was to define exactly what kind of "service of the heart" God wanted. From a traditional perspective, then, Jews pray because God has instructed them to pray. The technicalities of what to do, what to say, how to say it, when to say it, and whom to say it with have all been determined by Jewish legal authorities over time.

Nonetheless, "because the *halachah* says so" is not always a fully satisfactory reason to pray, even for many traditional Jews. A person may pray out of a sense of obligation or duty, but there are still lingering questions: Why does God command us to pray? What does prayer do? Does God change as a result of our prayers? Any response to these questions is necessarily tied to one's theology – one's beliefs about God, Torah, and Israel – and these questions have been discussed at length for generations, even by traditional, *halachah*-observant Jews.[18]

In *The Art of Jewish Prayer*, Rabbi Yitzchok Kirzner and Lisa Aiken write that one of the central goals of traditional Jewish prayer may be to "elevate us through

---

[15] For example, see laws about prayer in the *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim.*
[16] Exodus 23:25
[17] *Babylonian Talmud*, Taanit 2a
[18] For modern examples, see publications by Rabbi Hayim Halevy Donin, Rabbi Jeffrey Cohen, Daniel Landes and Seth Kadish.

communication with God."[19] In that view, the very act of prayer is, in and of itself, beneficial to the worshiper, presumably because it is one of the means through which humans attempt to form a relationship with God. When we pray, we assume that "finite, mortal, limited man can address himself to [the] eternal and infinite God, that human heart and divine mind can [somehow] be attuned to each other."[20] Heschel is less interested in our own elevation and more concerned about prayer's impact on God. He declares that "the main ends of prayer are to move God, to let Him participate in our lives, and to interest ourselves in Him...In prayer we establish a living contact with God, between our concern and His will."[21] Daniel Landes would agree: he explains that through prayer we "affirm, in a dialogue with God, that God can and will act within our lives and in this world."[22]

These traditional views of prayer all assume a pray-er who believes in a God that is accessible through prayer. These thinkers assume that human beings can actually communicate with God through the vehicle of prayer, and that God somehow enters into relationship with us through prayer. They believe in a God who can and does act in the world. Traditional Jewish prayer depends on these traditional beliefs about God.

Yet even for those who maintain traditional beliefs about God, there are still theological problems with prayer. For example, there is the perplexing problem of the purpose of petitionary prayer, in which we ask God for something. Dan Cohn-Sherbok

---

[19] Rabbi Yitzchok Kirzner and Lisa Aiken, *The Art of Jewish Prayer* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson Inc, 1991), 19.
[20] Jakob J. Petuchowski, *Understanding Jewish Prayer* (New York: Ktav Publishing House Inc, 1972), 5.
[21] Heschel (1996), 353
[22] Daniel Landes, "Prayer as Petition: The Philosophic Basis for Halakhic Prayer" in *My People's Prayer Book, Vol. 2: The Amidah,* ed. Lawrence A. Hoffman (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 1998), 8.

states the philosophical dilemma in his book, *Jewish Petitionary Prayers: A Theological Exploration*, in the following way:

> What sense is there in petitioning God, since by His omniscience He already knows all our needs and indeed all that is coming to pass in our world? If God is omnipotent and all-good [as Jewish tradition holds], it seems that petitionary prayer is superfluous. If all is purposed for good according to God's will, then what reason is there for human beings to tell their needs to God, let alone instruct Him in what He should do?[23]

This philosophical problem is serious one, but hardly the sole impediment to prayer; it rarely occurs to anyone but philosophers. More pressing is the theological issue of why God does not seem to answer petitions.

My purpose is hardly to solve these issues, but only to indicate that even traditional Jews who believe they are commanded to pray cannot do so without encountering at least some difficulties. Liberal Jews face the same stumbling blocks, but they have others as well.

Why are traditional reasons for prayer unsatisfying?

In addition to the philosophical and the theological issues raised above regarding petitions, modern liberal Jews often find tefillah difficult because we have serious reservations about the two main reasons that traditional Jews pray: 1) God commanded us to pray; and 2) We communicate with God through prayer. The first reason for engaging in tefillah is problematic because we liberals do not necessarily see ourselves as bound by traditional (i.e. Orthodox) *halachah*. Therefore, why follow the Rabbis' mandate to pray regularly, at fixed times and with fixed liturgy? The whole notion that God requires

---

[23] Dan Cohn-Sherbok, *Jewish Petitionary Prayer: A Theological Exploration*, Toronto Studies in Theology, Volume 35 (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1989), 2.

prayer is unsettling, since we are not always sure what or who God is, much less what God wants from us or how we are to develop a relationship with God.

The second reason for engaging in tefillah is problematic because of the many non-traditional ways that modern liberal Jews understand God. Different views about God lead to different views about prayer. In the minds of some, prayer does not necessarily lead to a relationship with the Divine. Certain modern thinkers, such as Mordecai Kaplan, view God as natural, rather than supernatural – a Process, rather than a Being.[24] As a result, prayer for Kaplan is not necessarily addressed to God; instead, "that part of [the pray-er] which is the actualized element in him addresses itself to that which is potential."[25] This is a very different object of prayer than the traditionalists have in mind! Many modern Jews do not believe in a God that is personal, hears our prayers, wants to respond, is able to respond, and/or has the power to do anything about our prayers whatsoever. Consequently, these Jews might need to find another goal of Jewish prayer besides communication with God.

Furthermore, modern liberal Jews sometimes struggle with the language of traditional Jewish prayer because it articulates a theology we do not believe. Liberals have an understandable "concern over whether the words that we use in our prayers really express our beliefs, whether those words are intended seriously to convey what they seem to be saying, or whether those words (or for that matter any words) mean anything definitive at all!"[26] Therefore, why would a liberal Jew pray?

---

[24] Jack J. Cohen, *Major Philosophers of Jewish Prayer in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), 60-79.
[25] Kaplan, *The Future of the American Jew*, p. 184; taken from Jack Cohen (2000), 68.
[26] Edward Graham, "Religious Language for a New Millennium" (CCAR Journal, Summer 1992), 21.

What is the purpose of prayer for modern liberal Jews?

It is clear that the reasons traditional Jews give for participation in tefillah are unsatisfactory for many liberal Jews. So why pray? And why pray in a Jewish communal setting? Modern Jewish thinkers have given many different reasons for prayer, in addition to the two given by traditional Jewish theologians. Most believe that prayer is supposed to "*do something*."[27] Michael Swartz puts it this way:

> Originally prayer was supposed to do something Up There: perhaps to please or appease God, or obtain favor or relief...The notion that prayer is supposed to do something Up There informs much of the traditional praying done by modern Jews, despite our sophistication...To those for whom the religion revolves around the Jew (this idea has been called Mordecai Kaplan's Copernican Revolution), function still prevails in prayer. Praying, they feel, should at least do something Down Here. The Gnostic will assure you of the feeling of relief and accomplishment his or her *Mi Sheberech* grants; historians may speak of the sense of cosmic power our Lurianic mystics felt in speeding the Messiah's coming, while the rest of us walk into services with the hope of being transformed.[28]

Somehow, we expect something to come out of prayer. We expect change. The following are eight of the most commonly held opinions today on the purpose of prayer for modern liberal Jews.

Personal Growth

By far the most frequent answer to the question, "Why pray?" is that we aim to improve ourselves through prayer. We hope prayer will affect us, change us, and make us better human beings. In his article, "An Educational Credo for our Time," Louis

[27] Michael Swartz, "Models for New Prayer" (Response, Fall-Winter 1982), 36.
[28] Ibid, 36-37

Kaplan cites a famous teaching of the Besht (Baal Shem Tov), who asked, "If after you've prayed, you're the same as before you prayed, why did you pray?"[29]

This view of prayer has deep roots in our tradition. According to some, the Hebrew verb for prayer (*l'hitpalel)* does not mean "to ask" or "to petition" God: "It is derived from a stem, *pay lamed lamed,* [which] means to judge; therefore *l'hitpalel* ('to pray') could also be translated as 'to judge oneself.'"[30] After explaining the underlying meaning of *l'hitpalel*, Rabbi Hayim Halevy Donin – an Orthodox Jew, no less! – declares that "all prayer is intended to help make us into better human beings."[31]

One way that we judge ourselves is by focusing our attention inward. Heschel remarks that "prayer is necessary to make us aware of our failures, backsliding, transgressions, [and] sins."[32] Rabbi Yitzchok Kirzner and Lisa Aiken argue that prayer "is supposed to be a process by which we preface any words that we might say to God by first taking a long, hard look at who we are spiritually."[33] They suggest that in prayer we ask ourselves, "What am I doing with my life? What are my material, intellectual, and emotional assets? How am I using them to further my spiritual growth?"[34] Kenneth Roseman takes the idea of "judging ourselves" even further:

> Prayer may be communication with oneself. As we pray, we may seek clarification of our ideas, peace of mind, or new directions for our lives. We recognize that there are times when we need to speak to our own hearts and minds, when the answer to our prayers will come from our own mouths, be seen in our own behavior, be discerned in our own attitudes and beliefs.

---

[29] Kaplan 41 (in Cohen, J.)
[30] Rabbi Hayim Halevy Donin, "Introduction," *To Pray as a Jew: A Guide to the Prayer Book and the Synagogue Service* (New York: Basic Books Inc, 1980), 5.
[31] Halevy Donin, 5
[32] Abraham Joshua Heschel, "On Prayer" in *Understanding Jewish Prayer,* ed. Jakob J. Petuchowski (New York: Ktav Publishing House Inc, 1972), 72.
[33] Kirzner and Aiken 10
[34] Ibid, 10-11

If prayer is self-evaluation, it can help us to "struggle with the gap between what we say and what we do – between our ideals and our actions."[35] It forces us to look at ourselves and think about how we might act differently in the future.

Another way we better ourselves through prayer is by directing our attention outward to the world around us. Doing this may be for the purpose of appreciating the beauty of the world and all the blessings in our lives, or it may be to notice the pain and suffering of people all around us. In stepping outside of ourselves in prayer, we attempt to see the world from God's perspective. "Troubles surround [the pray-er], but as he extols God, he jumps, as it were, out of his troubles, leaving behind his narrow self – his self-concern – and a new self is experienced."[36] This new self can see the world as a place that needs healing. As Louis Kaplan says, we pray in order to "learn what we are to do after we leave the synagogue and make our way to where the action is."[37] The real purpose of prayer is "to stimulate, not sedate, to make us aware of new concerns and move us to new deeds so that we do not remain at ease in our little Zions."[38] In prayer we articulate how we *want* the world to be, a step that can motivate us to go out and actually make the changes we would like to see in the world.

While prayer gives us time for self-reflection, introspection, appreciation, and motivation, it also gives us an opportunity for self-expression. Slonimsky describes prayer as an "expression of our needs and aspirations...to the Friend whom we suppose to exist behind the phenomena, the Friend who is concerned for man's needs and for his

[35] Harvey J Fields, *B'chol L'vavcha: With All Your Heart* (New York: UAHC Press, 2001), 250.
[36] Milton Richman, "Toward a Theology of Prayer" (*CCAR Journal*, April 1965), 54.
[37] Kaplan 41 (in Cohen, J.)
[38] Ibid, 41

high aspirations, and who is resolved to help."[39] Whether God is there or not, listening or not, prayer is one way that we express ourselves. For example, a man might pray for God to heal his dying mother. Whether God hears him or not, "the prayer must be spoken because the grief-stricken person must express his desperate need for help."[40] Prayer helps us to contemplate about how we might become better, more spiritual human beings, and to articulate the feelings that we need to express.

Communal Identification

Another reason frequently given for engaging in tefillah is identification with Judaism and the Jewish people. It is through tefillah that we most easily bind ourselves to Jewish history and tradition. Jakob Petuchowski stresses the way in which we connect to Jewish history through prayer:

> When a Jew prays, it is not as though a finite human being suddenly took it into his head that he may attune his mind to the infinite mind of God. Rather he can build, as it were, upon the contact which had been established long, long ago. The faith community of Israel today stands in prayer before the God of Israel even as it has stood before Him ever since Sinai, and even as its Patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, had already turned to Him when our people was as yet but a single tribal family....In other words, standing before God in prayer, I do not stand alone. I stand in the company of my people, a company both visible and invisible, spanning space as well as time.[41]

Prayer not only connects us to the Jewish past – to Jewish history and tradition – but it also connects us to the Jewish present and future. Prayer re-frames our experiences, helping to see ourselves and our individual stories as part of the ongoing narrative of the Jewish people. Richman writes that in prayer "the self is attached to a

---

[39] Slonimsky in Hoffman (1977), 72.
[40] Rabbi David Polish, "The Need to Pray," in *The Theological Foundations of Prayer*; taken from Harvey Fields, *B'chol L'vavcha*, 248.
[41] Petuchowski, 6

collective representation of other selves. This attachment may be hypostatized as a group, a community, or a people, with whose ideals this soul is identified. Here, the private self is submerged into the larger community-self."[42] In addition, as Halevy Donin tells us, prayer helps strengthen our connection with, and responsibility to, Jews everywhere. By using the words of the *siddur*, we "become part of a people." We "identify with Jews everywhere who use the same words and express the same thoughts. [We] affirm the principal of mutual responsibility and concern."[43] Moreover, life may feel less insignificant because we are part of a people who has existed for millennia and will continue to exist for generations to come. For George Driesen, this is the most obvious purpose of Jewish prayer:

> Communal prayer is the principal manifestation of the determination of American Jews to be part of the astounding march of our people through the millennia. The act of prayer makes the inescapable reality of my mortality more bearable. My life will end, and with it most of the dreams I dreamed, the songs I sang, the loves I loved. But the great Jewish romance with history and its God will go on.[44]

The Beauty & Emotional Power of Prayer

Though it is not often articulated by scholars, one reason that modern liberal Jews engage in tefillah is because of the aesthetic and/or emotional power of prayer. Communal Jewish worship can be artistic and beautiful – often through the use of music, poetry, art, and great literature. Related to the beauty of prayer is the emotional element: whether prayer is "beautiful" or not, it is often a powerful emotional experience. Prayer can be happy, joyful, upbeat, and even ecstatic. At other times prayer may be sad, mournful, heartrending, or poignant. At its best, prayer is emotionally moving – stirring

---

[42] Richman, 55
[43] Halevy Donin, 7
[44] George Driesen, "How God Gets in the Way of Praying" (*Moment*, October 1990), 50.

our souls and inviting us to feel emotions that we may otherwise hold at bay. For some people, this is the most important reason to pray.

Mystical Unification with God

Some Jewish thinkers believe that the purpose of prayer is not to communicate with God, but to become united with God. This mystical view of prayer has existed for at least a thousand years, but it has flourished in recent years. Steven Moss tries to help people achieve unification with God in prayer in his article "Finding Spirituality through Meditation." In it, he says that prayer ought to "inspire a person and awaken his/her spiritual roots."[45] Through the use of meditation, one can "open [his/her] inner spiritual realm to God" and "open channels to the Divine."[46] Eventually the pray-er who uses meditation can, according to Moss, "bring [his/her] inner being into a oneness with the Divine flow," and "open barriers that are within each person to our God who is the All everywhere."[47] When people use meditation for the purpose of prayer, the goal is not self-growth, communal identification, or aesthetic beauty; instead, the purpose is oneness with the Divine.

Rabbi Nachman of Breslov also articulated the mystical goal of prayer: "The service of the heart is prayer; that is, to nullify one's self-identity and to merge with the Infinite Nothingness."[48] Rabbi David Cooper builds on Nachman's teaching, asserting that "genuine prayer transcends the rational mind; it dwells in unknown and mystical

---

[45] Steven A. Moss, "Finding Spirituality through Meditation" (*CCAR Journal*, Summer 1992), 47.
[46] Moss, 48
[47] Ibid, 51-52
[48] Rabbi Nachman of Breslov, *Likutey Moharan* 22:9, taken from Rabbi David A Cooper, "Meditative Prayer" in *The Handbook of Jewish Meditation Practices: A Guide for Enriching the Sabbath and Other Days of Your Life* (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2000), 50.

realms... In the depths of authentic prayer, intellectual and philosophical concerns are put aside. Prayer is an emotive experience to which one's total being must be committed."[49] Though not all Jewish pray-ers have as their goal unification with the Divine, it is a powerful motivating force for prayer for some.

Prayer as Ritual

For people who pray with regularity, the ritual of prayer can be especially important. Rabbi Larry Hoffman makes a powerful argument for prayer as ritual:

> Prayer is not description (despite its descriptive language); nor is it petition (despite its patent requests). No theological world need correspond to the descriptions we give, and no supernatural power need respond to the requests we make. Liturgy is ritualized redundancy that lets us *show what ordinary conversation precludes*. [emphasis added][50]

In other words, prayer helps us put into ritualized form things we cannot express in any other way. It is through ritual that we are able to express the inexpressible. In the quotation above, Hoffman is referring in particular to prayers for those who are sick. He believes that praying for the sick is a ritual that "allows us to resist the temptation to describe, explain, or attribute moral meaning to what we do not know ourselves first-hand."[51] Neil Gillman also believes that ritual is a meaningful function of prayer:

> Mourners who recite the *Kaddish* following the death of a parent are rarely conscious of the theological content of the prayer and after a while, no longer feel intense grief...the very act of reciting this sacred text in this absolutely predictable way can carry religious significance...The *Kaddish* experience is probably the most striking example of how prayer functions as ritual.[52]

---

[49] Cooper, 50-51
[50] Lawrence A. Hoffman, "Illness and Inculturation," (Inaugural Lecture, Yale Divinity School, September 2004), 26.
[51] Hoffman (2004), 26.
[52] Neil Gillman, "Prayer as Ritual," in *Sacred Fragments: Recovering Theology for the Modern Jew* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1990), 238.

Ritual can provide a sense of comfort, often fulfilling a person's psychological and emotional needs.

Prayer, as ritual, also helps to structure time, since ritual is the means through which we organize time. As Hoffman explains in *The Art of Public Prayer*, "Without ritual there would be no meaningful use of time... Ritual arranges our life into relatively small packages of moments that matter."[53] Prayer done on a regular basis – daily, weekly, or even yearly – helps to give our lives structure. It has been shown that, in structuring time, ritual is important for a child's development.[54] I would argue that it is not only secular rituals (such as reading a book before going to bed) that matter, but religious rituals – including prayer – are equally important for children as they grow.

The "What If..." Factor

Scholar Kathryn L. Roberts analyzes the biblical scene in which David begs God to save the life of his and Batsheva's unnamed child. Roberts points out that "despite [the] knowledge of the certainty of his child's death, David nonetheless spends seven days and nights on the floor, hungry and dirty, pleading with God to change a judgment that he knows he 'deserves,' that he has brought upon himself, that seems irrevocable."[55]

Why does David pray, if he knows that the child will die? When servants question his behavior, David responds, "Who knows? Adonai may be gracious to me,

---

[53] Hoffman (1999), 17.
[54] Evan Imber-Black, Janine Roberts, and Richard Whiting, *Rituals in Families and Family Therapy* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2003).
[55] Kathryn L. Roberts, "Why We Pray," in *David and Zion: Biblical Studies in Honor of JJM Roberts*, ed. Bernard F. Batto and Kathryn L. Roberts (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2004), 109.

and the child may live."[56] Roberts evaluates this passage and concludes that the phrase, "Who knows? Perhaps..." is extremely significant; the "prayer's hope is built upon confidence that God can be affected by his prayers, that God can be moved."[57] Even when David knows with *certainty* that the child will die, he prays anyway. "Perhaps...", he thinks to himself.

So, too, some modern liberal Jews pray with the thought, "Who knows? Perhaps...", in the back of their minds. Even if we do not necessarily believe in a God who can hear or answer prayers, there may still be a whisper of "perhaps..." echoing in our hearts. We think to ourselves, "Maybe, just maybe, God can hear my prayer this time. Maybe God will heal my loved one, even though I know it is unlikely." This reason for prayer – the "What if... Factor," as I call it – is mentioned, albeit with different terminology, by Rabbi Eugene Borowitz in his essay "Please, God, Heal Her, Please." He explains that while many modern Jews deny that God has any active involvement in the natural order of the world, he still prays for people to be healed. We "do not know how God can be an efficient cause in the natural order," but that does not prevent us from "turning to God for what God might independently do for the ill."[58] Borowitz knows that many of us hope and pray for God's healing, even if we do not understand how or whether it can happen.

---

[56] 2 Samuel 12:22
[57] Roberts, 109
[58] Eugene B. Borowitz, "Please, God, Heal Her, Please," in *Studies in the Meaning of Judaism* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2002), 347.

Bringing God into the World

Even though many modern Jews have rejected traditional Jewish ideas about God, there are still those who maintain that through prayer we can bring (or let) God into the world. Rabbi Jeffrey Cohen believes that when we communicate with God through prayer, "God is enabled to be with us at all times. We cannot forget Him; we live our lives encompassed by His spirit."[59] In other words, prayer "interlaces our...activities within a web of holiness."[60] Prayer brings holiness (which we might also call "Godliness") into our lives and into the world. Borowitz argues that modern Jews have begun to engage in *tzimtzum* (self-contraction) in the last half-century. Through the act of *tzimtzum* and increased humility, we are leaving "space in our world for God," while we are "groping for better ways to let God's presence and God's power into our lives more fully."[61]

Heschel too stresses bringing God into the world through prayer:

> God is in captivity in this world, in the oblivion of our lives. God is in search of man, in search of a home in the soul and deeds of man. God is not at home in our world. Our task is to hallow time, to enable Him to enter our moments, to be at home in our time, in what we do with time.[62]

Reuven Hammer agrees with Heschel that prayer is one of the ways that we reach out to God and try to bring God into the world. He insists that "prayer is a way of experiencing the reality of God in the world, and of relating to that reality."[63] Both Heschel and Hammer articulate beliefs that may be too traditional for some liberal Jews, but they

---

[59] Rabbi Jeffrey Cohen, *Blessed are You: A Comprehensive Guide to Jewish Prayer* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson Inc, 1993), 102.
[60] Ibid, 106
[61] Borowitz (2002), 346
[62] Heschel (1972), 73
[63] Hammer, 7

nevertheless raise the valid argument that prayer is one of the ways that we try to encounter God (however one defines God) in our day-to-day lives.

Finally, Elliot Dorff claims that prayer is not only a means of bringing God into the world, but it is "also a way to know God in the first place."[64] Dorff argues that the *siddur* "helps its users to see the world through Jewish eyes – to believe in, and be emotionally tied to, a personal, caring God."[65] We learn about God, and how to connect with God, through the act of prayer.

"The Purpose of Prayer" & Tefillah Education

In this chapter I have tried to detail the many ways in which a modern, liberal Jew may understand the purpose of Jewish communal prayer in our time. Whether prayer is seen as a way to articulate our beliefs and needs (even if only to ourselves), to identify with the Jewish people, to bring God into the world, or to sense the needs of others in the world and become motivated to take action – any of these reasons for prayer, along with any other given in this chapter, is equally valid.

Those of us struggling to improve tefillah education in our congregations must at some point confront the question, "Why pray?" because in answering that question as individuals and as a congregation, we lay the foundations for good tefillah education. For, as will become evident in the following chapters, congregations educate for tefillah in very different ways, and with very different goals in mind. If the goal of prayer is mystical unification with God, for example, the education for prayer would be quite different than if the goal of prayer were introspection and personal reflection. When we

---

[64] Elliot N. Dorff, "Knowing God through Prayer," (*Conservative Judaism*, Winter 1999), 37.
[65] Ibid, 51

articulate the purpose of tefillah, we also begin to articulate our aims for tefillah education. And that is a very good place for us to start.

~ Chapter Two ~

Rabbinic Views on Tefillah Education

The quest for high-quality tefillah education is not a new one. Indeed, the issue of how we might best educate our children for a lifetime of Jewish prayer has been around since the very inception of rabbinic Judaism. Since the time of the Mishna (1st-2nd century CE), education has been an important topic of discussion for the Rabbis, and there are a number of rabbinic texts that deal with tefillah education in particular. In classical rabbinic sources, the Rabbis primarily focus on education for *behavior* – for particular prayers and skills; for example, how and when should a father teach his son to recite the *Sh'ma*? How and when should a child learn to shake the *lulav*? Though the world of the Rabbis almost two millennia ago was very different than our world in the twenty-first century, and the specific questions the Rabbis ask may differ from our questions, they nevertheless struggled with tefillah education as we do today. They wondered, just as we do, "How do we best educate our youth for Jewish communal worship?" The purpose of this chapter is to highlight a number of rabbinic principles that may, in fact, prove useful for us as we try to improve tefillah education in our congregations in the twenty-first century.

L'hargil: Habituation / Acculturation

In the *Encyclopedia Talmudit*, Jewish education (חינוך) is defined as "the obligation to habituate/acculturate (להרגיל) a minor in the mitzvot of which he will

become obligated upon his maturation."[66] The Hebrew verb להרגיל appears dozens of times throughout the entry for חינוך since the Rabbis use it repeatedly in their discussions about education.[67] The recurring use of להרגיל is significant because the verb's implications are quite different from that of other verbs that might have been used to refer to education. The Hebrew root *r.g.l* (*resh, gimmel, lamed*) means "ordinary, usual, common, habitual, customary, or familiar" in Modern Hebrew, and the *hifil* verb form, להרגיל, means "to train, to accustom, to habituate, or to familiarize."[68] The verb להרגיל is quite different from the Hebrew verb ללמד, for example, which means "to teach, to instruct, or to prove."[69] From the Rabbis' frequent use of the verb להרגיל it could be argued that our job as Jewish educators is to make Jewish traditions seem ordinary, usual, habitual, and familiar. Jewish education is not simply a matter of instruction; as scholar Isa Aron has argued, it is mostly a matter of enculturation.[70]

In tefillah education, then, the rabbinic goal is not only to teach Jewish prayers or "prove" to our students why prayer matters; on the contrary, tefillah education for the Rabbis is primarily about *habituation* and *acculturation*. In order to habituate children to tefillah – to make Jewish communal worship a habit – we must engage our students in tefillah on a regular basis. The Rabbis advocate for rote learning (להרגיל could mean doing something frequently enough that it becomes "regular") because they believe that activities learned by rote will become internalized habits. The Rabbis' educational goal

---

[66] "Chinuch" (חינוך), *Encyclopedia Talmudit, Vol 16*, ed. HaRav Meir Bar-Ilan and HaRav Shlomo Yosef Zavin (Jerusalem: Talmudic Encyclopedia Publ. Ltd: 1982), column 161.
[67] For example, see *Babylonian Talmud*, Yoma 82a
[68] Reuben Alcalay, *The Complete Hebrew-English Dictionary* (Jerusalem: Massada Publishing Company, 1963), 2400-2401.
[69] Ibid, 1130
[70] Aron, 66

is for children become regular pray-ers (i.e. pray three times a day), and in their view, rote learning is the best way to accomplish that goal. For the Rabbis, behaving (i.e. the act of praying) must precede believing (i.e. how one thinks/feels about prayer). In the twenty-first century, it is still the case that the fundamental purpose of tefillah education is to teach people how to pray Jewishly; tefillah education is not necessarily meant to be a process of acquiring knowledge for its own sake. For, as the Rabbis say, we are obligated to educate for those actions which a child will be obligated to do upon his/her maturation;[71] therefore, we should educate for tefillah in such a way that will enable our students to be part of habitual Jewish communal worship as adults.

Acculturation is related to habituation, though the two are not exactly the same: acculturation is the "the process by which the culture of a particular society is instilled in a human from infancy onward."[72] We acculturate our children to tefillah by helping them absorb and assimilate the culture of Jewish communal worship in the congregation. Tefillah education is, according to the Rabbis, a process of socialization. In addition to teaching prayers, tefillah education ought to include a process of becoming familiar with all the things that make up the *culture* of prayer – the space, the people, the sounds, the attire, etc.

Obligation to Educate: Parents 1st, Community 2nd

According to rabbinic thought, parents hold primary responsibility for the education of their children. As the *Encyclopedia Talmudit* points out, "The obligation to educate is incumbent, in every case, upon the father. He is obligated to educate his son –

[71] "Chinuch," *Encyclopedia Talmudit*, col. 161
[72] "Acculturation," *American Heritage Dictionary*

or his daughter – in the commandments."[73] In the Talmud we find the following instruction: "A father is obligated to do the following for his son: to circumcise him, redeem him, teach him Torah, take a wife for him, and teach him a craft."[74] Certainly the obligation to "teach him Torah" would have included teaching one's child tefillah! In cases where the child has no parent, most of the Rishonim and Acharonim rule that the בית-דין (court) is obligated to step in and educate the child.[75] If the parent (in this case, the father) is unable to educate his child due to his own lack of knowledge, he must seek out education for himself and, at the same time, find someone else to educate his child.[76]

According to the Rabbis, then, the obligation to educate lies primarily with the parents; the community's obligation to educate comes second. This rabbinic principle is very important in the context of modern tefillah education: the instruction to "teach him Torah" serves as a reminder that all Jewish education – including tefillah education – ought to begin with parents. If parents are unable to educate their children for prayer, then we must begin youth tefillah education by educating the parents. This is frequently accomplished in synagogues through the use of family education programs. Synagogues could further this principle by providing more opportunities for parents to learn – not only through "family education" (parents and children learning together), but also through "parent education" and/or "adult education." The goal for congregational tefillah education, ideally, is to build on that which children learn from their parents.

A corollary of this principle – parents first, community second – is that tefillah education works best when children see their parents as role models. In many liberal

---

[73] "Chinuch," *Encyclopedia Talmudit*, Col. 165
[74] *Babylonian Talmud*, Kiddushin 29a
[75] See Tosafot on Nazir 28b
[76] *Shulchan Aruch*, Yoreh Deah 245:1

Jewish communities, tefillah is unfamiliar for large numbers of parents; it makes them uncomfortable. If parents have trouble with tefillah, it is not surprising that their children do, too. Students in our schools wonder, "Why should tefillah matter to me when it is not important or meaningful for my parents?" Or, "My parents don't like services; why should I?" Parents are important role models, and children have a keen sense of how their parents feel about Jewish communal prayer. Therefore, improving tefillah education for youth necessarily means improving tefillah education for adults as well.

Start Young

The Rabbis recognize two important principles about Jewish education: 1) Judaism must be learned, and 2) as soon as a child is developmentally ready to learn, he or she ought to be educated. When Deut. 6:7 instructs us וְשִׁנַּנְתָּם לְבָנֶיךָ, Ramban notes that "we are commanded thus so that our children will know the commandments; for how will [our children] know [the commandments] unless they learn them?"[77] There is disagreement among the Rabbis about the exact timing of education for prayer (when should it begin?), but all agree that prayer must be *learned.*[78] This may sound obvious, but it is in fact an important principle to keep in mind. Human beings are not born with the knowledge of Jewish prayers, customs, traditions, and obligations. These things must be learned, and the Rabbis would say that it is best to learn them *before* one is obligated to do them. In other words, it is best to learn Jewish rituals and traditions as children, rather than waiting until we are already adults.

---

[77] Ramban on Deuteronomy 6:7
[78] "Chinuch," *Encyclopedia Talmudit*, Col. 167-168

The commandment of education is "to habituate [a child] in the mitzvot before 'his time,' so that he will be accustomed to them by the time s/he reaches maturity [i.e. adulthood]."[79] Tefillah must be learned, and education for it should begin as early as possible; as Rashi says, "'Education' is a language that comes from the beginning."[80] The Rishonim say that "we are obligated to educate in every commandment whenever it is possible and fitting to do so, even for children under the age of five."[81] Tefillah education should not wait until third or fourth grade; it should begin as early as possible.

Al Pi Darko: Student-Centered Education

Educational research has shown that student-centered education – in which the student's needs, interests, and abilities are placed at the center of learning – is the most effective way for students to learn (as opposed to teacher-centered or curriculum-centered education). Interestingly, the notion of student-centered education can be traced as far back as biblical and rabbinic texts. The Book of Proverbs instructs us to חַנֹּךְ לַנַּעַר עַל־פִּי דַרְכּוֹ ("train a lad in the way he ought to go"), an educational principle that is later picked up by the Rabbis.[82]

The Rabbis interpret the educational principle of על-פי דרכו in at least two different ways. First, they recognize the modern concept of "developmental readiness," even though the term itself comes from twentieth-century educational experts. Educators are aware of developmental readiness when they realize that it is only possible to teach

---

[79] "Chinuch," *Encyclopedia Talmudit*, Col. 163
[80] Rashi on Genesis 14:14; see the following section, "Al Pi Darko," for more details about when to begin education
[81] See commentary by Ritba and Ran on *Babylonian Talmud* Sukkah 28b; "Chinuch," *Encyclopedia Talmudit*, Col. 168
[82] Proverbs 22:6, JPS translation

certain ideas, skills, or concepts when a child is developmentally ready to learn them. Education must take into account a student's cognitive, linguistic, emotional, spiritual, social, and moral development. The Rabbis clearly understood the concept of developmental readiness, as is apparent in the following *baraita* in the Babylonian Talmud: "A minor who knows how to nod/shake is obligated in *lulav*; he who knows how to wrap is obligated in *tzitzit*; if he knows how to lay *t'fillin*, his father must acquire *t'fillin* for him; if he knows how to speak, his father must teach him Torah and the recitation of the *Sh'ma*."[83] Our obligation is not simply to teach a child how to shake the *lulav* or recite the *Sh'ma*; rather, we must be sure that the child is ready and able to learn whatever it is we want to teach. In this educational model, *age* is less important than developmental *stage*. When a child has reached a point at which s/he is ready to learn, or when a child is developmentally ready to perform a particular mitzvah, the Rabbis say s/he has "reached his [time of] education" – הגיע לחינוך.

The concept of developmental readiness goes hand in hand with the second rabbinic interpretation of על-פי דרכו: education is not a one-size-fits-all endeavor. The *Encyclopedia Talmudit* entry for חינוך explains that we are "obligated to educate [a child] according to his wit/sharpness, and if he does not understand, then we are not obligated to educate."[84] In other words, the Rabbis know that every child is different – with different strengths, talents, weaknesses, and particularities – and each child deserves a unique education to fit his/her needs.

In today's society, in which more and more children are diagnosed with "special needs" while other children continue to be labeled "gifted and talented," it is clear that

[83] *Babylonian Talmud*, Sukkah 42a
[84] "Chinuch," *Encyclopedia Talmudit*, Col. 168

Jewish education – and tefillah education in particular – can no longer remain a one-size-fits-all endeavor. Unfortunately, this is one rabbinic principle that has not been widely adopted. Though many congregations make special arrangements for a handful of children with "special needs" to become bar/bat mitzvah, tefillah education is, for the most part, undifferentiated. Few congregations have, thus far, considered ways to better tailor congregational education to individual students' needs. Perhaps now is the time to adopt the rabbinic principle of על-פי דרכו and explore ways for congregations to individualize education for each and every student in its midst.

Tefillah Education: A *Seder*

While the Rabbis recognize the need to tailor education for individual students' needs, they also advocate for teaching tefillah in a particular order that adheres to most children's developmental progress. They suggest we teach tefillah in the following order: the study of Torah and the recitation of the first line of the *Sh'ma*, the *aleph-bet*, the full *Sh'ma*, the blessings before and after *Sh'ma*, *Tefillah* (i.e. *Amidah*), morning blessings and *Hallel*, and then everything else.

According to a *baraita* found in the Talmud, the very first things a child should learn are the study of Torah and the recitation of the *Sh'ma*: יודע לדבר - אביו לומדו תורה וקריאת שמע ("A minor who knows how to speak – his father [should] teach him Torah and the recitation of the *Sh'ma*").[85] Rambam clarifies that when we begin to teach children the recitation of the *Sh'ma* at this young age, we should only teach them the first line ("*Sh'ma Yisrael*..."). Children typically learn to

[85] *Babylonian Talmud*, Sukkah 42a

speak before their second birthday, which means that the time to teach most children Torah (i.e. Torah stories) and the first line of the *Sh'ma* is at the age of one or two years old. In his commentary to Pirkei Avot 5:21, Rashi tells us, "Immediately when a child reaches the age of three full years, we teach him letters of the Torah so that he will habituate himself to reading the Torah."[86] Therefore, the second step in the rabbinic order of tefillah education is teaching a child the *aleph-bet*.

Once a child has been introduced to the study of Torah, learned to recite the first line of the *Sh'ma*, and learned the *aleph-bet*, it is time to continue his/her education by teaching him/her the full recitation of the *Sh'ma* (all three paragraphs) and the blessings before and after the *Sh'ma*.[87] The next step is to teach the child the *Tefillah* (i.e. *Amidah*); it comes after the recitation of the *Sh'ma* because it is longer and therefore may be harder to learn.[88] After the *Tefillah*, we should teach the morning blessings (*Birkot Ha'shachar*) and *Hallel*: we teach the morning blessings because they are similar to the *Tefillah* and include the blessings for the study of Torah, and we teach *Hallel* because it comes from the *Tanach* (which, presumably, the child has also been studying).[89] In the twenty-first century we may choose to educate for tefillah in a different order than the Rabbis suggest; however, we can take their lead by carefully looking at the order in which we educate for tefillah to determine whether it makes sense developmentally.

---

[86] See "Chinuch," *Encyclopedia Talmudit*, Col. 170; Rashi on Avot 5:21
[87] "Chinuch," *Encyclopedia Talmudit*, Col. 171
[88] Ibid
[89] Ibid; see Tosafot on *Babylonian Talmud*, Megillah 19b

Yirah Precedes *Ahavah*

While we moderns may select different educational goals than the Rabbis, it is clear that the Rabbis are primarily concerned with the *behavior* of prayer. They want children to learn when and how to *daven*; therefore, it is not surprising that Rambam suggests that we "educate [children] to serve/worship [God] out of fear/awe (*yirah*)... until their knowledge (*da'at*) increases and they will serve/worship [God] out of love (*ahavah*).[90] Rambam, along with other Rishonim, believes that education must begin with a sense of fear and/or awe. I offer both translations of the Hebrew word *yirah* because it seems to me that both fear and awe may operate in the first stages of education for behavior: children often obey their teachers out of a sense of fear of punishment, and/or they may look up to their teachers (or other teens/adults in the community) with a sense of awe and try to imitate their actions. They may also act out of a sense of awe and/or fear of God – in particular, they may fear Divine punishment or retribution. Because of their awe and/or fear, children do whatever it is they are being asked to do. It is possible that some children can learn religious behaviors out of a love of God, but the Rabbis believe (and I concur) that it is rare.

The notion that "*yirah* precedes *ahavah*" is more than a theological construct; it is also an educational directive. In the realm of behavior, we must begin with discipline; we internalize that discipline, and only then can we be creative and make it our own. Applied to tefillah education, this principle tells us that we must first teach the *matbeah* of prayer, and only then can we encourage our students to make tefillah their own. It may be desirable to get to the *ahavah* stage, but we must begin with *yirah*. Some people

[90] Rambam Teshuva 10:1 & 5; also see "Chinuch," *Encyclopedia Talmudit*, Col. 164

may strongly disagree with this model of tefillah education; nevertheless, it is worth noting that this is the way in which the Rabbis encourage us to educate for prayer.

An important detail of this rabbinic principle is that we must continue to educate for prayer even when the child does not exhibit the proper *kavanna* (intention, beliefs). The Rabbis teach that we must "educate the minor for the commandments even when he does not have proper *kavanna*; for [even though] his youth causes him to lack *kavanna*, it does not remove him from the obligation of education."[91] As a longtime religious school teacher, I know how hard it can be to put this rabbinic teaching into practice. There is nothing more challenging as a teacher than forcing children to do that which they have no desire to do. Yet the Rabbis encourage us to keep pushing tefillah – even when our students do not have the proper *kavanna* to get anything meaningful out of the experience.

Experiential Education

While we must continue to teach tefillah even when children resist, it is nevertheless possible to do what we can to make tefillah education a positive learning experience. In the modern academic study of education, it has long been evident that "experiential learning" is much more effective than frontal, lecture-oriented learning. According to the Association for Experiential Education, the principles of experiential education (which is sometimes called "constructivist education") include the following:

- Experiential learning occurs when carefully chosen experiences are supported by reflection, critical analysis and synthesis.

[91] "Chinuch," *Encyclopedia Talmudit*, Col. 163; see footnote #29

- Throughout the experiential learning process, the learner is actively engaged in posing questions, investigating, experimenting, being curious, solving problems, assuming responsibility, being creative, and constructing meaning.
- Learners are engaged intellectually, emotionally, socially, soulfully and/or physically. This involvement produces a perception that the learning task is authentic.[92]

Though they did not call it "experiential education," the Rabbis nevertheless advocate for it. The Rabbis understood that education does not happen in the classroom alone. As is evident throughout rabbinic texts, children must be *immersed* in tefillah for them to learn it. For example, the Rabbis suggest we "bring children to the *beit-k'nesset* (sanctuary)" and encourage them to "kiss the Torah and treat it as beautiful."[93] When we bring children into the sanctuary and engage them in the *experience* of tefillah, they can develop certain feelings that are not always possible in the classroom, such as honor for the Torah, comfort with hearing Hebrew, attachment to the synagogue, fear and love of God, etc. As a Chinese proverb states: "Tell me and I will forget. Show me and I may remember. Involve me and I will understand."[94]

Prayer and Torah

In many congregational schools, Jewish education is divided into two components: "Jewish Studies" and "Hebrew." Although prayer sometimes appears in curricula for Jewish Studies classes, many synagogues prefer to teach prayer in their Hebrew classes (they use Hebrew to teach prayer, or use prayer to teach Hebrew). The Rabbis indirectly warn us about these arbitrary divisions. For them, prayer and Torah study go hand in hand. As we learned earlier from a *baraita* in the Babylonian Talmud,

[92] Association for Experiential Education, http://www.aee.org/customer/pages.php?pageid=47
[93] "Chinuch," *Encyclopedia Talmudit*, Col. 172-173; *Babylonian Talmud* Hagiga 3a
[94] Association for Experiential Education: http://www.aee.org/customer/pages.php?pageid=47

יודע לדבר - אביו לומדו תורה וקריאת שמע ("A minor who knows how to speak – his father [should] teach him Torah and the recitation of the *Sh'ma*").[95] The Rabbis see prayer and Torah study as one endeavor, as two sides of the same coin. Children should begin to learn both simultaneously.

Though Jewish educators often try to put "prayer" and "Torah study" in two separate categories (as evidenced by offering classes in "Jewish Studies" – which includes Torah study – and "Hebrew" – which includes prayer), it is important to remember that Torah study is an important component of rabbinic tefillah, and tefillah is an important part of rabbinic Torah study. Let us begin with the former: Torah study is an important component of rabbinic tefillah. In the rabbinic imagination, tefillah does not only refer to "prayer." As we saw in Chapter One, tefillah is a combination of praise, supplication, thanksgiving, confession, and study – in short, it includes all the ways in which we communicate with God. One of the most important ways that Jews communicate with God is through Torah study. It is therefore not surprising that a large portion of tefillah involves the study and recitation of Torah: in fact, we "study" Torah from the earliest part of the morning service (in *Birkot Ha'shachar*) all the way through to the Bedtime *Sh'ma*. If "Torah study" includes the study of all our sacred texts – biblical, rabbinic, medieval, and modern – then it is clear that tefillah is chock full of Torah study. It is simply crazy for us to assume that it is possible to isolate the study of tefillah from the study of Torah.

At the same time, we must acknowledge that tefillah (even if we use the narrow definition of "prayer") is an important part of rabbinic Torah study. The Rabbis "thought

[95] *Babylonian Talmud*, Sukkah 42a

it inconceivable to begin a day without studying Torah," so the morning service begins with Torah study preceded by a series of blessings ("probably a list of alternatives once, but now a canonized set said together as part of waking up").[96] There may be disagreement over which blessing to use (*la'asok b'divrei Torah, asher bachar banu... natan Torah*, etc.), but there is widespread agreement that Torah study must begin with the recitation of a blessing. Similarly, there is a custom of reciting *Kaddish d'Rabanan* when one concludes Torah study. Torah study is bracketed with tefillah, reminding us that the study of Torah is a holy endeavor and in engaging in it, we ought to give thanks and praise to God.

This rabbinic principle – that tefillah and Torah study must go hand in hand – may be the most difficult for synagogues to adopt. The division of Jewish education into "Jewish Studies" and "Hebrew" is so engrained that it may be difficult to encourage supplementary schools to better integrate the two areas. However, it is worth taking the rabbinic perspective seriously and beginning a conversation to re-think how we might educate for tefillah with Torah study as an integral, necessary component.

Teach to the Community's Practice

One of the most interesting teachings from rabbinic writings on education is the recognition that children must learn the customs and traditions of the community of which they are a part. In the section of the *Encyclopedia Talmudit* that refers to education for the recitation of the *Sh'ma* and *Tefillah* (i.e. *Amidah*), we read, "Educate [them] in the commandments in the way that [people] speak of the commandments in the

[96] Lawrence A. Hoffman, "Blessings and Study: The Jewish Way to Begin a Day" in *My People's Prayer Book, Vol. 5: Birkhot Hashachar*, ed. Lawrence A. Hoffman (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2001), 7.

community."[97] I understand this comment to mean that it is incumbent upon us to teach children how to operate in the community in which they find themselves. That means we must teach them the language, skills, behaviors, and beliefs that will allow them to become part of the community as they mature.

This principle – "teach to the community's practice" – is especially significant in the realm of tefillah education. It is not particularly helpful to habituate children to something that is foreign to the congregation's "regular" tefillah. For example, children who grow up attending "children's services" that have nothing in common with adult worship in the synagogue will have no idea how to be participants in adult worship when they become "too old" for children's services. If we hope that our children will become regular participants in adult tefillah when they reach adulthood (or even before that, in their teenage years), then we must expose our children to that kind of tefillah when they are young.

While other rabbinic principles have focused on *behavior* – how, where, and when we should educate youth for Jewish communal worship – this principle focuses more directly on *belonging*. While the Rabbis were concerned with the behavioral aspects of tefillah education (making sure children know how to recite the appropriate prayers at the appropriate times and places), they were also concerned with building community. They realize that it is important to make sure that children develop a sense of belonging – not only a sense of belonging to the Jewish people at large, but also a sense of belonging to the individual (local) community of which they are a part.

[97] "Chinuch," *Encyclopedia Talmudit*, Col. 173

Closing Thoughts

As I have tried to demonstrate throughout this chapter, the Rabbis were concerned with tefillah education and have left us with a number of educational principles we might adopt as we try to improve tefillah education in the twenty-first century. Indeed, many of the principles described above could be applied to almost any realm of Jewish education today! Regarding tefillah education in particular, the Rabbis were operating in a *halakhic* framework in which children needed to learn tefillah in order to fulfill God's commandment to pray. As a result, their educational principles focus primarily on developing the *behavior* of prayer, and to a lesser extent, a sense of *belonging* to the prayer community. The Rabbis were far less concerned with children's *beliefs*. As we will see in the chapters ahead, the three congregations I studied exhibit elements of all of these rabbinic principles to a greater or lesser degree, determined, in part, by their educational goals.

~ Chapter Three ~

Believing: Tefillah Education at Temple Sinai

Temple Sinai: An Overview

Temple Sinai[98] is a large urban Reform synagogue in the Western United States. It has a long, illustrious history spanning more than a century, and it has played a significant role in the history of the city in which it dwells.[99] With more than two thousand families, a clergy team of seven, and a staff of well over one hundred people, the synagogue is currently one of the largest in North America. Temple Sinai boasts an extremely wide variety of programs, classes, and resources, seeing itself as a "foundation of community life for Jews and non-Jews, for members and non-members."[100] From social action projects to art exhibits, from concerts by distinguished musicians to lectures by world-renowned speakers, the offerings at Temple Sinai are astounding. With vast financial resources and a reputation for excellence, Sinai has established itself as one of the most prominent Reform congregations in the twenty-first century.

Among the thousands of people who maintain membership at Sinai, there is incredible diversity. Member households include a significant percentage of inter-faith families, gay and lesbian families, and people of many different ethnic, racial, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Temple Sinai saw a major influx of new members in the last decade, including sizeable numbers of previously unaffiliated Jews, in large part due

[98] Names and identifying features of all synagogues and people involved in my case studies have been changed to protect their privacy.
[99] Further historical details are withheld here in order to maintain the congregation's anonymity in this research.
[100] Taken from the congregation's website

to a "voluntary dues" program that was introduced about 10 years ago. Rabbi Dennis Blum, who has been the senior rabbi at Temple Sinai for almost 15 years, describes the system of "voluntary dues" at Temple Sinai:

> *We wanted to lower the barrier to affiliation, because when anyone would call the synagogue, the first thing they would say was, "How much does it cost?" And I wanted to be able to say, "Whatever you want." You can join for nothing, or if you want to make a contribution, at your election, do it. And then we'll talk to you about dues [in a year]. It was wildly successful. We quadrupled the number of new members. If you're under 30, dues are optional until you're 30. But even after you're 30, if someone says they can't afford it, that's okay. In my last congregation, we spent huge amounts of energy trying to squeeze $100 out of Mrs. Schwartz because we thought she wasn't paying enough. But we just don't do that here. If you tell me, "All I can afford is $250," and you have a billion dollars in the bank, we're not going to question you. We want to go after people who can really support the congregation and who are willing to, because that extra hundred bucks you'll get out of fifteen households is not going to be the same as getting $5000 from one person.*
>
> *So [the way it works is] we have "minimum dues" – a third of our households pay less, a third pay more. What that did was it began to attract lots of people who had never stepped foot in a synagogue. Some of them said, "We would never have joined had you not made it so easy." [Since beginning voluntary dues,] the congregation has doubled in size, and our revenue has doubled.*

In addition to launching an innovative dues policy, Rabbi Blum has shaped Temple Sinai in another significant way:

> *The congregation had always been senior rabbi-driven. There was a senior rabbi and then a whole bunch of assistants that came in through a revolving door, on the three year rotation, or four or five. That meant the first year they learned the job, the second year they did the job, and the third year they were looking for a job – which meant you got one good year out of every three years. So it put all the focus on the senior rabbi, because why would anybody want [to get to know] somebody that wouldn't even remember their name, because they'll be gone? I said to the board, if you are looking to strengthen the congregation, you'll need to find very key people and keep them here. And they listened.*

> *So Mary Gold, who left last year, was here for 12 years. Laurie Klein has been here around 12 years. Lev Schiffman has been here 18 years. Cantor Green has been here 20 years. That's created a very different feel for people, because now they can relate to different rabbis in the congregation. Some people don't know who I am, which is fine.*

As I heard from leaders in the Reform movement, Rabbi Blum has "no ego needs," and he has worked hard to bring in as many talented people as possible to help him lead the synagogue into the future.

Tefillah at Temple Sinai

For most of its history, Temple Sinai has been a beacon of classical (German) Reform Judaism. The main sanctuary is a vast, majestic space with the capacity to seat 1700 people. Recently renovated, the sanctuary boasts a gleaming white marble *bima*, stunning stained glass windows with over two hundred different colors, and massive chandeliers that glitter as they hang from the soaring ceiling. Services in the main sanctuary are usually conducted in the "classical Reform" (high-church) style of worship, complete with a professional choir, organist, and a cantor with a beautiful, booming voice. Due to both the architecture and the style of worship, Sinai's main sanctuary services are awe-inspiring for some, but tremendously intimidating for others. Whereas many Reform congregations have shifted away from "classical Reform" worship, Temple Sinai continues to offer classical Reform services on a weekly basis.

Fifteen years ago, the leadership at Temple Sinai decided to renovate their auditorium and turn it into an alternative sanctuary space seating several hundred people. Since that time – and especially in the last five to ten years – the number of worship opportunities at Sinai have exploded. Instead of offering one Friday night service and

one Saturday morning service (both in a classical Reform style), Sinai now offers seven or eight different kinds of worship services on a regular basis. When I asked about tefillah at Temple Sinai, Rabbi Laurie Klein responded, "I can't say anything about tefillah here; I can [only] talk about *tefillot*." As Rabbi Blum explains,

> *We began to notice that we really are post-denominational here. People don't select synagogues anymore by brand. They go where they think they can best be served.*
>
> *One of the things we noticed was that people were really not as interested... well, our old time members were still interested in classical Reform [worship], but our newer members, and the people who said they would love to join "if only," were people who wanted more warm and fuzzy, more participatory, more Hebrew, more of what some people call "happy clappy" – music that's very repetitive, omni-directional, not grand. And the truth of the matter is that that's what people wanted. Once we began to offer what we call a minyan-style service, [people] began joining in very large numbers, some from Conservative congregations.*
>
> *We [eventually] developed the concept of "Synaplex" – multiple worship opportunities – so that we could leave the classical Reform service essentially the same (though we've warmed it up a bit over the years), but add all of these other opportunities. The notion is the sum of the parts is greater than the sum of the whole. If you have only one worship service, you get a number of people. But if you have two worship services, you get a much larger pool of people who will show up. So we have seven or eight kinds of services. We run them concurrently – there's always two on Saturday mornings, and now there will always be [at least] two on Friday nights. Some people would never set foot in one or the other. It's transformed the way the congregation offers worship. It attracts people.*

Temple Sinai now offers a "classical" service at 5:30pm and another "contemporary" service at 6:00pm and/or 7:30pm every single Friday night. To catch a glimpse of the incredible breadth of tefillah at Sinai, one need only look at the monthly options for Friday night worship including – among other things – off-site tefillah, tefillah specifically geared toward young adults (in their 20s and 30s), tefillah designed for families with children, and jazz-inspired tefillah. As Cantor Barbara Green joked,

"It's like 'pick your poison!' (laughter) Whatever you want to do, we've got it. It's all there."

Saturday morning worship is somewhat less varied than Friday night worship, but it is nevertheless multifaceted. On most Shabbat mornings there are two services at 10:30am: one in the main sanctuary, and one in the alternative (smaller) sanctuary. The main sanctuary service is classical Reform with a choir, organ, cantor, and rabbi. The "*minyan* service" (as congregants call it) is a "contemporary" service, described by Rabbi Klein in the following way:

> *We say "contemporary," but it's actually more traditional, but with guitar. The shaliach tzibur plays guitar, we have percussion instruments, and a rabbi also leads the service. It's much more a sense of participation, where people are davenning and singing together, almost exclusively in Hebrew, the entire service.*

In addition to the two services that happen every Saturday morning – the "main" and "*minyan*" services – there is a lay-led *minyan* once/month and a family service (for those with young children) once/month.

Over the years there has been some tension among the clergy regarding the various worship styles. Some feel more comfortable with the "classical" model of worship and others prefer the "contemporary." Cantor Barbara Green has been especially dedicated to maintaining a weekly service that is classical Reform:

> *I grew up in an Orthodox atmosphere, so I have the Orthodox sound in my head... the chazzan (cantor) leading the congregation, wailing above the congregation, everyone going (mumble mumble), and the kids running around. But I was also a classically trained musician, and sang for many years in churches in New York. So I have that sound in my head [too]. When I found Reform Judaism... it fit the bill for me, because I can have that experience of tefillah as I remembered it, and also have the experience of a reverence and a beauty that I needed in my own kind of worship.*

[For me], the idea of having guitars and all this warm fuzzy stuff going on doesn't feel like prayer to me. It feels like a kumsitz (sitting around the campfire). It feels like everybody is just kind of singing along... but for me, it's empty. I find that a very empty experience. I don't enjoy it. I love either (traditional) davenning or high church. The camp-y, folk-y, guitar-y thing is really hard for me. Really hard for me. Unless it's done so exquisitely well, it's extremely hard for me. [I think prayer should be] an inspirational and exquisite experience for people... to get down to that wonderful, worshipful, spiritual feeling.

Rabbi Klein, on the other hand, feels much more comfortable with the "contemporary" style:

I grew up in a classical Reform suburban congregation, and it always felt like there was this very large distance between me and what was going on, which made it hard for me to find myself in worship. So I'm driven by a sense of finding yourself in worship: not having too much distance, but not being [smothered]. [It's] having a balance so that as people, individual worshippers can find their own space, and be drawn into community at the same time. I think that, as a rabbi or shaliach tzibbur, there's a delicate balance between having that distance and then, you know, having too much of where it's you and a million people praying [together] all the time. So I think [it's] a balance between having that eruv, a sense of doing your own tefillah, but also being in a communal space.

You know, this morning I taught Va'yetze... who are the angels on the ladder? [I taught] a commentary about the angels actually not being something outside of us, but being <u>in</u> us. So when we say "God was in this place," the makom is us. So for me, what I said about ideally praying in a community and [also] having individual space... it actually feels inauthentic to me if I'm not having my own prayer experience. As I've gotten older, I've used [prayer] to re-charge myself internally, so that I'm not doing my external work exclusively. Prayer helps me to build kind of an inner sanctuary, in an Abraham Joshua Heschel way, that carries me through whatever's going on in the outside world.

Interestingly, although Cantor Green and Rabbi Klein prefer very different *styles* of worship, their worship *goals* are more or less the same: to create a prayer experience that is meaningful and feels personally satisfying for themselves and for others. Along with the other clergy at Temple Sinai, both women want tefillah to move people – emotionally, cognitively, and spiritually. They simply have different ideas about the best

way to reach that goal. As we will see in later chapters, tefillah goals are not necessarily the same at every synagogue, and it is interesting that despite widely divergent modes of worship at Sinai, the worship goals remain almost the same.

Tefillah Education at Temple Sinai

The primary goal of tefillah education at Temple Sinai is to make prayer an accessible, meaningful experience for children and adults so they will feel comfortable integrating Jewish prayer into their lives. Tirza Friedland, Director of Youth and Family Education, explains her perspective on tefillah education:

> *I feel very very strongly that being able to pick up a siddur and read any prayer in Hebrew is not the skill I want my students to get out of the program. In the amount of time that we have, there is no way that these kids are going to become fluent Hebrew readers and understand what they're reading. It's not possible. [Of course,] I want them to be able to recognize and identify and read key prayers, but more importantly, I want them to have an idea of what these prayers are about, where they come from, why Jews pray in community, what it's all about, and ultimately what does it mean to me as a 12 year old, 13 year old, or 11 year old growing up in the 21st century?*
>
> *[This is] because I believe that five years from now, ten years from now, when they hit problems in life they may not have now, when they bump into the stuff that life throws at you, that being able to read the words in the prayer-book may not give them the source of strength that they need. But if they can think back, "When we studied the V'ahavta, I thought about X, Y, and Z," then perhaps that will bring them back into the prayer-book, or just give them a source of strength. If somewhere in their souls, and somewhere in their minds, and somewhere in their hearts, they remember "there was a prayer – something I studied, or I learned about... that God is my salvation, or God is my rock"... that vocabulary, then it might take them back into the prayer-book.*
>
> *So our goal is not fluent Hebrew reading or fluent davenning. If we're preparing our kids to go out into the world, and their Judaism is supposed to be the center inside that they can turn to, then fluent Hebrew reading is not what they need. [Therefore] our goal is a real sense of, "Why pray? What do all these prayers mean? And why pray Jewishly?"*

Educators at Temple Sinai have made a conscious choice to focus more on the affective, cognitive, and spiritual elements of prayer ("How do I feel about prayer? What do I believe? What is my '*makom*' for prayer?") rather than on the behavioral elements ("How do I pray?"). Indeed, Tirza freely admits that "*kavanna* is a real strength of our program; *keva* is not."

There are three primary components of religious education for children at Temple Sinai: youth education, family education, and "Weekday Torah." All students attend religious school classes (called "youth education") once a week, and they attend three family education programs per year with their parents (one per season – fall, winter, spring). Students in grades four through seven also attend an additional day of midweek Hebrew studies called "Weekday Torah."[101]

Tefillah is integrated into all three components of religious education at Temple Sinai. At the beginning of youth and family education classes there is a school-wide "opening tefillah" in the alternative sanctuary. It begins with Hebrew songs one might find at a camp song session, such as *David Melech Yisrael*. Two song leaders (one adult and one teenage *madrich*) play instruments such as guitar and keyboard, and they encourage participation by using hand motions, body movements, clapping, games, and more. Students sit by grade (*chavurah*) with their teachers and/or parents, and the words to *V'ahavta* hang on large banners at the front of the sanctuary.

Eventually the singing stops and Rabbi Lev Schiffman – whom everyone calls "Rabbi Lev" or "Lev" – leads one or two rounds of "*Lev Omer*" (like the game "Simon Says," but in Hebrew). Finally, when Lev has everyone's attention, the tefillah officially

[101] Information taken from the congregational handbook/flyer for youth and family education

begins with *Modeh Ani* (on Sunday mornings) or *Hinei Mah Tov* (on Wednesday afternoons) and continues with *Barchu*, *Sh'ma*, and *V'ahavta* – without the use of prayer-books. Tefillah ends with the recitation of the blessing for the study of Torah (*la'asok b'divrei Torah*), and Lev or Tirza dismisses the students one *chavurah* at a time.

I must admit I was surprised to find so few formal liturgical prayers during Temple Sinai's youth / family education tefillah. Modern Hebrew is abundant, but liturgical Hebrew is rather sparse. I asked Tirza why they decided to include certain prayers and leave others out:

> *I think it was kind of organic. You need the Barchu because that's where you bring everybody together, that's the call to worship. And the Sh'ma is key. That used to be all we did. Then about two and a half or three years ago we started – when we did the year of Torah and we wrote a Torah scroll ourselves – we did Parashat Ha'shavua. We presented something about the weekly Torah portion in the opening circle [i.e. opening tefillah]. And then Rabbi Lev really wanted to do the V'ahavta and teach everyone to chant it, so that's really when we started to add that. In the first year, I think we just did a couple of lines at a time. Now we do the whole thing. The kids who are new just sort of pick it up, and then once they get in sixth grade they actually have a whole class that looks at it, takes it apart... what's in this prayer? "Oh, what is that word? It's uch'tavtam? I never heard that right!" It wasn't like anybody sat down and said, "What prayers should we do?"*

As Tirza explains, the structure of the school's current tefillah did not necessarily come from a conscious plan by Sinai's educators; its development has been organic. That being said, the desire to lead the children in only a few short prayers rather than all the key prayers in a regular *shachrit*, *mincha*, or *ma'ariv* service was entirely intentional. Behavior – the ability to *daven* a full Jewish service – is simply not Temple Sinai's educational goal. A shorter, more interactive tefillah experience better suits Tirza's goals of engendering emotional, cognitive, and spiritual attachments to prayer.

If we take a step back to examine the historical development of tefillah at Temple Sinai, we would find that tefillah and Hebrew language study were barely present in education at the synagogue prior to the arrival of Rabbi Lev in the early 1990s:

> *[When] I came in 1990... the congregation had a classic Sunday school. There was very little Hebrew taught. If you wanted to become a bar mitzvah, it was a two-track system: Hebrew school and Sunday school. In one swoop, we went "Whap!" [and added Hebrew to the curriculum]. We lost a few families, people who said, "Why are we doing Hebrew? I never learned Hebrew." Fine. We just plowed ahead. So now we [began] doing tefillah in school... bringing more tefillah in, bringing in b'rachot...*
>
> *Something happened that was very important, very early on. Kara Levin, who still works for us, had just come from the [NFTY] Israel Trip. This is, for me, a foundational story! She comes back from the Israel trip, end of August, and we have a little service in the chapel to welcome back the kids who went. And she literally pins me to a wall and says, "You have got to fix us! You've got to change this!" I said, "What is it?" She says, "We're known as the 'Sinai kids.' They know who we are!" I said, "What are you talking about?" "When the NFTY leaders were dividing up which confirmation classes would do which services, they skipped us because they know we don't know anything!" I said, "What?!" "They said, 'Well, you're Temple Sinai." This young bright woman – whose parents grew up at Sinai and whose grandparents are still members –[was outraged at] this idea of being skipped because they couldn't go from Barchu to Sh'ma.*

After hearing Kara's anguish, and encountering other bright students who were similarly frustrated with their lack of Hebraic and tefillah-based knowledge, Lev embarked on a journey to introduce far more Hebrew (both modern and liturgical) into Sinai's educational system. Rabbi Lev, who is now the "Senior Educator" at Sinai and oversees all facets of education in the congregation, feels strongly about increasing skills-based competency among Sinai's youth so they will no longer be the "Sinai kids who don't know anything." While Sinai's youth education tefillah does not include the full liturgical rubric found in traditional tefillot, the fact that there is tefillah every single

week – with at least three prayers recited entirely in Hebrew – is a major accomplishment for Lev, Tirza, and the rest of Sinai's educational leadership.

If tefillah is not entirely traditional on Sunday mornings and Wednesday afternoons (when youth/family education takes place), it is even less so at the start of Weekday Torah sessions on Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday afternoons. Weekday Torah always begins with "tefillah," if the word "tefillah" is understood quite loosely. Tirza or one of the teachers leads a 10-15 minute tefillah experience based on a weekly theme, such as *shalom* /wholeness, *hoda'ah* / gratitude, or *makom* / refuge. As Tirza explains,

> *We really try to bring a meditative or reflective element to [Weekday Torah tefillah]. It's very creative, dynamic... taking the essence of the prayers sometimes and working it back, as opposed to just saying the prayers.*

The following is an example of how Tirza has led creative tefillah with the students at the beginning of Weekday Torah:

> *With the kids, for Sh'ma, [I used wheel-within-a-wheel]: Basically, you have one circle of people on the outside, and one circle on the inside; they're facing each other, and they talk to each other. First I asked the question "What do you like to listen to?" [Students answered the question to the person facing them in the inner/outer circle.] Then we changed people and I asked, "What are things in your life that are unique, that there's only one of?" I remember because as I walked around listening, one young woman said, "my family... there's only one 'my family.' There are lots of families, but there's only one 'my family.'" I was like, "Yes!!" And then it was, "Well, take what you like to listen to, and that one thing, and put them together... What does it look like? What does it feel like?" Part of the wheel within a wheel technique that I do is deep listening, where the first person has 45 seconds to talk, and the other person is just listening. You don't nod, you don't speak; you just listen. And then you switch. Then at the end I said, "Just in the same way that when I was talking you were completely listening to me, that's what God is doing when we say Sh'ma. God is totally listening to us." And then we said Sh'ma.*

Another Sh'ma technique I did with them which worked really really well had to do with "makom." Everybody finds their makom, and then, when you're ready, just start to say the Sh'ma. Don't chant it, just say it. People start at different times, and you get this cacophony of all these different people saying it at different times, and then I ring the bell, and then we said it together as a community. We've done a lot of that sort of thing.

Weekday Torah tefillah sometimes takes place with the whole school, and sometimes it occurs within each individual classroom. I observed tefillah in the classroom of a skillful teacher who led her sixth grade class in a guided meditation. The teacher encouraged the students to close their eyes, focus on their breathing, and pay attention to various parts of their bodies as she guided them. After the short meditation, she asked the students to open their eyes, and the class had a short discussion about the experience and how it was related to the theme of the week, "*Makom*."

Tefillah at Temple Sinai is not defined by the recitation of Hebrew prayers in a particular order; rather, educators use "tefillah" to help students think and feel in particular ways. Through tefillah students work out their beliefs about God, their feelings about Judaism, and their understanding of themselves as spiritual beings. Tirza and many of the teachers speak in soft, gentle, peaceful tones, and their voices help to create the spiritual "*makom*" within the walls of the synagogue to which they aim.

Though one might assume that the congregational leaders would be conflicted about which style of tefillah to educate toward (since styles of tefillah are so drastically different from one Shabbat service to the next at Temple Sinai), it has not come up as a major educational issue. What kind of worship to educate for does not necessarily matter if the school's goals are to create a prayerful environment and to engender *kavanna*. However, one issue that the school faced for many years is which *siddur* to use in

educational settings. For the past fifty years Sinai has used several different *siddurim* (including *Gates of Prayer*, the *Union Prayer Book*, and an alternative *siddur* created by Rabbi Lev) in its various services, and the school had to decide which prayer-book to use for educational purposes. That problem has been solved this year by the publication of *Mishkan T'filah*, the Reform movement's new *siddur*, since the congregation will use *Mishkan T'filah* in all its services from now on (and naturally, it will be used for education as well).

The "Distinctive Torah" of Temple Sinai: What Makes Sinai Unique?

Shabbat Exchange

One of the most innovative and successful components of Sinai's educational system is a program called "Shabbat Exchange." To understand how and why Shabbat Exchange came to be, one must note that Rabbi Lev is a strong advocate for "linking the silos" in Jewish education[102]:

> *We're the "Al shlosha d'varim" people. I really think it's a balance between Avodah, G'milut Hasadim, and Torah. They should be overlapping circles; get the silos to come down! The Avodah world overlaps into the G'milut Hasadim world. And the Torah world overlaps with both. It's three circles, overlapping. It's [about] integration.*

As important as it is to combine all three "circles" of Torah (study), *avodah* (tefillah), and *g'milut chasadim*, Rabbi Lev has worked especially hard to combine the first two – study and prayer. Shabbat Exchange developed as a way for sixth graders and their parents to *learn* about the rubric of the Shabbat morning service and *experience* the Shabbat morning service in one fell swoop. For eight weeks in a row, instead of coming to "youth

[102] See Jack Wertheimer, "Linking the Silos: How to Accelerate the Momentum in Jewish Education Today," The AVI CHAI Foundation, December 2005, http://www.avi-chai.org/Static/Binaries/Publications/Linking%20The%20Silos_0.pdf

education" on Sundays or Wednesdays, students attend Shabbat Exchange with their parents on Shabbat mornings. There is an hour-long learning component, during which Lev teaches the "architecture" of the Shabbat morning service, followed by attendance at one of the Shabbat morning services offered at Sinai.

Shabbat Exchange has been highly successful, in that students and parents who finish it feel much more comfortable with Shabbat morning worship. According to Rabbi Lev,

> *Shabbat Exchange began as a volunteer program [five years ago]. But the parents' evaluations were so out-of-the-park that we made it a "kind of mandatory" program, and then we made it a "really mandatory" program. The parents' evaluations said, "It is the best thing we've ever done because now we understand the rubrics of the siddur, we're comfortable in our own skin!"*

Indeed one mother I met, Jody Cohen, was thrilled with her experiences in Shabbat Exchange:

> *I didn't understand the mechanics of the service until I went through Shabbat Exchange with [my son] Michael. I think I gained an understanding of the order [of the service], why things are [in that order], what the difference is, the role of each of the prayers. I love that I learned about standing for the Barchu... that it's the leader who calls you all and starts, and then everybody joins in. I didn't know that. So it's those things. And I feel more empowered. I know what to expect, I know how to participate [in a Shabbat morning service]. I have a greater comfort. And it makes me feel more interested in coming and participating.*

Many synagogues offer family education programs, but few have anything like Shabbat Exchange: eight weeks in a row, for parents and their sixth-grade children (siblings often come along), specifically focused on Shabbat morning worship, combining study and prayer. The timing of Shabbat Exchange is especially appropriate, since it helps parents and children feel comfortable with Shabbat morning worship right

before they begin to attend services regularly as a result of the b'nai mitzvah boom in seventh grade.

Emphasis on B'rachot

Just as the Talmud begins with a tractate called "B'rachot," Rabbi Lev is adamant that Jewish education ought to begin with *b'rachot*. He believes that *b'rachot* (blessings) are the "building blocks of tefillah" and "should be taught as naturally as *bikkur holim*." According to Lev, Judaism is a "path of response," as one can see in the prayer *Elu D'varim*: just as we respond to those who are sick in particular ways, prayer is also a matter of knowing when and how to *respond*. Lev explains that "we do them [i.e. blessings] when they're needed, when they're called for. My goal is to [help children] build a competent consciousness, skill, and desire to respond" to life and people in Jewish ways.

Rabbi Lev sees the recitation of blessings as an integral part of Jewish living and therefore an integral part of both youth and family education. He wants people to develop "a sense that *b'rachot* are natural, like breathing." For example, he says, "When kids go off to mitzvah corps, they say a *b'racha*. When they start studying, they say '*la'asok b'divrei Torah*.' I consider that tefillah. Those are tefillah moments." Perhaps most important for Lev is that parents learn when and how to say blessings at home:

> *We now do birkat banim at the pre-school's Friday morning pre-Shabbat Shabbat service. We brought in birkat banim... think about that! These are new parents, who are learning to bless their children! That's probably a more profound tefillah moment than Rosh Hashanah. We give out the Shabbat pamphlets from Behrman House, all the parents have them, and we do birkat banim [with them] in the family ed program. Tomorrow's family ed program with kindergarten is on Sh'ma Al Ha'mitah – how to do the [bedtime] Sh'ma at home. If the family does*

Sh'ma at home on a regular basis. I consider that a greater tefillah success than coming to the High Holy Days. [Parents and kids] make a "Sh'ma pillowcase," and we have kids who tell us they take that pillowcase to college! Imagine that!

The focus on blessings is perfectly in line with Temple Sinai's educational goal of engendering *kavanna,* since the recitation of blessings is one way that prayer can play a meaningful role in a person's life. Lev and Tirza work hard to weave blessings into the fabric of youth and family education, and as a result, blessings have indeed become one important form of "tefillah education" at Temple Sinai.

Teacher Tefillah

If Lev wants Sinai's *students* and *parents* to feel more connected to prayer (especially through study and the recitation of *b'rachot*), Tirza wants Sinai's *teachers* to feel more connected to prayer. She realizes that prayer is every bit as important for the synagogue's teachers as it is for the students, and she therefore decided to require "teacher tefillah" before every Weekday Torah session:

This year I added a fifteen-minute block to the teachers' contract so that for fifteen minutes before we go in to teach, there is a teachers' tefillah. One teacher supervises the students and the rest of us gather together for a little tefillah. Each time, a different teacher has the opportunity to bring a prayer, a poem, a meditation, a song... whatever it might be, it [is meant to] give us that transition. Because we're all coming off of busy days as well. If we're really serious about teaching Torah, then we need to be in the mindset of teaching Torah. We need to stop for a moment and say, "Okay, how do I get into that mindset?" Also, it helps to create community. We talk so much about learning communities, but what about praying communities?

I haven't asked the teachers, but I think they like [teacher tefillah], and I think it does do what I wanted it to... which is to ground the teachers as a community before we go into what really is holy work. You know... it creates a framework or a container for that.

Each week there is a different theme for teacher tefillah (the same theme used in student tefillah), and teachers sign up to lead. On the day that I visited teacher tefillah, there were twelve teachers sitting around a table, and the weekly theme was "*Makom*." A male teacher handed out two pages with texts / meditations / teachings related to the theme, and the rest of us silently read the texts for about five minutes. The following is just one example of the texts we read:

> *Awareness Meditation*
>
> *Place in Hebrew is "Makom," one of the names of God. The Place of Creation with all its worlds and dimensions is nothing other than God Himself in the context of Makom. When we meditate on Place/Makom we are gazing onto God. The whole of creation is nothing other than God.*
>
> *When we focus on Makom we awaken the awareness of the absolute One within our self/mind.*

After giving us time to quietly read the texts, the teacher led a short discussion which mainly focused on the students: What do we want for them? What have we tried? How do we create a *makom* that's good for them? There was brief mention of our own (i.e. the teachers') prayer lives, but the conversation primarily focused on the students' prayer lives.

I found it interesting that "teacher tefillah" wasn't exactly tefillah, although I should not have been that surprised since "student tefillah" is not really "tefillah" in a traditional sense either. I assumed there would be some kind of prayer or ritual component to the teacher tefillah, which was not the case. I asked Tirza about it:

> *Nicki: When I was [at teacher tefillah], it was a reflection, discussion... But it wasn't "prayer" in a ritual sense. So I was wondering, what has been the balance with the teachers? Is it usually more like what I experienced, or is it usually a "lets do a prayer together" kind of thing?*

Tirza: It's all been that reflective thing. It's creating that makom tefillah, but it's not...

Nicki: ...tefillah.

Tirza: Yeah. As you can see, the teachers feel more comfortable with kavanna than with keva. One of the things that's really astonishing in our program is that almost all of my teachers are comfortable talking about God. At least using the word, or Adonai, or whatever they use. That's huge. Talia [Sinai's Director of Adolescent Education] did her masters thesis on teaching God in Reform synagogue schools. She did some survey work, and it's kind of appalling how few schools actually teach about God. And that's not a problem here. I mean, we definitely do. We use that language and we do talk about God.

Teacher tefillah is an excellent lens through which we can view tefillah education at Temple Sinai. Although the ability to recognize and recite certain Hebrew prayers is valued, it is not the primary goal of tefillah education in the congregation. The goal is to create a space and a mood that is conducive to prayer, to encourage discussion about God and religion, and to help people access and express their inner spiritual lives. Prayer – at least in a traditional sense – is not part of teacher "tefillah" at all. Rather, it is about centering yourself, distinguishing between the sacred and the profane, and reflecting on your spirituality and the spiritual lives of your students.

Role of a Guru / Personal Guide

Although few people spoke explicitly about the role of a "guru" or "personal guide" at Temple Sinai, I found it to be an interesting addition to tefillah education which could be developed even further. Several of the rabbis at Sinai are extremely magnetic, charismatic people, and they seem to draw people in through their charisma. At least one or two of the rabbis are naturally blessed with the ability to help people feel spiritually alive, and they seem to serve as "gurus" for people on their Jewish journeys. Just as

Hasidic Jews look to their Rebbe for spiritual guidance and sustenance, Sinai congregants look to their rabbis for the same things.

One of the people I interviewed, Joseph Katz, is a former personal trainer who is now in his first year of rabbinical school due to the mentorship and guidance he received from rabbis at Temple Sinai. He taught at Sinai for a number of years, where he discovered very interesting parallels between personal training and tefillah education. As a personal trainer, you work one-on-one with people to help them develop better skills, techniques, and understandings about exercise. The same type of thing can happen in tefillah education, which Sinai has begun to do through "Guide Rabbis" – the "guide" helps students and their families develop skills, techniques, and understandings about tefillah as they journey through the 18-month process toward bar/bat mitzvah.

Personal trainers also provide encouragement for those who have trouble keeping up with regular exercise routines. A personal tefillah guide could conceivably do the same thing – encourage people to keep attending and studying tefillah, even when they don't feel like it. Joseph gave the following example to illustrate the importance of having someone help you establish a tefillah routine:

> *I played sports all my life. How many times did I not want to go to practice? But I did. Can you learn to play an instrument or learn to dance [by doing it] once a week? You can have fun with it, but can you ever really learn it? No, I don't think so. [Tefillah] doesn't have to be every day, but it could be. It's really hard! It's a hard thing to learn! There's such potential for [it] to be transformative in our lives and be with us throughout our lives. And it's not limited to how strong our bodies are. It's something you can do all your life! [You can] build that... [but you need] that practice... without it, you can never really do it. It's hard to build momentum.*

Joseph touched on the importance of a guide, coach, trainer, or guru who can help us do things on a regular basis that we might not choose to do regularly if left alone. At

Temple Sinai, the Guide Rabbi provides important support and direction for the family who is preparing for bar/bat mitzvah. However, I wonder if the concept of "Guide Rabbi" could be extended even further to enhance tefillah education at the congregation?

Closing Thoughts

Since Temple Sinai is a Reform synagogue, it is not driven by the standards of *halachah*. As a result, tefillah education does not focus on the habitual nature of prayer, nor does it aim to teach students to *daven* in a traditional sense. While most students educated at Temple Sinai do leave with a grasp of the key prayers in a Jewish service, they are not trained to become expert Hebrew readers or steeped in liturgical knowledge. As is hopefully evident from this chapter, the goals of tefillah education at Sinai are focused primarily in the realm of *kavanna* – on beliefs, feelings, theology, and a sense of spirituality – which makes it very difficult to measure success:

> *Nicki: How do you measure success in tefillah education?*
> *Tirza: I don't think we really can.*

To succeed at tefillah education, according to Sinai's definition of success, is to internalize prayer, to feel that it is an integral part of one's life, to explore one's beliefs about God, and to find prayer personally meaningful. Teachers may be able to measure students' Hebrew reading abilities, but ultimately that does not get to the core of what Sinai is trying to do. Tirza recognizes that there is an inherent tension between teaching for *keva* and teaching for *kavanna*, and she acknowledges the price Sinai pays for its choice to focus on *kavanna*:

> *We've done a pretty good job of beginning to set up kavanna, and the purpose of tefillah, and that praying in community is important. But I don't think our students are comfortable with the siddur, I don't think*

> *they're all that comfortable with the words of the prayers. The balance is really really hard. I want the students to understand the purpose of prayer, and to actually play with, "What does it feel like to pray?" And [I want them] to feel good about it – [to feel] that praying is a good thing to do, and [realize that] it can come from the words on the page, [and] it can come from what's in your heart. I think what we're striving for is... to try to go beyond the performance piece, go beyond "I know this" and into "What does this mean for me?" I think even the little kids can do that.*

Through the use of creative tefillah, an emphasis on *b'rachot*, the development of Shabbat Exchange (which includes parents), teachers' comfort with God-talk, and much more, Sinai is well on its way to achieving its goals in the realm of tefillah education.

~ Chapter Four ~

Behaving: Tefillah Education at Kehillat Beth Israel

Kehillat Beth Israel: An Overview

Kehillat Beth Israel (KBI) is a suburban Conservative synagogue in the Eastern United States with a membership of approximately nine hundred households. According to educator Linda Kohn, KBI is located in a "very nice, married, stable community," where "the divorce rate is low" and there is "no 'bad' or 'seedy' neighborhood." KBI considers itself to be a traditional, right-wing Conservative *shul*, and many of its families come from Orthodox or "Conservadox" backgrounds. Rabbi Steve Goldberg, who has been the rabbi of KBI for almost thirty years, explains his view of the congregation as "a place for non-Orthodox Jews who want intensive Jewish living":

> *My advocacy has been that there are a variety of spiritual paths that a person can follow. That same person may follow different paths at different parts of their lifetime, and different people in the [same] household may follow different paths. We've really had three paths – Torah, which is the learning path; Avodah she'balev, spirituality [including tefillah]; and g'milut chasadim, the hands-on stuff. Through focus groups and our engagement with strategic planning, we've actually increased to two others as well, which clearly are very important to people. One is the "chevre" path. There's something sacred about building a bond of friendships and being involved in a kehillah kedosha. And then the fifth path is the path of people-hood – engaging with Jewish communities, Jewish issues, Jewish people, Jewish life in places throughout the U.S, throughout the world, and throughout Israel. We see a lot of that. So there are five paths.*
>
> *My view of the world is that we are a place for non-Orthodox Jews who want intensive Jewish living, in any of those five foci. Maybe I'm wrong, but it's probably the case that if you think of all the non-Orthodox synagogues in [this area], it's unlikely that any of them have as many people who come for tefillah, as many people in adult learning, as many*

people [involved] in Israel stuff and world stuff, as many people in social action stuff. That's my guess.

Nicki: But it's not just happen-stance, right? It was intentional?

Rabbi Goldberg: Totally intentional. We made a choice. We attract people who are looking for intensive Jewish living; that's our goal.

Rabbi Goldberg is not exaggerating when he describes KBI as a place for "intensive Jewish living." Out of 900 households – approximately 1300-1350 people – the synagogue has about 400 adults who are involved in tefillah on a weekly basis, 200 adults involved in regular adult learning, 150 adults involved in ongoing Israel programming, and another "couple hundred" adults involved in *tikkun olam* endeavors. As Rabbi Goldberg notes,

30% [of the congregation involved in tefillah] on a weekly basis is not a trivial number! And if you look at it monthly, it's probably more like 40-50%. So that's a pretty good number. We get a lot of people involved in a lot of stuff. There's some overlap, but it's a lot of different people.

The desire of the leadership at KBI to attract a core group of people who favor "intensive Jewish living" has led to significant recruitment efforts. Though Rabbi Goldberg humbly dismisses those efforts as common in the Conservative movement, he concedes, "We're better at it than some." He recognizes that "synagogues are defined by the culture of the people who are engaged," and for that reason, he has made concerted efforts to bring people into the community who are "particularly passionate" about Jewish life. Cantor Jacob Levy, who has been at KBI for twenty-five years, notes that the congregation maintains a "critical mass" of people committed to Jewish life today because there are "interested families who were already interested – already committed davenners, committed Jews in their homes – who moved into the community." He explains how the rabbi encouraged young, committed Jews to come to KBI:

Rabbi Goldberg was part of the process of getting them here. What he would do in the earlier years of his rabbinate, he would sniff out, try to find people who were interested in possibly moving to this area, and then he would go wine and dine them. He would go woo them, saying, "let me take you around, let me show you." Yes, I want you to move here because we want to build this community; I'm not going to be all secretive about it. But let me [help], let me show you. He would find realtors. He would woo people to come here, and he did that for, I don't know, maybe... somewhere between 30 and 60 families moved to the congregation because they were specifically woo-ed by him. And then there were other families who said, "Oh, my friend said I should check this out." And then it began to snowball a little bit.

Educator Linda Kohn, who has been at KBI for almost twenty years, told me that an important component of Rabbi Goldberg's "woo-ing" was helping newcomers find affordable housing within walking distance of the synagogue, thereby attracting people who walk to *shul* on Shabbat (i.e. traditional Jews) and creating a community of KBI congregants within a small radius of the synagogue. Those recruitment efforts seem to have been successful, since today the congregation is defined by an extremely active and well-educated laity who are indeed committed to "intensive Jewish living."

KBI calls itself a "right-wing, traditional" Conservative synagogue, and it seems to me that the nomenclature is primarily due to decisions regarding tefillah: the community insists on a "complete *davenning*" with a "full *Musaf* and *Kedushah*" and a "complete annual Torah reading,"[103] unlike many other Conservative congregations. KBI chooses not to use the Conservative movement's *Sim Shalom* as their primary *siddur*; instead they use a black volume called *The Sabbath and Festival Prayerbook* which was distributed by the Conservative Movement for those who want a more "complete" liturgy. It is interesting to note that when I asked Cantor Levy about the things that make tefillah successful at KBI, he responded,

[103] As explained to me by both the educator and cantor

> *It is the fact that we haven't compromised our main minyanim. This is a congregation where, if it's in the prayer-book, we say it. We haven't started with a triennial Torah reading, we haven't cut out repetitions of the Amidah. The davenning is traditional, and that's what draws traditional people, people who want a traditional Conservative congregation. People say, "Oh, this is what I was looking for!" ... Shabbos morning [is successful] because we haven't cut things that are traditional about it.*

Another way in which the community sees itself as "traditional" is in the language it uses. Hebrew and Yiddishkeit appear frequently (such as *Shabbos*, *shul* and *davenning*), and I heard many people use the Ashkenazi pronunciation of key Hebrew words (such as "min-YA-num" for *minyanim*). The synagogue's identity as "traditional" – particularly in the realms of language and worship – is very important to both the professional leadership and the laity of KBI.

Shabbat at KBI

The hallmark of KBI is its vibrant Shabbat culture. While I was studying KBI its regular building was under construction, and I was unable to witness their "usual" Shabbat scene. However, everyone I met specifically mentioned the experience of Shabbat at KBI, taking great pride in the Shabbat community that comes together every week for study, prayer, and socializing. On a regular Shabbat in their own building, KBI provides many different entry points for engagement. As I noted earlier, approximately four hundred adults come to Shabbat morning worship on a weekly basis, along with a significant number of children.[104] In addition to the main service, which typically runs from 9:00am-12:15pm, KBI offers a significant array of other Shabbat "addresses"

[104] The number of adult worshippers at Shabbat services remains that high almost every week of the year, even on weeks without life-cycle events such as b'nai mitzvah or baby namings.

throughout the morning: Torah Portion Study Group, Adult Learners' class, Adult Learners' Minyan, Torah Reading Chug (grades 4-7), Torah for Tots (infants through pre-K, with their parents and/or grandparents), Mini Minyan (K-1st grade), Mini Congo (2nd-3rd grade), Junior Congregation (4th-5th grade), Kadima (6th-7th grade), and Teen Shmooze (post b'nai mitzvah and up).

Most of these "addresses" (as Rabbi Goldberg calls them) are available every single week of the year – rain or shine, holiday or no holiday, every single season. On top of that, there are family education programs on Shabbat morning sixteen times during the year, and the synagogue offers a variety of activities through the national program called "Synaplex" once a month. Around 12:15pm, directly following all of the morning activities, there is a community-wide Kiddush luncheon, sponsored by the synagogue. As Linda reminded me, "it's a significant expense for the congregation, but it is part of the budget of Shabbat programming for the community" because the leadership sees it as a crucial part of building a strong Shabbat-oriented culture.

It seems to me that the Shabbat offerings at KBI are both more *varied* and more *consistent* than in most North American synagogues. They are more varied in that there are at least three or four options for adults every single week, and there are at least four or five options for children as well. They are more consistent in that they take place every single week of the year. Many congregations offer "Junior Congregation" or "Tot Shabbat" on a monthly basis, but it is rare to find a synagogue with so many options every single week. I think it is worth including Rabbi Goldberg's comments regarding the Shabbat morning experience at KBI:

> *We have a substantial sit down Kiddush luncheon every week, which really enforces the sense of chevre, and is a real incentive to come with*

your kids. The kids are in their programs, and the adults are in their programs, and everyone comes together for meals and activities. Some people stay all day!

...We created a socialization pattern into prayer. There are people who can be, you know, Avraham Avinu or Sarah Imenu, the lonely person of faith. They can come by themselves, pray to God, and leave. [But] that's not most people. Most people need to feel part of something. And that's why having this large Kiddush luncheon socialization, and stuff going on at all ages and stages every week, is really important.

We have worked hard to provide comfortable children's addresses on Shabbat, and a variety of adult paths [too]. That's why Synaplex was an interesting concept, easy for us to adopt when we were asked to be part of it, because we've always been doing that! The idea of – we have some people involved in yoga, some people involved in meditation, some people involved in parshah study, some people who are involved in parent education stuff when there's a family service, some people involved in preparing for the Torah reading, some people involved in preparing to lead the davenning, some people involved in Torah study at the end of the service... I mean, there's a lot of stuff going on!

Nicki: Many entry points...

Rabbi Goldberg: Yes, many entry points, even in the [main] service. There's stuff like the Mi Shebeirach we have [when people come up to the readers' table to say the names of loved ones]... that's time consuming! But there are a lot of people now who really look forward... for them it's a high point, that they can have a place they can come and offer the name of their loved one in a collective, communal prayer to God for healing. That's probably 75-100 people who come up to offer those kinds of names to us [each week]. We also encourage many life-cycle functions to be celebrated every Shabbat. That's one of the reasons why we don't permit more than one bar or bat mitzvah, even though [other] synagogues usually do. We leave room for an aufruf, a baby naming, an anniversary, this, that... all kinds of stuff going on. And then, of course, people know we're going to have speakers with lunch n'learns, and I advertise topics that I'm going to give sermons about, for certain segments of the population. Kids come back... they read Torah the anniversary of their bar/bat mitzvah, same as adults who do adult bar/bat mitzvah. So there's really a lot going on. There are a lot of small pieces, but when you put them together, it becomes significant.

Shabbat is the highlight of the Jewish week; it is also clearly the highlight of Jewish life at Kehillat Beth Israel. It is the time when a large percentage of the congregation comes together for learning, prayer, celebration, and community.

Tefillah Education at KBI

Tefillah education for youth at Kehillat Beth Israel emphasizes behavior: students learn the *keva* of Jewish prayer, developing the proficiency to *daven* with the community. While the rabbi, cantor, and educator all recognize the importance of believing (i.e. *kavanna*, intention, understanding the meaning of prayers) and belonging (being part of a community), it is clear that the educational system is designed to enhance students' abilities to *daven* and serve as *shlichei tzibbur* (prayer leaders) in traditional Jewish settings. Linda explains that the overall goal at KBI is for students "to feel comfortable and confident" in Jewish prayer settings; however, she believes that this goal must be reached through the use of "multiple impacts, not only [in] our setting." As a result, KBI tries to push programs such as Jewish camping, youth group (USY), and high school in Israel, emphasizing that synagogue worship "can't be the only experience" if children are to reach "our prayer goals." Since the overall goals of comfort in and confidence with tefillah cannot be achieved through religious school alone, Linda and the rest of the KBI leadership has decided to focus its tefillah education primarily on behavior – on developing Hebrew skills, learning prayers, and being able to participate in and lead traditional *davenning*.

At KBI, tefillah is viewed within the framework of traditional *halachah*. When I asked Cantor Levy about the role of tefillah in the congregation, he stared at me

speechless. "The role?" he asked. "Yeah... what is tefillah for the congregation?" [Silence] I continued, "Let me make it even more broad, if that will help... tell me about tefillah at your congregation." [Long pause] "Well... tefillah is something we are commanded to do." For Cantor Levy, indeed for the whole educational system at KBI, Jews engage in tefillah because they are commanded to do so. As a result, Cantor Levy says, "we want to have as many people *davenning* to God, as knowledgably, and as fervently as they can." The cantor recognizes that "trying to engender *kavanna* is complicated;" therefore "with children, [tefillah education] is mostly aimed at 'here are the phonics of what you want to get out of your mouth'" along with a little bit of "the broader concepts behind that."

For Rabbi Goldberg, the goals of tefillah education are also connected to behavior – learning how to *daven* and how to lead traditional *davenning:*

> *The goal would be, depending on the individual case, A) Hebrew phonics – immersion in Hebrew phonics; B) mastery of certain basic prayers... everybody should have that, it's baseline for bar/bat mitzvah if they're going to lead; C) if you are motivated, and you're coming to a variety of prayer services, then you will gain additional fluency, additional comfort level, additional interest in learning to lead.*

It is worth noting that neither the rabbi nor the cantor is especially concerned with making prayer a meaningful, spiritual experience. They do not claim that the goals of tefillah education are primarily about believing or belonging; they accurately describe tefillah education at KBI as the process of teaching students how to lead and follow traditional *davenning* – a task the synagogue accomplishes exceedingly well.

There are a wide variety of educational "tracks" for children at KBI, all of which include tefillah. Children in Kindergarten through 2nd grade attend religious school once/week, and they may opt to sign up for "Intensive Hebrew" and/or "Primary

Enrichment" classes in addition. Children in grades 3-7 attend religious school twice a week, plus two Shabbatot (Saturdays) per month. Moreover, there is a program called "NOAM" for day school and religious school students in grades 3-8 which is run by KBI teens and meets on Shabbat afternoons several times during the year. NOAM (also called "Masorti Youth") is "an international youth movement [at which] children and teens gather to play, learn, meet new people, and grow as individuals."[105] There is a requirement for children in grades 3-7 to attend synagogue on Shabbat fourteen times during the year, and it may be fulfilled by attending special "Shabbat School" programs (i.e. family education), "Torah Chug" (see page 81 for details), Family Friday Night programs, NOAM sessions, or any of the "regular" children's *minyanim* on Shabbat mornings.

A large number of KBI families send their children to Jewish day school – either the Solomon Schechter (i.e. Conservative) day school or the local Orthodox day school – and the synagogue acknowledges that the needs of day school students are different than the needs of religious school students. Day school students do not usually attend "religious school" classes, but many of them regularly attend the various Shabbat programs listed above. Interestingly, professionals at KBI do not typically refer to students in the congregation as "day school kids" or "religious school kids;" rather, they often divide people into "Shabbos regulars" and "not Shabbos regulars" (keeping in mind that "Shabbos regulars" include both day school families *and* religious school families).

Tefillah is a component of every single program described above. At KBI, tefillah begins with "kids who are in utero" at Torah for Tots on Shabbat mornings. As Cantor Levy's wife and longtime teacher Gail Levy remarks, "It's great when they come

[105] Taken from KBI's "Welcome Back Book," 2006-2007; 5767

out [of the womb] singing tefillah!" When I visited KBI for Shabbat, there were approximately fifteen parents and their toddlers (ages 0-5) present at Torah for Tots, and a very dynamic teacher led the group in prayers, songs, stories, and a lot of *shtick*. Gail tells a story about a father of four children who just "graduated" from Tots:

> *He says everything he learned, he learned in Tots! It's actually very nice for the parents as well [as the kids]. Parents want to feel comfortable! We try to explain what we're doing, and we do the same thing every week. Well, we do some different things, but the basics are the same. So they really get that in their ear, in their souls, in their kishkes, and they're very comfortable with that.*

For many years now, Torah for Tots has been highly successful as a way for young children and their parents to become inducted into weekly tefillah at KBI.

As children grow, there are additional opportunities for tefillah education. Linda leads tefillah with the nursery school kids on Friday mornings, and religious school classes *always* begin with tefillah – *shachrit* on Sunday mornings and *mincha* on weekday afternoons. Tefillah alternatively takes place in individual classrooms, with all classes in the grade, and as a whole school (for example, there is a special school-wide service every Rosh Hodesh). Shabbat School sessions include "family services" (separate from the main service and the various children's *minyanim*), and students at NOAM events "*daven mincha* with a full Torah reading, the whole big deal."[106]

Linda recognizes that KBI educates for tefillah through "rote learning, not [through] the emotional piece of the tefillot." The children start by learning prayers through hearing them and memorizing them aurally. Eventually they learn to read the Hebrew, correcting any words or phrases they may have heard (and perhaps memorized) incorrectly. Gail tells an interesting story about the successes of rote learning at KBI:

---

[106] Interview with Linda Kohn, June 2007

I'll never forget the story of Jonathan [so-and-so], the greatest example of "You just do it, even if you don't feel like it.... it becomes part of your routine." You can challenge it, but it has to be part of your routine first. In my earlier years of teaching, when Jonathan was coming to observe – and he's a great educator! – of course it was the day that my baby-sitter came late. So I came late into the classroom, and I'm usually there early. I was like five minutes late, and everybody is all over the place. And I said, "Okay guys, get your siddurim, we're davenning!" Afterwards Jonathan said to me, "You have no idea how amazing that was!" Because they were so used to the routine of davenning, the room settled down right away. Rote is not "bad" – it's not ideal, but it's not "bad" either.

I personally witnessed almost the exact same scene in a fifth grade religious school *mincha* service. The teacher called out, "Who wants to lead?" and five students rushed to the front of the room. The students serving as *shlichei tzibbur* faced the ark at the front of the room and proceeded to lead a traditional *mincha* service for the entire fifth grade. I was flabbergasted. As soon as the prayers began, every single child joined along out loud or sat quietly. Most of the students knew the words to most of the prayers, including Ashrei, of which Linda says, "We break our teeth with [that prayer]!" It is possible, of course, that the students were on their best behavior due to a visitor sitting in the back of the room. But there is no denying the fact that the fifth graders were tremendously comfortable with weekday *mincha* liturgy. Linda mentioned that the fifth graders "can do a full *mincha* very comfortably, and by the time we get to hay [seventh grade], the goal is for them to do *ma'ariv*, some of *shachrit*, and be able to lead." I have to admit that I did not fully believe her until I saw the fifth graders *davenning* with my own eyes.

Despite making the conscious decision to focus KBI's tefillah education on *keva* and rote learning, Linda wonders whether that has been the best route to take. She recognizes the prize of her decision (students do indeed develop strong *davenning* skills),

but she also acknowledges the price: students may not feel as connected to prayer as she would prefer: "Where do the emotions and feelings get involved? That's something we're trying to figure out..." Linda worries that students who have a hard time with Hebrew or singing may never be able to connect with prayer in a deep way:

> *There are people who will never be proficient in the Hebrew language. Should prayer be cut off to them? That's where I'm really struggling. There are kids that are not singers. Yesterday I had this whole thing... there are people that just don't like singing. So does that mean that prayer is not accessible to them? Is there another venue? Like, is art more a venue, or is dance more of a venue? And what happens with a disabled child, or a child who will never be able to learn the Hebrew? You're cut off from the prayer experience?? I'm struggling with it because in the Conservative movement, at least, rote learning is... it's very important for them to have a matbea tefillah, that they feel comfortable in every single setting of tefillah. But yet, they are uncomfortable. I'm working with this 83 year-old woman... and even though she's a Shabbos regular, she is a non-[Hebrew] reader. She can enjoy the musaf, she can enjoy the music of it, you know, but she doesn't participate in it. So, what does that mean? I'm trying to figure that out.*

KBI has been enormously successful in getting its students to feel comfortable with traditional *davenning*, but its leaders nevertheless question whether they are doing what's best for all the students in focusing on the *keva* of prayer.

The "Distinctive Torah" of KBI: What Makes KBI Unique?

Incentive Programs: Skills-Based Competency

Since the goal of tefillah education at KBI is skills-based competency, the congregation has created a number of incentive programs to encourage students to build their prayer skills:

> *Linda: We have what we call the "Sh'ma/V'ahavta Club," the "Kiddush Club," and the "Shatz Club." They are all incentive programs. Around this time of year, we send a letter home to 3rd, 4th, 5th, and 6th graders saying that if they.... if you read the Sh'ma / V'ahavta, you sing the Sh'ma*

/ V'ahavta, and then you do it by heart, you become part of the "Sh'ma/V'ahavta Club." And then at the end of the year when we have the Zimriya, they get a major prize – they don't get a little prize, they get a major prize! – a book prize, something like that. For the "Kiddush Club" they get a Kiddush cup. They have to do Friday night Kiddush – the full Kiddush – ...they have to do it four times for their families, get signed off on it, do it for me, I sign off on it, and they get a Kiddush cup at the end of the year [at the Zimriya]. And then the "Shatz Club" is being a shaliach tzibbur (prayer leader) for all of shachrit, well, an abbreviated shachrit... They get a tape from me, they learn it on their own, and then they lead the Shabbat service.

Nicki: At Junior Congregation?

Linda: It's (actually) at a Shabbat School program. The parents come, it's a big deal. They get a machzor... well, that's what I gave them last year. But they get a major gift, a major thing at the Zimriya, it's really nice. We have a couple of kids who have done the Shatz Club. It's an incentive program, so it's not a large [number of kids who do it]. It usually happens around November/ December, and the kids are usually motivated to do it all the way up until March. When we're in our [regular] building, it's a bigger deal because I have a bulletin board, and I use the bulletin board to make it even more big deal-y. It's this whole cute thing that happens. The Sh'ma/V'ahavta Club was the first one, and it was always geared toward the 3rd and 4th graders. The Kiddush Club was geared toward the 4th and 5th graders, and the Shatz Club was geared toward [older kids]... it's like an age bracket thing. Most kids do them in order, [but] one of the kids decided he wanted to skip over to the Shatz Club.

When I learned about these incentive programs, I was very impressed. KBI's leadership keeps its eye on the prize: they know their goals in tefillah education (i.e. competency in *davenning*), and they have built an educational system that revolves around those goals. The incentive programs give students the opportunity to shine in an area that the synagogue clearly values (prayer skills). In many synagogue schools the only "carrot" (i.e. reward) for students to work toward is success on the day of one's bar/bat mitzvah. KBI demonstrates that it is possible to develop additional ways to reward student achievement. Moreover, the incentive programs are successful because

they honor students' accomplishments in the public eye. Whether it is through seeing one's name listed under "Sh'ma/V'ahavta Club" on the school bulletin board or receiving a Kiddush cup at the school's end-of-year Zimriya, students learn that their achievements matter to the whole synagogue community.

Individualized Learning: Appreciation for Learning Differences

One of the most interesting findings from my interviews at KBI is that all three senior staff members – the rabbi, cantor, and educator – maintain a deep appreciation for learning differences among people, and they recognize the need for religious education that is tailored to individuals' needs. KBI leaders know intuitively that a one-size-fits-all model of Jewish education does not work very well – in part because students have different needs, and in part because students have different desires and interests. The following are several interesting comments made by the three "clergy" of the congregation about the need for and the challenges of individualized learning (Rabbi Goldberg told me that "Linda is a clergy-person in our model"):

> *Rabbi Goldberg: In terms of kids' [tefillah education], there's a tremendous range, and we are very comfortable in having, in acknowledging the enormous range. We have 120, 130 day school kids, we have special needs kids, we have families who worship sports and therefore it's very hard to find time for supplementary school education, and everything in between. We have day school drop-outs who want intensive enrichment activities in supplementary school... So we are really engaged in a tremendous array of opportunities for both learning [in general] and learning for tefillah. I'm not hung up on getting everybody to fit into one cookie cutter. I think that's doomed to fail, and it also impairs the ability to push those who are the most motivated. If you define your objective as being to customize [the learning], that helps you. And the customization may change with child X or family X from year to year.*
>
> *...One challenge we face in tefillah education is that the push to diversify is increasing rather than decreasing. You have more of a range of need.*

You have many more kids [today] who are being diagnosed with special needs issues. That's a problem on that side, requiring specialized training. Linda has a specialty in that area, but faculty-wise and otherwise, that's difficult. We also have a growing number of former day school kids who are in the [supplementary school] system. As day school becomes more and more costly, families increasingly keep them in for fewer years... so we're pushing on the other side of the equation, too.

**

Cantor Levy: *I do not teach set classes on how to lead [davenning], not at this point. It's one-on-one. The reason I don't do it in a class is because people learn at pretty different paces and need help with different kinds of things. I've found it was not helpful to do in a classroom setting. The speed of learning was... you were always boring someone to death or going way too fast for someone. No matter what you did, it didn't gel.* (NOTE: the cantor is speaking here about adult tefillah education, but I would argue that the same thing can be said for youth!)

... I think there's a huge difference between what's ideal and what's do-able [in tefillah education]. I think ideal tefillah education would be all the people who go through programs with us would be able to be fluent with all the things they have to know, read, or sing to be part of a prayer service. But I don't think that's a realistic goal, and it doesn't matter whether you're functioning in an Orthodox yeshiva or in an afternoon Talmud Torah. Even in the yeshiva world there are people who are into davenning and people who frankly aren't into davenning so much. They do other things, but they're not going to be davenning all the time. There are people who are good with Hebrew as a foreign language, and people who just aren't. Look, my kids are in yeshiva... there are some people who are good at math and some people that aren't; and there are some people who are good at tefillah and some people who aren't. Some kids [at yeshiva] have been exposed to a 45-minute minyan every single day, and some of them get it and some of them space out... it's very easy to ignore davenning!

**

Linda: *We're trying to make [davenning] accessible to the kids. I think the basic problem around tefillot is that it's rote – we are teaching them rote knowledge at this point. And in order to keep them, to have them pay attention, we use shtick. I believe that we have the visual learners, the auditory learners, and the manipulative [learners]. Tefillah is pretty much auditory and visual, so I need to use some type of manipulative with them. So that's when the shtick gets involved.*

(NOTE: The following is an example Linda gave me about tailoring religious education according to students' needs/interests.)

I have this adorable teenager who layns beautifully, and she was helping another kid with his Torah chug assignment. She's cool. She's very cool, and he looks up to her. And they were layning yesterday in school... instead of him going to Hebrew, he was working on his Torah chug [portion]. The interesting thing is when you have one person who is the glue of the program, you can flip it around. Yesterday I was thinking, you know what? This is pretty cool. We can do this. It's not a conflict in my brain that this child is pulled from Hebrew to be working with his Torah chug assignment. I looked at it as being a really positive thing.

From the comments above, I see at least three different issues raised by the KBI clergy:

1) Special-needs students: How can we best serve this population in congregational schools? It is challenging on many levels, including funding, staffing, and creating appropriate learning environments.
2) How can the congregation support, encourage, and push those students with the strongest aptitude for and interest in prayer? With an undifferentiated model, we sometimes lose the ability to nurture those students who are really "into it."
3) How can we educate students with varying levels of interest and aptitude for Hebrew and/or tefillah? Is there a way to tailor each student's learning experiences and learning goals, so that it is possible to cultivate different students' skills and interests (as with the boy who wanted to practice chanting Torah instead of remaining in his Hebrew class)?

It is worth noting that KBI tracks its students in Hebrew classes according to their Hebrew skills, beginning in fourth or fifth grade. KBI wants to reach students where they are, and the school has decided that tracking is the best way to do that. The school also allows for individualized education in that each student may choose how s/he wants to

fulfill the requirement of attending KBI on fourteen Shabbatot per year. Each student may fulfill this requirement through attendance at Shabbat *minyanim* (i.e. *davenning*), Torah Chug (i.e. learning to chant Torah), NOAM (i.e. prayer and study with other kids and teens), or family education programs. The clergy clearly acknowledge the growing need to diversify their learning options, but they nonetheless struggle with how best to do so.

Torah Chug

One of the ways that KBI pursues its goal of skills-based competency in tefillah is through "Torah Chug," a unique and highly successful program designed to teach pre-b'nai mitzvah students to chant Torah if/when they so desire. Veteran Torah Chug teacher Gail Levy explains how the program works:

> *Twice a month on Shabbat from 10:15-11:00, for the 4th-6th grade, there's a Torah reading club. So they'll learn, you know, six to nine p'sukim (verses), and then they will read Torah here in Junior Congregation. Or they can read Torah in the afternoons at the NOAM program. We've had years of major success with it. So they learn it on a Shabbat morning, and it used to be that we wanted them to do it the following week. But that was insane [to have Junior Congregation reading Torah every week]. So now, I think it's every 3rd week. So they get [their assigned verses], they practice, the next time they practice, and then they read. Some of them love to do it; they get very excited. It's great because you learn it, you master it, and you see [the results]. We teach Torah trope, so you learn the trope for that day, you practice it, you do it from the Torah, and within a few weeks, you've seen the success! Davenning takes longer [to learn]. But this is – you've done it! You did it!*

Torah Chug has been wildly successful at KBI, and as far as I know, few other congregations have tried similar programs.

From my perspective, this program is successful because of what some management consultants call "short-term wins," or what Synagogue 2000 called "low-hanging fruit." Whatever we call it, it is the ability of an organization to create small

"victories" that motivate people or institutions who are in the midst of a long journey. The individual's journey through Jewish education may last a few years or (hopefully) a lifetime, and it is important for educators to help students reach benchmarks of success along the way. For many children enrolled in today's congregational schools, the only "win" in their religious education is the bar/bat mitzvah. At KBI, Torah Chug provides another significant way for students to feel that they have achieved something important along their educational journey – and like the incentive programs, achievement is recognized in the public arena.

In their book *The Heart of Change*, John Kotter and Dan Cohen explain that short-term wins must be "visible, timely, unambiguous, and meaningful" in order to keep enthusiasm and motivation high in an organization.[107] The "wins" achieved by students in Torah Chug fulfill all four categories: they are indeed visible, timely, unambiguous, and meaningful. I watched one Shabbat morning as two children (ages 9 and 10) came to Torah Chug for the first time. Gail taught them a trope phrase,[108] asked them to *read* the Torah verse they would be chanting (in Hebrew, which they did fairly well), had them *chant* the verse using only the trope, and then finally showed them how to chant the phrase by combining the trope and the actual Hebrew words. Both students chanted almost an entire verse of Torah within the first fifteen minutes of showing up to Torah Chug! The "win" created momentum, motivation, and enthusiasm for the two boys; they felt proud of their achievement and excited to learn more.

What makes Torah Chug work so well is not only its ability to create "short-term wins;" it is also a terrific example of individualized learning. For students like those I

---

[107] John Kotter and Dan S. Cohen, *The Heart of Change: Real-Life Stories of How People Change their Organizations* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press, 2002), 125.
[108] Such as "*mercha, tipcha, munach, etnachta*"

described above – who show up to Torah Chug for the first time – it is possible to achieve success simply by learning one trope phrase and learning how to chant one verse of Torah (which they will chant in front of the Junior Congregation a couple weeks later). That's a significant achievement! For other students – those who already know trope (such as day school students), or those who come to Torah Chug frequently – it is possible to achieve success by setting more advanced goals, such as chanting more verses (up to ten) or learning a new portion every few weeks. Gail tells the advanced students to make sure they know what every single word means, and then she asks them to think about how it should be sung, based on the meaning of the text. She encourages them to chant Torah with expression. Every single student who comes to Torah Chug can set reasonable, achievable goals for him/herself.

Furthermore, it is worth emphasizing that Torah Chug is an *optional* program on Shabbat mornings; kids only come when they really want to learn how to chant Torah, or when they simply want to supplement their education at the synagogue. As a result, the number of students who show up varies widely. While Gail oversees Torah Chug and is the paid "teacher" for it, a number of other adults and teenagers serve as volunteer tutors for the kids who attend. Torah Chug therefore builds inter-generational relationships, and it gives teenagers and adults another venue to utilize their talents/interests on Shabbat mornings.

Coaching and Role-Modeling

Coaching and role-modeling are pervasive elements of tefillah education at KBI. They exist on all levels and for all ages. Let us begin with "coaching." In my

conversations with Linda, I learned that a major challenge for her (and for many Jewish educators) is finding teachers who feel comfortable enough with tefillah to teach it and to lead it. On the one hand, it has not been difficult for Linda to find teachers who feel comfortable *davenning*. She has strict hiring policies: she only hires teachers with Conservative ideology and comfort with traditional *davenning*. However, many of her teachers balk at the idea of *leading* tefillah – particularly when other adults (such as parents) are present. This may be, in part, because many of the teachers are women who grew up in traditional / Orthodox environments where women were not permitted to lead tefillah. As a result, Linda decided to pay Gail to serve as a "coach" to the teachers, helping them feel more comfortable with leading the *davenning*.

> *Linda: I actually hired Gail two years ago to be the tefillah trainer. I wanted to encourage the staff members who are shy to be given the opportunity to feel more comfortable. [Unfortunately], it did not work very well. All of the staff members know the tefillah. [But] leading is very intimidating to them. In the classroom setting, they will lead the tefillot. But on a general, big level... only a handful will do it.*

Although hiring Gail as a "tefillah trainer" did not necessarily fulfill the goal of improving most teachers' comfort with leading tefillah, it is nevertheless worth noting Linda's effort to enhance tefillah education through coaching. Perhaps in another setting with different teachers, this would be a successful tactic.

"Coaching" also happens at KBI through one-on-one mentoring / training. In Rabbi Goldberg's words:

> *I believe one role of the rabbi is to empower a lot of people to be involved. If you were to study the role of Cantor Levy or the role of Linda Kohn in our shul, it's much more tefillah-oriented than the role in most congregations, certainly most Conservative congregations. Cantor Levy is not only the Hazzan, who leads davenning beautifully, but he trains people, and he is delighted and proud to train people to lead Shachrit and Musaf. He doesn't lead both on Shabbat. He's delighted to train people*

> *to read Torah, which he does beautifully, but he trains large numbers of people. ... Linda Kohn trains people for tefillah [as well]. If you look at her role, she's not the principal of the Hebrew school; she's the congregation educator.*

At KBI, the goal is to train as many people as possible to lead tefillah, and all three "clergy people" (rabbi, cantor, educator) are involved in that effort, working one-on-one with people who are interested in becoming *shlichei tzibbur*.

While coaching is an important phenomenon at Kehillat Beth Israel, role modeling is truly the key to the congregation's successes in the realm of tefillah education. First and foremost, there is an inter-generational community of people who attend tefillah on a regular basis. From a very young age, children at KBI witness their parents and other adults in the community *davenning*, so they begin to recognize the importance of tefillah in people's lives. In addition, younger children have the opportunity to see older children and teenagers engaged in tefillah when they attend NOAM on Shabbat afternoons (which includes tefillah as a significant component of the events). Indeed, the educational vision of Kehillat Beth Israel includes the following goal: "To create life-long learning role models so that children come to [the] view that Jewish education goes beyond the childhood years."[109]

Role modeling is not only important for children; it is also evident in the relationship Linda has built with the educational staff. There is *davenning* at all staff training sessions and staff meetings, and Linda models for the teachers how to serve as a *shaliach tzibbur*. One key element of tefillah at KBI is the use of shtick; Linda uses silly expressions, songs, games, hand motions, and other forms of "shtick" to engage students

[109] Taken from KBI's "Welcome Back Booklet & School Calendar," 2007-2008 (5768), p. 2

in the prayer experience. Therefore Linda models shtick for the teachers whenever she leads tefillah:

> *I think I model it for them. It comes from me and it goes down to them. It's a modeling. The teachers will watch me... the majority of teachers are with me on Shabbat, so they see the shtick I do on Shabbat, and they take it into the regular davenning [in the classrooms]. Even the Shabbat [minyanim], like Mini Minyan, Mini Congo... Sarah hung out with me for years before she took on Mini Minyan; Dalia watched me lead davenning and then she does what I do.*

As Educational Director of KBI, Linda does not only help set the vision, plan the curriculum, and hire and supervise teachers; she also serves as a very important role model for the teachers (and students). Linda herself is a traditionally-observant Jew who *davens* regularly, and her ability to lead *davenning* (in both traditional and non-traditional ways) is a critical part of her role as congregational educator.

Closing Thoughts

In Chapter Two we saw that, according to the Rabbis, habituation and acculturation are essential components for "successful" tefillah education if the goal of tefillah education is behavioral (developing children's capacity to *daven*). This is readily apparent at KBI, where the goals of tefillah education mirror those of the Rabbis. Because children *daven* a full service every single time they show up to synagogue, they become habituated to traditional *davenning*. In addition, many students in the religious school attend Shabbat morning services on a regular basis, thereby building a habit out of going to synagogue. Jessica, a 19-year-old freshman in college who grew up at KBI and attended religious school there, explains how she and her family developed the habit of going to *shul*:

> *Well, I actually never used to go. I started going when I was in Aleph (3rd grade), and my sister was in Torah for Tots. My mom was like, "Well, you guys go every other week, so why don't I just come (with my younger sister)?" My dad doesn't come, but the rest of us do. So we started going every other week. Then over the summer, we started going anyway [even though we didn't have to].... and now we go every week. Now it's just habit. As you get older, you feel kinda weird sometimes [when you can't go]...I started life-guarding again, so every once in awhile [my boss] will put me on for 10:30 in the morning [on Saturday], and I feel so weird. The weirdest feeling, you know... I'm used to going every Saturday morning to Temple! I guess it's become habit. I feel like something's missing if I don't go.*

For Jessica, going to *shul* on Shabbat became a social experience where she saw her friends, spent time with her mother and sister, and developed a strong sense of community. As a result, it became a habit which she continues to this day.

Acculturation to communal worship is also a significant component of education at KBI. Although there are a large number of *minyanim* and other activities for youth on Shabbat mornings, everyone comes together for the last fifteen to twenty minutes of the "main" service. As a result, children eventually feel comfortable with the culture of KBI's adult service. Rabbi Goldberg highlights the importance of including children in congregational worship:

> *[There are] people who worship the god of decorum, who think that children make too much noise. But my view is that if you hear children making noise, those children have a good shot at growing up with comfort in tefillah. If you guarantee that they can't step foot in the building until after bar mitzvah, you also guarantee that they will <u>never</u> step foot in the building.*

When children enter the "main" service on Shabbat mornings – when the children's *minyanim* end – those in Kindergarten through third grade run up to the readers' table to help lead *Aleinu*, *Adon Olam*, and *Ein Keloheinu* (and are rewarded for their efforts with

lollipops).[110] KBI not only invites children into "adult" *davenning*, but they also make the children feel that their presence matters.

**

Habituation and acculturation are significant components of tefillah education at Kehillat Beth Israel, helping children feel comfortable with traditional *davenning*. As the congregational educator, Linda continues to question whether and how to bring in the emotional / affective / spiritual elements of prayer into tefillah education (i.e. believing and belonging), but at the same time there is also widespread recognition of the successes of tefillah education in the realm of *keva*. On the whole, Kehillat Beth Israel has been extraordinarily successful with tefillah education, if "success" is defined in their terms – as education for the *behavior* of prayer.

[110] Since the Middle Ages Jews have used sweets for educational aims (thereby encouraging students to perceive Jewish education as "sweet" and enjoyable). In line with this rabbinic custom, KBI gives sweets (such as lollipops and chocolate kisses) to children in the special children's *minyanim* on Shabbat mornings. See *Rituals of Childhood* by Ivan Marcus for more details about the medieval custom of using sweets in Jewish education.

~ Chapter Five ~

Belonging: Tefillah Education at Bayside Reconstructionist Synagogue

Bayside Reconstructionist Synagogue: An Overview

Bayside Reconstructionist Synagogue (BRS) is a Reconstructionist congregation in the suburbs of a large city in the eastern United States. With three hundred and fifty family units it might be considered a "small" synagogue, but it is actually quite large for the Reconstructionist movement. Rabbi Ken Silverman has been the rabbi at BRS for almost twenty years, and he explains the congregation's history in the following way:

> *The synagogue was founded fifty years ago, and the people who founded it were ideological Reconstructionists who were not particularly interested in prayer. In fact, they were all affiliated with other synagogues, mostly with the Conservative synagogue in [a nearby town]. They met in people's basements to talk about the work of Mordecai Kaplan and others. I guess in about the third year, someone said, "You know, it wouldn't kill us to daven Shachrit. If we daven, then we don't have to go back to the synagogue which we all hate."*
>
> *They were meeting on Saturday afternoons, and they started davenning occasionally... not too much. They would daven before they met [for study]. Then they decided to have High Holy Day services, and then they decided to found a school for their kids so they wouldn't subject their kids to an institution they weren't philosophically into.*
>
> *The synagogue never had a really strong thrust for tefillah. I mean, they were more into the study experience, and they were very interested in music. The founders were very very concerned about cultural expression and the like. So they saw tefillah as an opportunity to come together to sing together. By the way, they were very well-educated Jewishly. They were very knowledgeable. So they had what to reform or re-value or re-construct. [For davenning] they used the Reconstructionist prayer-book with various supplements. Early on they got Rabbi [so-and-so] to be their rabbi, but he only came for Shabbos every other week. It was very much a lay-run organization.*

Over time, BRS has changed considerably. They now employ a full-time rabbi, a full-time cantor, and a ¾-time rabbi/educator, all of whom work in collaboration with lay people to set the vision for the congregation. They have weekly Shabbat services on Friday night, and tefillah has become more central to the life of the congregation. Rabbi Ken (as everyone calls him) explains how some of the changes came about:

> *The congregation grew and people's needs were different. People joining were not ideological Reconstructionists.*[111] *They were coming to get an education for their kids, and whatever happened to them, that was very nice, but that was coincidental. It's so unlike the founders, who really didn't give too much consideration to the education of their children; they wanted adult education.*

Despite the changes described by Rabbi Ken, the synagogue's focus on Reconstructionist ideology is still prominent today. The congregational brochure features the following quotation from Mordecai M. Kaplan, founder of Reconstructionist Judaism: "Judaism cannot be perpetuated merely by nostalgia for the past. The conditions which enabled Judaism to flourish in the past are irrevocably gone with the wind. Nothing less than original and creative thinking in terms of present day realities and future possibilities can create anew the conditions which are indispensable to Jewish survival."

Kaplan was most well-known for his theology which put *people-hood* at the center of Judaism as opposed to God or Torah. In his magnum opus *Judaism as a Civilization*, Kaplan defined Judaism as the civilization of the Jewish people, and he championed Jewish "folkways." Religion is but one component of the Jewish civilization; art,

---

[111] For more on Reconstructionist ideology, see *Judaism as a Civilization* by Mordecai Kaplan and http://www.jrf.org/reconstructionism

language, music, dance, food, land, and literature are all important components as well.[112] For Kaplan, prayer matters, but it is just one facet of many in Jewish life.

For Cantor Tyler Roseland, who was invested as a cantor in the Reform Movement, it has taken some time to adjust to a congregation where tefillah has not always played a central role:

> *Nicki: How would you describe the role of tefillah here?*
>
> *Tyler: Well, when I came here, what I loved is they already had a great background of musical knowledge, and they also had rabbis who could sing. So they were already a congregation attuned to musical sensibilities. So I just felt at home here, I created a niche. It was a dream opportunity for me. But I'll be honest. It's been somewhat frustrating for me, as someone for whom tefillah is very important. It's often de-emphasized. Ken has commented on numerous occasions that this is not a praying congregation. Sometimes that underlines that we're trying to make it into one, at least partially one. It's tough in our setting, I think, because of our congregation's history... a place focusing on education, community, study. While those things can be spiritual practices, I feel like it's very much, in that sense, a "classical" Reconstructionist congregation.*

Indeed, Rabbi Ken himself is not particularly interested in or moved by traditional Jewish prayer:

> *Ken: [When I came to BRS] I was interested in talking about prayer. I was interested in expanding the repertoire, increasing poetry and literature... and I was very interested in communal singing. I'm not seriously into the spiritual nature of the prayer experience.*
>
> *Nicki: Where does your spirituality come from, if not prayer?*
>
> *Ken: Art. I'm very interested in art, music, literature. But for me, sitting in a room of paintings by Mark Rothco (?) is, I guess, what people talk about when they hear... I've been to the great Jewish cathedral, in [---], where I grew up. But that doesn't resonate, that spirituality... I think that often what goes for spirituality in religious areas is forced. "Be spiritual, you're here." By the way, I went to yeshiva as a kid, even though my parents were secular Jews. So I come to this pretty screwed up anyway,*

---

[112] Eugene B. Borowitz, *Choices in Modern Jewish Thought: A Partisan Guide, 2nd Ed.* (New Jersey: Behrman House, Inc, 1995), 104.

you know. I could bentch after my ham-and-cheese sandwich; what does that mean??

Nicki: (laughter) Can you tell me what prayer at BRS feels like, for you?

Ken: Well, the Friday night service is an hour and a half. And in that hour and a half there's important music, there's some great literature, there's very good discussion, and I would say the possibility of experiencing a moment or two of transcendence.

Kaplan's influence on BRS – not only on Rabbi Ken – is readily apparent, even in the realm of tefillah. One of the ways that the synagogue encourages creativity in worship is through the use of prayer supplements (with poetry, art, and readings in English to add to the prayer experience) which Rabbi Ken creates for Friday night services and b'nai mitzvah families create for Saturday morning services. Furthermore, the Erev Shabbat service features a long sermon / discussion that can last up to forty-five minutes. As Rabbi Ken describes Shabbat at BRS, it is possible to see how the Kaplanian focus on community, on "belonging," prevails:

Friday night we have a pretty decent loyal crowd. Shabbos mornings, with a bar mitzvah, it's the bar mitzvah [guests] and one or two people from the shul. And, by the way, there might be one or two people in shul [i.e. services], but we have about thirty-five people who come to the study group. So it's not like people aren't coming to shul on Shabbos; it's just not necessarily to daven, which is fine with me. I mean, what do I care? For many years I encouraged people that if they didn't want to come to shul... go to the movies and come to the oneg. Or come to the oneg and then go to the movies. I don't care. I want them to feel part of the community.

The culture at BRS is very informal. The clergy wear jeans on a regular basis, congregants call the clergy by their first names – with or without titles ("Rabbi Ken" or simply "Ken") – and everyone I met was warm, funny, and low-key. Students usually sit on the floor during their religious school classes, and there was a feeling of ease and informality at every single event I attended. The informality is evident even in the

congregational brochure, which includes a picture of Cantor Tyler in a t-shirt holding a young child (his own?), with their heads peeking through the center of an inner tube.

Tefillah Education at BRS

Though neither tefillah nor youth education were particularly important to the founders of BRS, both have become more significant to the community over time. Tefillah education is now a major component of the synagogue school experience at BRS, as is evident from this section of the school's statement of its goals:

> "It is our goal to support your desire to raise your children with a deep appreciation, understanding, and excitement for Jewish life in its various manifestations – religious, cultural, spiritual, and communal... Children are taught to love and honor the language of our tradition as they learn the *alef-bet*. Through song, prayer and stories they deepen their knowledge of Hebrew. In addition to basic vocabulary, children learn both the Friday night and Shabbat morning liturgies, trope, as well as selected holiday prayers..."

Rabbi Suzie Dobbs, the rabbi/educator at BRS, explains further:

> *The vision of the whole school is to create Jewish identity, so tefillah is a part of that whole experience. Although it's one of the sub-headings, it's aligned to that vision. We have decided, over time, that tefillah education [should be] in the midst of our Hebrew education. We have decided to do Hebrew through prayer, which has been a very big conflict over the course of the years – whether to do conversational Hebrew and have prayer be a totally separate piece, or to do Hebrew through prayer. And we have decided to do Hebrew through prayer. So our sections are broken up – part of the day they do Hebrew, and part of the day they do Judaica – and their Hebrew piece is where they engage in tefillah education.*

There are three options for the "Synagogue School" at BRS prior to seventh grade, and each has a different approach to tefillah education:

- Kindergarten & Alef Co-op Program – The youngest students attend school once a week, and they participate in tefillah with Rabbi Suzie or Cantor Tyler for about fifteen minutes without the use of *siddurim*. This program is a "co-op," which means there is always a parent in the classroom along with the teacher(s).

- Tuesday/Thursday: Bet (2nd grade) – Vav (6th grade) – These students attend school twice a week, on Tuesdays and Thursdays. The Synagogue School Handbook explains that each day includes one session of Hebrew instruction and one session of Culture/ Civilization or Bible. In addition, a prayer service is held on Thursdays for about twenty minutes with both Rabbi Suzy and Cantor Tyler. Rabbi Suzy tells me that "we do *Shachrit* one week, and we do *Ma'ariv* the next week. It's not based on time."

- Shabbat School: Bet - Vav – This is an alternative program in its third year at BRS. Students are divided into three classes: *Shabbat Katan* (2nd grade), *Shabbat Derech* (3rd & 4th grade), and *Shabbat Gadol* (5th & 6th grade). Students attend school on Tuesday afternoons as well as Shabbat – either Friday evening or Saturday morning. The first Friday night of the month (when family services are held), students engage in "classroom" activities from 6:00-7:30pm. Afterward they join their parents for family services. In the remaining weeks of the month, students attend Shabbat school on Saturday mornings from 9:00-11:00am, which includes Torah study and attending part

of the congregation's Shabbat morning service. Parents are required to come with their children twice a month – once/month on Friday night, for the Friday night family service, and once/month on Saturday morning for "B'yachad" (see below).

The Shabbat school emerged for two reasons. First, there was "a core group of people who wanted to be a part of services and wanted other kids to be part of it."[113] In addition, BRS participated in one of the recent synagogue transformation programs, and as part of that change process, people said they were interested in a weekend option for synagogue school (it had always been a Tuesday/Thursday school). Most people requested a Sunday option, but the leadership of the synagogue said, as Rabbi Suzie recounts, "You know, that's not our philosophy as a community. If we're going to do [a weekend option], it has to be on Shabbat." Thus, the Shabbat School was born.

B'yachad, a program that emerged in conjunction with the Shabbat school, has been a significant new endeavor at BRS. When it was decided that parents would be required to attend synagogue with their Shabbat school students twice a month – once on Friday nights, and once on Saturday mornings, the Saturday morning program came to be known as "B'yachad." It currently runs from 9:00-11:00am on one Saturday morning per month; although B'yachad is open to the whole community – all ages – attendance is required for parents and students in the Shabbat School. B'yachad includes separate Torah study groups for parents and children, followed immediately by a joint family Shabbat service led by Rabbi Suzie and Cantor Tyler. Parents of Shabbat School students provide a light lunch that follows the service.

[113] Rabbi Suzie Dobbs, Personal Interview, May 2007.

Both Shabbat school and B'yachad have been highly successful. The Shabbat school began with fourteen students, grew to twenty-five students the second year, and now has forty students. For the younger grades in particular (who have no history of attending the Tuesday/Thursday program and thus might be more inclined to join the Shabbat school), Shabbat school has been a popular option. In 2007-2008, just the third year Shabbat School has been offered, there are eleven second-graders in the Shabbat school and eleven second-graders in the Tuesday/Thursday program. As Rabbi Suzie says, "That's a huge success! It's half and half!" Shabbat school began as an alternative to the "regular" synagogue school, but it may be becoming the "regular" school, whereas the Tuesday/Thursday school may someday become the "alternative." Only time will tell. In the meantime, one of the successes of the Shabbat school so far is the creation of a strong sense of community among the families who participate – among those who come together twice a month to celebrate through study, prayer, and food.

The "Distinctive Torah" of BRS: What Makes BRS Unique?

Belonging: Being Part of the Community

Although the clergy and teachers of BRS would like their students to learn basic Hebrew reading skills, know certain key prayers, understand the structure/rubric of a prayer service, and feel something positive and/or spiritual with regard to tefillah (as is the case at many synagogues), one of their primary goals is to teach children how to function in community for prayer – how to sit still during tefillah, how to behave in the sanctuary space, how to treat others in the community, etc. I was surprised to find that every single person I met at BRS articulated this as an essential goal of tefillah education:

Rabbi Suzie: We are trying to model the Reconstructionist congregation belonging – we're trying to show them what it means to belong, to be able to fit, to come together as a community. We want them to feel like they're part of the community, and they know how to be in a community... to sit and be able to function for a twenty minute time period, holding a book.

Cantor Tyler: I feel like what we do teach them, pretty effectively during the regular tefillot is how to be with a community that's praying. They know that in the twenty minutes they're there – and in that twenty minutes we cover an entire Ma'ariv or Shachrit – they know they're there from the warm-up section through the concluding prayers, and that they're all in that together, and that we're doing it together. I think that's important... Those second graders who are there at the beginning of the year, they don't know what the heck is going on. But that's okay! 'Cause that's part of the experience, too. We want them to know that they don't always have to feel that they know everything in order to participate... Through osmosis that first year, they see the kids older than them, and it's a lot about the socialization.

Rabbi Ken: I think that on Thursday afternoon, [the prayer service] is a lot about kids learning how to behave. By the way, I put great stock in that!

Karen [Teacher]: One of the other basic things that I really believe we have to do is teach kids how to sit in a group setting like that. What does it mean to go to synagogue? What does it mean to sit in a prayer service? Is it okay to read a book? Can you kick the chairs in front of you? There's a norm of how we want you to behave in that setting. It's a different space if it's tefillah, or a concert, or a talent show, or whatever it is. But right now it's being used for tefillah."

The articulation of the goal of being able to function properly in community even extends to parents:

Nicki: What do you want your kids to get out of their prayer education?
Joanne (parent of two kids in the Shabbat school): Just to be comfortable, because for me, not having a Jewish education, until coming here, I was very uncomfortable sitting in synagogue. I may as well have been in church. So that's one of the reasons – to be comfortable, to feel at home, in a community. If you're not comfortable during services, you feel separate from the community.

The desire to teach kids how to behave in community is not only an articulated goal, but it has so far been highly successful:

Rabbi Suzie: The difference in how quickly they are able to come in and sit down and control their behavior, after we did [tefillah] on a weekly basis, was unbelievable. Because they saw themselves as part of a group, they understood being in space together. Over the course of the year, we really see unbelievable growth. Before we had done tefillah education the way we do it currently, whenever they came into the sanctuary for a program, they never knew where to sit, they didn't understand how to hold themselves, didn't understand how to be a group. And now whenever we have programming – six times a year we do communal programs – they're able to function as a group. They're able to understand how to be together in a space. So that's...it's not necessarily tefillah-based, but it's a result of their tefillah experience. And to me, that's a very important thing.

Like the educators at Temple Sinai and KBI, Rabbi Suzie is aware of the time limitations she faces, and she recognizes the imperative of making choices about her educational aims. Along with Rabbi Ken, Cantor Tyler, and the education committee, Rabbi Suzie made the decision that tefillah education ought to engender a sense of *belonging* – even if that means the school spends less time working toward the goals of *believing* and *behaving*. BRS has been successful at developing a sense of community in the school through the use of tefillah, even though their students may be less well versed in the *keva* of prayer and less able to articulate their beliefs and feelings about prayer.

The Importance of Community: A Strict Attendance Policy

Building community is not only a stated goal of the BRS synagogue school programs, but it is also enacted through a strict attendance policy. Though exceptions are made from time to time, students are required to attend synagogue school from second through seventh grade. The school's handbook describes the Six-Year Residency Policy in this way:

> "The goals of the BRS synagogue school are to impart to our children not only the Hebrew language, prayer, and Jewish culture and history, but to instill an appreciation for Jewish life and values. As a Reconstructionist

> congregation, we seek to create a cohesive caring community within our school as well as in the congregation. To achieve this goal, which our congregation deems to be of great importance, the synagogue school has a six-year residency requirement for attendance... [details]... Exceptions will be evaluated on a case-by-base basis. However, it is the belief of the synagogue community that it is disruptive to community building as well as the Reconstructionist principles to allow exceptions to the six-year residency requirement."

Of course, the school encourages students to attend school from kindergarten through their teen years, but six years is the minimum. The strict attendance policy at BRS does not only apply to the number of years the student attends school (the "residency requirement"); the school also maintains a strict attendance policy per year. Students may miss no more than 25% of their classes, or else they will be moved back one grade:

> *Rabbi Suzie: We say that belonging to the community and being a part of services and being a part of class is an important thing. We have an attendance requirement that we actually... I won't give out work if a kid is absent or if a kid is sick; I won't let them "make it up" by giving out work. They <u>have</u> to be there.*
>
> *Nicki: So what do they do (if they're absent)?*
>
> *Rabbi Suzie: They're not absent. It hasn't happened because parents aren't going to let that happen. What happens is that they get put back in the year below. And the language is, "You haven't met your communal obligation. Your bar/bat mitzvah date, if you have one, gets put into the year below because you now have to become part of this next community."*

From my experiences attending and teaching in synagogue schools, these strict attendance policies are rare. It seems from my observations that the strict attendance policy does lend itself well to building a stronger sense of community – an important goal for everyone at BRS.

Tefillah Education with a Reconstructionist Twist

One of the ways that Reconstructionist ideology affects tefillah education is through the stated goals of community building (see above). However, there are other ways that Reconstructionist thinking plays a significant role in tefillah education at BRS.

For the clergy at BRS, "tefillah education" is not only about Hebrew prayers, or about learning the content of the prayer service. It is, as Rabbi Suzie says, about helping them to live in two civilizations – as Jews and as Americans:

> *In the seventh grade, students work with Rabbi Ken on English reading supplements [for their b'nai mitzvah]. You should see them, they're unbelievable. They're English readings that supplement the Hebrew liturgy. Rabbi Ken helps provide resources for them... you can also take from poems, or excerpts from books, but he's the one who helps to guide them, and puts it within the structure of the outline of the service. So that's a very big piece of our tefillah education during seventh grade – helping them to put [together] these two pieces of living in two civilizations, which is a very big Reconstructionist approach. No matter what, even if you're Jewish and b'nai mitzvah, there's still the other piece of your life, your secular life and how do these integrate with one another? Services were done in the vernacular, in Aramaic, so we have to add our English piece to it to be able to have meaning to other people.*

The b'nai mitzvah training in seventh grade also includes the creation of a "family D'var Torah." This is a creative and innovative component of b'nai mitzvah training at BRS, and it is interesting in its own right. However, I include a description of the "family d'var Torah" here because I was surprised to learn that Rabbi Suzie views it in the context of tefillah education:

> *I work with the student and their family on their d'var Torah. We give every family the option of studying text with me, about their Torah portion. I see this in the construct of prayer, [even though] it's not direct prayer. I eat dinner at their houses, and I start every session with "la'asok b'divrei Torah" – beginning it with the concept that that this is a prayerful experience. ... We do research together, I teach them how to research, and they the family constructs a discussion of the Torah portion. As a family they sit around the Torah table and give a discussion as a whole family,*

during the service. I would say 98% of the families do it – everyone has dinner with me and engages in text study, and I would say 98% of them actually do a presentation [or skit] of some sort [at the bar/bat mitzvah service]. It's very meaningful. To me, it's the most unique, prayerful experience, because it ties in all the different pieces for them.

From this example, it is possible to see how the founders' emphasis on text study continues to influence BRS today – even in the realm of what the clergy calls "tefillah education." In addition, it is worth noting that the family d'var Torah is a great way to fulfill the rabbinic directive to combine Torah study and prayer.

Another interesting example of how Reconstructionist ideology influences tefillah education at BRS came from my interview with Cantor Tyler. For him, tefillah education is a good way to learn the Hebrew language (Hebrew literacy was important to Kaplan and continues to be important in the Reconstructionist movement):

I think a lot of [kids' tefillah education] is tied into Hebraic literacy, and the prayers themselves largely function as a vehicle for helping them with their Hebrew, and not necessarily the other way around. I think [the weekly synagogue school service] helps their Hebrew a lot. Because I think one of the best ways to learn reading Hebrew is to say words you already know, in the order that you already know them, because then you make that connection between visually what you're seeing and what you're speaking and what you're hearing. So in a sense they're like "reading" along. At first they're doing it just by rote and memorization, but then when they start to follow words on the page, they already have the internalization of what they are. So I think that helps in terms of reading... I think the Hebrew reading level has gone up since we've started this, which, to me, is just as important as the tefillah level going up.

I find it fascinating that Cantor Tyler sees tefillah as an avenue to learn Hebrew and not the other way around. That's quite an unusual position to take in supplementary Jewish education in North America!

If Hebrew literacy is one aspect of "tefillah education with a Reconstructionist twist," then so too is a new program at BRS called *Tefillot B'reirot* (Prayer Electives). It

used to be the case that on Tuesday afternoons, there was no formal prayer component of the BRS synagogue school. Tuesday/ Thursday kids participate in the weekly service on Thursdays, and Shabbat school kids attend services on Shabbat. After seeing *Tefillot B'reirot* at camp over the summer, Rabbi Suzie was excited to try it at BRS:

> *I'm wondering if I do Tefillot B'reirot that are really exciting, active... like I did a jogging one at camp, an athletic one, a yoga one, this and that... the tefillot would be totally different from what our image of tefillah is. [This summer] I began with blessings over the body and breath, then an activity, and we ended with the blessing over the body. It was about forty minutes, but I could do it for twenty minutes instead. There was knitting, or something like that as well – something about hiddur mitzvah, a blessing about that... So it's couched in the concept of tefillah, but it's not straight tefillah. I might not be able to start it [yet] because I need to have an education committee meeting, and I don't change things without them being part of it... it has to go through a process. But I think this is the way I want to go. I think it would add a dimension to the concept when you say to a kid, "How do you feel about tefillot?" they're not just thinking about sitting in the sanctuary.*

Cantor Tyler was also eager to try *Tefillot B'reirot*:

> *We're starting these b'reirot... we'll have movement, I'm going to do one on meditation and chanting, we'll have some sort of yoga thing, or other more creative options, and I do think that's been a missing piece. I'm hopeful that [this] will reinforce for the kids that tefillah is a spiritual experience. So maybe they can take something that happens on a Tuesday and bring that – like a kavanna – into the Thursday [tefillah] experience, even though it's more "traditional."*

The idea of *Tefillot B'reirot* is that students pick which type of tefillah they want to attend for twenty minutes on Tuesday afternoons. At camp, students were able to choose a different type of tefillah experience each day; at BRS, Rabbi Suzie surmises, students will sign up for a particular *tefillah breirah* (prayer elective) for a length of time – perhaps a month, or as long as a semester. The students would then be able to try something different for the next session. By embracing the idea of *Tefillot B'reirot*, the

leadership at BRS demonstrates their efforts to build community and engender *kavanna* for prayer, rather than emphasize the *keva* of prayer.

One challenge of tefillah education in a Reconstructionist context is the struggle to find appropriate learning materials. BRS currently uses curricula developed by the Reform movement (Mitkadem and the Chai Curriculum) that have worked for BRS to some degree, but they also pose certain problems. The Reconstructionist movement has made a handful of liturgical changes that are not found in Reform curricula (such as different blessings before/after the Torah reading). Therefore, in the realm of tefillah education in particular, BRS must make adjustments to the learning materials they use to account for Reconstructionist liturgy.

On the other hand, the clergy at BRS want their students to learn a handful of prayers that cannot be found in the Reconstructionist family *siddur* they use, *Siddur Kol Ha'Noar* (*The Voice of Children: A Siddur for Shabbat*, edited by Rabbis Sandy Eisenberg Sasso and Jeffrey Schein). Consequently the clergy pasted in six or seven prayers inside the front and back covers of the *siddur*, which leads to a lot of flipping back and forth during tefillah. As Rabbi Suzie says, "Once you've set your vision, it's a real challenge to find curricula [and *siddurim*] that fit your vision, especially in a Reconstructionist *shul*!"

Solving the Transliteration Dilemma

Whenever a synagogue school decides to include parents in its worship services – either during the week or on Shabbat – a dilemma often arises about whether to provide transliterations. Most Jewish educators want their students to participate in tefillah

without the crutch of transliterations in order to improve the students' Hebrew reading skills. On the other hand, many parents who attend services with their children have poor Hebrew skills themselves, and they need transliterations in order to participate. Cantor Tyler describes the policy at BRS regarding transliterations at family services:

> *I'm happy with the way we've handled transliteration this year. We don't have any transliteration on Thursdays, when it's just the kids. There are two versions of the Reconstructionist family siddur – one with transliterations and one without. We bought it without. That's what the kids use in school and for B'yachad and Friday night [services]. But what we did do – Suzie and I spend hours creating these laminated sheets that have transliterations for all the prayers for the parents. They've been affectionately known now as "the placemats." They're all on one sheet, 14x17 or 11x17 sheet. We wanted the parents to feel included too, and we knew that most of them are not as literate as the kids are Hebraically. So we say, "These sheets are for the parents only." The parents sit with the kids, and the kids have the book, and the parents can have the book and the sheet if they want. So that's how we got around the issue of not having transliteration in the prayer-books. Maybe it will motivate some of the parents who say, "Hey, if my kid can do it..." But it also allows them to participate if they want. We don't' want anyone to feel excluded. But we want the kids to know that for them, they'll learn it one way or another. If they learn it by rote, that's fine, they learn it by rote. But they're not going to have the crutch of the transliteration in front of them.*

Closing Thoughts

Tefillah education at BRS is highly successful in the realm of building community and creating a sense of *belonging* – the goal most strongly articulated by the leaders of the congregation (both lay and professional). The students focus less on rote memorization of prayers (the *keva*) or on ideas and feelings about prayer (the *kavanna*) and more on building community. That makes perfect sense in the context of Reconstructionist Judaism, where being part of the community is essential. The Shabbat school has been a major success so far, in that it builds community, emphasizes adult

participation in education, improves prayer and Hebraic competency to some degree, and encourages experiential learning.

One of the most important aspects of tefillah education at BRS is that of innovation. The congregation feels free to experiment with new ideas – as long as a majority of the clergy and the lay leaders are on board – and to then reflect on the experiments as they happen. The next big project at BRS is called "Project Kehillah," as explained by Rabbi Suzie:

> *We're shifting from education being kid-focused to being community-focused. We're breaking up the entire congregation into ten "kehillot," [of thirty-six families each]. They're each completely random – not geographic-based or affinity-based. It's this concept of being really inter-generational learning. There will be six programs for each kehillah over the course of the year, which is tremendous for us to be able to get off the ground! And the concept is that the kehillah is going to be a community within a community. For shiva, our expectation is you go to shiva for anyone in your kehillah, whether you know them well or not. One of the kehillah activities is a Shabbat dinner, one is a havdallah/dessert, one is learning about family histories, one is a social action project, one is a progressive dinner, and one is a congregation-wide Pesach program.*

It will be interesting to find out how Project Kehillah affects tefillah education at BRS, since it is sure to influence both tefillah and education in the congregation. On the whole, Bayside Reconstructionist Synagogue is dynamic organization with people who are constantly evolving, growing, experimenting, and reflecting. BRS is a wonderful example of how a synagogue whose culture is not particularly focused on prayer can nevertheless succeed at tefillah education, when "success" is defined by the ability of a synagogue to build community and develop a strong sense of belonging among its congregants.

~ Chapter Six ~

Common Threads: Areas of Convergence in Tefillah Education

As we have seen in the last three chapters, it is possible to succeed in tefillah education in a wide variety of congregational settings. Temple Sinai, Kehillat Beth Israel, and Bayside Reconstructionist Synagogue are exemplary models of tefillah education in the twenty-first century, despite their vast differences. Temple Sinai is enormous, urban, and Reform; Kehillat Beth Israel is medium/large, suburban, and "right-wing" Conservative; and Bayside Reconstructionist Synagogue is small, suburban, and Reconstructionist. Each synagogue has its own unique method of "tefillah education," as indicated by programs like Sinai's Shabbat Exchange, KBI's Torah Chug, and BRS's *Tefillot B'reirot*. Yet for all their differences, the three congregations have many areas of convergence as well. The purpose of this chapter is to highlight a number of the most important common threads that weave through tefillah education at the three synagogues I studied.

Intentionality

There are many synagogues in North America with educational systems that seem to run on auto-pilot. Although Jewish educators have the best of intentions, it is nevertheless the case that many of us keep religious schools running more or less the same year after year, adding a program here or there based on what's "hot" at the moment rather than on a cohesive vision of Jewish education. Tefillah education is particularly vulnerable in this regard: it tends to include a mish-mash of various

curricula, programs, and worship services all geared toward some vague, unspecified goal of "learning Jewish prayer."

In stark contrast, all three synagogues I studied were exceedingly intentional in the way they do tefillah education. Educators at Temple Sinai made the conscious choice that engendering *kavanna* and developing a prayerful environment in the school ought to take precedence over training for proficiency in *keva*. The decision at Kehillat Beth Israel was just the opposite: KBI operates in a *halakhic* mode whereby one's feelings about prayer are far less important than one's ability to participate in and lead traditional *davenning*; therefore the education system is designed to improve students' *davenning* skills. Taking yet another path, Bayside Reconstructionist Synagogue pursues community-building as its agreed-upon goal of tefillah education.

In each synagogue there is a clear educational vision, and tefillah education serves as one important component of the vision. The educators at these congregations realize that in the minimal time allotted to supplementary Jewish education, it is impossible to do everything. As a result, important decisions must be made about where to focus one's time, energy, and resources. Each congregation has deliberately chosen one area of tefillah education to pursue, recognizing both the prize and price that come along with that decision.

Leadership: Collaboration, Empowerment, and Longevity

One of the most obvious areas in which all three synagogues excel is in the realm of leadership. Through collaboration, empowerment, and longevity, the professionals at

each synagogue have created outstanding models of tefillah education for the twenty-first century.

Collaboration

There is widespread evidence that collaborative leadership is highly effective for all kinds of organizations, including synagogues.[114] To be sure, one of the things that makes Sinai, KBI, and BRS successful is that they have strong visionary professionals who exercise leadership by collaborating with others to set the tone and shape the goals of tefillah education. While the extent to which lay leaders participate in educational decision-making varies significantly from synagogue to synagogue, there is evidence in all three congregations of strong collaboration among the Jewish professionals. It became apparent to me that the rabbi(s), cantor, and educator(s) in each congregation support one another, trust one another, share an educational vision, and truly value and take into consideration one another's points of view. That is not to say there are no disagreements or problems among the professional staff; rather, the clergy and educators have, for the most part, committed themselves to working through conflicts in a collaborative manner for the benefit of their community.

If one hallmark of excellence in Jewish education is "linking the silos" (i.e. lowering the barriers between different "silos" of the synagogue[115]), then all three synagogues have indeed achieved excellence. While the synagogues do remain silo-ed to some extent – with certain professionals taking the lead over certain "silos" of the congregation such as education or worship – the professionals at Sinai, KBI, and BRS have worked hard to lower the barriers between those silos.

---

[114] See, for example, Isa Aron, *The Self-Renewing Congregation: Organizational Strategies for Revitalizing Congregational Life* (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2002).
[115] See Jack Wertheimer's "Linking the Silos"

Exercising collaborative leadership and "linking the silos" are especially important tasks in the realm of tefillah education. Tefillah education inherently lies at the nexus of at least two congregational "silos" – education and worship. In many synagogues, an educator oversees congregational education while the rabbi(s) and cantor(s) oversee congregational worship. All too often there is a significant disconnect between what happens in the educational "silo" and what happens in the worship "silo," a situation that inevitably leads to fractured and ineffective tefillah education. Sinai, KBI, and BRS serve as important role models for other congregations in the realm of tefillah education because they have successfully linked worship and education.

Empowerment

One of the most important ways for synagogues to "link the silos" between education and worship is to empower the educator(s). While collaboration among leaders of any organization is often the key to success, true collaboration works best when all players enter the relationship on equal footing. Unfortunately, the reality is that in most synagogues the rabbi(s) and cantor have much more power and status than the educator(s). Yet in the three synagogues I studied, the educator was – without exception – elevated to equal status, and had just as much power, as the rabbi(s) and cantor.

At Temple Sinai, Lev serves as the "Senior Educator," just as Rabbi Blum serves as the "Senior Rabbi," and he often runs the weekly clergy meetings. Lev supervises a large educational staff, which parallels Rabbi Blum's supervision of the rabbinic staff. While Lev is clearly empowered at Temple Sinai, so too is Tirza, who makes important decisions about youth and family education in particular. At KBI Linda is considered an

equal partner to Rabbi Goldberg and Cantor Levy – so much so that the rabbi and cantor refer to her as "clergy." Rabbi Goldberg feels strongly about empowering Linda:

> *If you looked at Linda's role, she's not the principal of the Hebrew school; she's the congregation educator. She's involved holistically with every age, pre-school through adults; not just in the classroom, but on Shabbat [too].*
>
> *You know, we worked on the vision together. Linda will lead a healing service, or a family service, or... she leads all kinds of stuff. Not only am I not threatened by that, but that is my goal. We are really the three clergy of the congregation. In [our] model, Linda is a "rabbi," which is very unusual.*

And at BRI, very little happens without the consent and input of the rabbi, cantor, and educator, along with an assortment of lay leaders. As Rabbi Ken told me,

> *You think I could have a final say about anything [as the "senior rabbi"]? Not in a Reconstuctionist shul! Everything is by consensus. I talk with Suzie and Tyler. Any major decision is made democratically among the three of us and then brought to the education committee.*

Rabbi Suzie, as the congregational educator, is absolutely an equal player among the clergy at BRS.

It is true that both Lev and Suzie are rabbi/educators, which may help to elevate their status in their congregations from that of a "regular" educator. However, the leadership model at KBI demonstrates that an educator (who is not also a rabbi) can be empowered by the rabbi(s) and cantor to be an equal partner on the clergy team. It seems to me that an empowered educator is essential for strong tefillah education.

Longevity

While empowering the educator is a very important step toward improving *tefillah* education, increasing the longevity of rabbis, cantors, and educators' tenure at the

synagogue is equally important. There are often very good reasons why Jewish professionals leave synagogues after short periods of time; that being said, one of the best ways to improve tefillah education is to put together a team of professionals who respect each other, work well with one another, and remain together for a significant length of time. It takes a long time for leadership teams to work out their differences, create a shared vision, and then implement that vision. The simple fact is that change takes time.

The rabbis at Sinai and KBI both spoke eloquently and passionately about the need for consistency in leadership over time. At the beginning of Rabbi Blum's tenure at Sinai, he made a conscious decision to hire good people and try to keep them for as long as possible (see pages 45-46, Chapter Three). Rabbi Goldberg made a similar case for longevity at KBI:

> *Nicki: I wanted to ask you about having just two official clergy for a congregation this size. That's quite unusual!*
>
> *Rabbi Goldberg: In part it's because of Linda's role. It's also in part because the cantor is much more of a clergy person... much more of a "rabbi" than most cantors are empowered to be by rabbis. And Linda is a "rabbi," which is very unusual. It's also... I have a philosophical view that I'm not fond of having staff engage with people's neshama's (souls) [if they] are going to be here for a short period of time. And, at least in the Conservative movement, most assistant rabbis are in to learn, and then they're out the door. We do that with rabbinic interns. If you want to learn, then come learn. But I don't want to spend the synagogue's resources on people who are here for three or five years. That to me is trivial.*
>
> *We really deal much more long-term [here]. Our nursery school director is in her 26th year, our cantor is in his 26th year, I'm in my 29th year, Linda is in her 19th year. That's how I like to function. The three of us [rabbi, cantor, educator] have been a team for twenty years, and that's unusual, but it's a real factor in building what we built.*
>
> *That being said, we're actually in the long-range planning process where, at some point in the not-too-distant time, I will be looking for us to have somebody as a second rabbi because that way when I retire, there will be*

somebody who has been with us for a few years, really understands the systems, you can see they work well with Linda and Jacob and what we've built.

Although it is possible to succeed in Jewish education (and, by extension, tefillah education) with leadership teams that have been in place for a shorter period of time, it seems that the longer the rabbi, cantor, and educator work together (if the team is collaborative and supportive of one another), the more effective they can be.

Excellence in Teaching / Staffing

It goes without saying that strong tefillah education depends on strong teachers. A synagogue may boast a wonderful vision for tefillah education, and the rabbi, cantor, and educator may exhibit outstanding collaborative leadership skills, but teachers are really the key to successful education. All of the educators I met spoke about the need for (and the challenge of) finding and training teachers who can excel in the realm of tefillah education.

Teacher Buy-In

In the course of my research I found that strong tefillah education requires teachers who buy in to the congregation's goals. While some people might be skeptical about the practice of hiring congregants as religious school teachers, all three synagogues I studied had a teaching staff with a high percentage of congregants, in part because it was clear that teachers who are also congregants support the synagogue's educational goals. Teacher buy-in is especially important to Linda at Kehillat Beth Israel. She told me she "only hires teachers with Conservative ideology," making sure to speak with

potential teachers about ideology in the initial interview. Linda is grateful that she can be choosy about who she hires since a lot of people want to work at KBI.

Suzie (at BRS) also spoke about her desire to hire teachers who share the congregation's ideology – in this case, Reconstructionist – but she has fewer options than Linda does because of geography. It is sometimes challenging for her to fill all the teaching positions with people who are ideological-Reconstructionists:

> *Last year I had one teacher who was Orthodox, and [unfortunately] there was a lot of animosity. I could see it on her face during tefillah, and we talked about it in her interview. We discussed what would happen, and she was great about it. She was [here] for two years... the first year she was great, and then the second year, I don't know what happened! But I could see it on her face... I sat in on her class, and I could only imagine what went on when I wasn't there. She could not stay. But sometimes I [do] have to keep teachers who are not 100% the best. It's difficult.*

When I interviewed teachers at each synagogue it was obvious that, by and large, the teachers knew the primary goals of tefillah education in the congregation and believed in those goals. There were exceptions, of course, but most teachers articulated the same goals for tefillah education that their rabbi(s), cantor, and educator(s) did. I believe that teacher buy-in is a critical factor in the successes of tefillah education at these three congregations.

Professional Development Opportunities

For better or for worse, many synagogue teachers feel uncomfortable with tefillah; consequently, it is hard for them to teach tefillah and/or lead tefillah for their students. Like many Jewish adults in the present era, these teachers never experienced strong *tefillah* education when they were growing up, and they feel incompetent when it comes to Jewish prayer today. Some teachers may be able to work with their students on

Hebrew reading skills, and they may be able to sit quietly during the school's weekly services. Nevertheless, if teachers feel uncomfortable with tefillah, students easily pick up on their unease. All of the educators I interviewed – Tirza, Lev, Linda, and Suzie – expressed a desire for their teachers to feel more comfortable with tefillah than they currently do. All three synagogues offer professional development opportunities for their teachers, and there is always a tefillah component to their staff training sessions. However, there is an ongoing need for more and better training for teachers in the realm of tefillah education.

Synagogues have very specific needs when it comes to what teachers should know, feel, and be able to do in the realm of tefillah. At KBI, where the educational goal is competency in traditional *davenning*, it is essential for teachers to feel comfortable with traditional *davenning*. The synagogue cannot expect students to learn that which the teachers do not know! Gail, one of the teachers at KBI, explained why she decided to teach sixth and seventh grade classes this year:

> *Because I thought they should know how to daven! (laughing) I feel strongly that they should have... I feel the best way for them to [learn] it is by example, by modeling. I know how to daven, I feel comfortable with davenning. I have been davenning my entire life. I grew up in an Orthodox world, I went to an Orthodox day school, and I have no problem with davenning anywhere. And I can't say that about the entire staff. It's not just teaching it n the classroom, but it's also seeing the staff do it!*

At Temple Sinai, on the other hand, where the goal of tefillah education is focused more on belief than on behavior, it is not surprising that the teachers feel very comfortable talking about God and spirituality, but they feel much less comfortable with the mechanics of prayer. Each synagogue must tailor its professional development offerings to what is most critical for teachers in that setting.

Well-Paid Teachers

Money matters. If one of the key ingredients to good tefillah education (indeed, good education of all sorts!) is good teachers, then synagogues must be willing to pay the kinds of wages that attract the best teachers. I was astounded at the successes of KBI's Shabbat morning children's *minyanim* until I witnessed the *minyanim* for myself. The teachers were outstanding! Across the board, every teacher who leads a weekly children's *minyan* at KBI is dynamic, creative, thoughtful, caring, fun, and steeped in Jewish learning. When I asked Linda how she was able to put together such an extraordinary teaching staff for Shabbat mornings, she told me that she seeks out good people and then pays them very well ($100 for leading an hour-long *minyan* / program). Linda realizes that many of these people do not make much money in their "regular" jobs (teaching Jewish pre-school or Jewish day school, for example), and she believes they deserve to be paid well for what they do – especially when they are really good at it.

Teachers at Temple Sinai are also well-paid for their time, which includes a certain amount of planning per week. For example, those who teach on Sunday mornings are required to be present from 8:30am-12:30pm every Sunday, even though the youth/family education classes technically run from 9:00am-11:45am. Teachers are paid for a half-hour of preparation before school starts and forty-five minutes of reflection / evaluation / planning after school ends. Several teachers at Sinai told me they are "well-paid per hour" for what they do, and that they would work more hours (including full-time) if it were possible. Paying teachers well is one way to attract and keep the best teachers; paying them for planning time further enhances their ability to teach to the best of their ability. Paying teachers well is especially important for improving tefillah

education since more teachers are needed who truly shine in both the teaching and leading of tefillah.

Teacher Teams / Collaboration

Since so many teachers feel uncomfortable when it comes to tefillah, one of the best ways to make progress in tefillah education at one's synagogue is to provide ways for teachers to work in collaboration with one another. Teachers at BRS gather on a regular basis to discuss problems in their classrooms and ways to address those problems. Teachers at KBI decide whether to do tefillah by classroom or by grade, depending on how comfortable the particular teachers feel with leading the *davenning*. Teachers at Temple Sinai have at least two avenues for collaboration with one another – the Weekday Torah teachers gather each week for "teacher tefillah," and the youth education teachers are organized into teams (by grade) with one "lead teacher," several adult teachers, and several teen teachers on each team. As Karen, a superb teacher at BRS, remarked, "[As a teacher] you don't have to feel like you're standing on an island thinking, 'What am I supposed to do?'"

Religious school teachers frequently feel they are left to their own devices to come up with creative ideas and deal with challenging students. In synagogues like the ones I studied – where teachers work in teams and collaborate with one another – tefillah education is much easier to tackle. Teachers can lean on one another for support and advice when it comes to teaching tefillah, which is a notoriously tricky subject to teach.

Parental / Family Involvement

Just as the Rabbis emphasize the role of parents in a child's education (see Chapter Two), the synagogues I studied also underscore the role of family involvement in tefillah education. All three congregations offer family education programs with a tefillah component, and two of the schools *require* children to attend Shabbat worship on a regular basis with their parents.

There are many reasons why it is helpful for parents to learn tefillah along with their children. First and foremost, important role modeling takes place when parents and children pray together. Children see their parents engaged in tefillah, which may influence how they view tefillah for themselves. In addition, when parents feel comfortable with tefillah, they can bring it home with them. Rabbi Lev at Temple Sinai spoke passionately about his desire for parents to do blessings and prayers with their children at home (be it *Birkat Banim*, the Bedtime *Sh'ma,* or anything else – see pages 58-59 in Chapter Three).

Another reason to include parents and other family members in tefillah education is that, as Cantor Levy at KBI pointed out, people feel much more connected to prayer when "you have a critical mass of people who are obviously 'into it'. It really helps if you have that." When children and their parents experience tefillah in the context of *community-wide* tefillah, something special happens that is impossible to recreate in a regular religious school setting.

Moreover, it is helpful for parents and families to be involved in tefillah education because Jewish learning and Jewish living ought to go hand in hand. It is not helpful for children to learn "what we Jews do" when they and their families do not actually do those

things! All three synagogues have youth and family education programs on Shabbat because they believe that tefillah education should happen in the context of congregational tefillah (which typically takes place with the largest number of people on Shabbat). In Rabbi Goldberg's words:

> *We have a Saturday school because our view is we want people to define, on the weekends, to define Jewish time as Saturday, not Sunday. I don't really care what you do on Sunday, but on Saturday I'd like you to connect Jewishly. And we have family programming [on Shabbat] so that some people engage in the building into the larger congregational fabric. One of the goals is to have not just the kids, but the parents, feel comfortable, feel engaged, feel empowered to see tefillah as an option.*

Finally, family education is helpful when a synagogue wants to integrate Jewish day school families and families involved in supplementary Jewish education. Two of the three synagogues I studied (Temple Sinai and KBI) have significant numbers of families with children in Jewish day schools, and they use family education and/or Shabbat programs to better integrate the two populations. Rabbi Lev advocates for family education at Temple Sinai in the following way:

> *I've been saying it for years – family education is the great common space. Parents meet each other. Kids are safe. There's no before, there's no after. There's no sense of "I've done this before" [for the day school kids], or "I learned this last week." There's food. There's camaraderie. This is the first year we're [inviting day school kids and their families to family education programs] in every grade. We did it in the fifth grade for years, and then added sixth and seventh grade. We want to integrate them. It's all family all the time, so it's comfortable. But now this year we're experimenting – inviting [day school] families to the Sh'ma pillowcase program. It's like, hey, how can you miss that?!*

I would add to Lev's comments by saying that family education integrates day school and supplementary school kids and their families most successfully through tefillah experiences, since prayer is one of the few ways that everyone in a synagogue can come together as one community.

The Influence of Camp

Summer camp heavily influences tefillah education at the three synagogues I studied. All of the educators were profoundly affected by their experiences at camp – as campers, staff members, or both – and they spoke passionately about their efforts to bring ideas from camp into their congregations. The influence of camp is evident by the presence at all three synagogues of informal learning. It is rare to see "traditional classrooms" with students sitting in chairs at their desks and teachers standing at the front of the room at any of the three congregations. Rather, it is more common to see students sitting (or even lying down!) on the floor, moving around the classroom, and/or moving from place to place within (and sometimes outside) the synagogue's walls.

In the realm of tefillah in particular, the influence of camp is even more apparent. At KBI Linda uses a lot of camp shtick to liven up the tefillah experience (including clapping, hand motions, games, body movements, silly questions, and more). At Temple Sinai, Lev is also heavily influenced by his camp experiences in the way he leads tefillah. Like Linda, he too uses a lot of shtick, along with the kind of folk / guitar music that has a distinctly camp-like feeling. One of the longtime teachers at Temple Sinai, Sandy, told me that some people call the temple "Camp Sinai" because of how strongly the school resembles a camp environment. Furthermore, she says that "the goal [of Sinai's youth education] is for them to want to be here and have a good time. It's nice if they learn – they read Hebrew and learn some concepts and stuff. But it really needs to take place at home. This is a supplementary social club." At Bayside Reconstructionist Synagogue, Suzie is also influenced by camp, but her desire to adapt camp tefillah for the synagogue

is more recent, if only because summer camping is a newer phenomenon in the Reconstructionist movement.

Another way that camp inspires tefillah education in congregations is the recognition that tefillah can and should take place in a wide variety of settings. Just as campers often alternate among praying with their individual cabins, with all the kids their age, and with everyone at camp, students at these congregations alternate among praying with their classroom, with their grade-level, and with the whole school. They also experience prayer in more than one physical location: in the classroom, in the sanctuary, or outside. Retreats with significant tefillah components are popular at all three synagogues – including youth retreats, family retreats, and congregational retreats – and I imagine that tefillah at those retreats bears a striking resemblance to camp tefillah in that synagogue's particular movement.

Miscellaneous

There are a number of other common threads that weave through tefillah education at Temple Sinai, Kehillat Beth Israel, and Bayside Reconstructionist Synagogue. They do not fit easily into one category, but they are significant areas of convergence that are worth mentioning.

Choir as Tefillah Education

All three cantors I met asked me whether choir "counts" as a form of tefillah education for the purpose of my research. Cantors generally seem to believe choir is a terrific venue for tefillah education, but they were hesitant to include it in the category of

"tefillah education" because choir is not always part of the mainstream religious school experience. None of the other people I spoke with mentioned choir in the context of tefillah education (rabbis, educators, teachers, parents, students), but I tend to agree with the cantors that choir is an important (and highly successful!) way that synagogues educate children and adults for tefillah. In the words of Cantor Green from Temple Sinai:

> *My little children's choir, [in my view], is tefillah education! What they sing is Friday night liturgy and other little songs. All of them now can daven a Friday night service! They know all the prayers, through the choir. I think the choir is extremely vital. I think any congregation that doesn't have a children's choir or an adult choir is cheating themselves. It's really important.*

Consistency

In every congregation I studied there was significant consistency in the use of sources and shtick for teaching tefillah. At BRS, for example, the congregation uses the same *siddur* for weekday religious school services, Shabbat School services, B'yachad services, and Friday night family services. Cantor Tyler explains the conscious choice he and Rabbi Suzie made to use the same sources and lead services in the same way for all services at the congregation:

> *Mostly [religious school services are] just Suzie and I leading it in the same way we do a family service.... I'll chant the chatimot, and we teach them how to do "baruch u'varuch sh'mo" in the middle of the chatimah, and certain prayer modalities... when to bow, etc. We want them to be accultured (sic) to what happens in a service. When we do the priestly blessing, the way we do it in any of our services, we have them put their arms around each other and we sort of bless each other, since we're so non-hierarchical and it's not about the priests blessing us. So we do that, the same way we would it in an adult service, even though it means they're all over each other and swaying and rocking and pushing each other. But, you know, it's still part of the experience, even if they're not at the maturity level yet.*

I feel like the climate at a [Friday night] family service is pretty decent because kids are accustomed to coming to services on Thursdays. And even if the service on a Friday night is a little different – when you add in a story or add in some family readings, and it's an hour instead of twenty-five minutes – the same basic pieces are there. And a lot of the same actual melodies are there. I think the kids are accustomed to it.

At KBI, Linda also works hard to be consistent in her tefillah education methods:

I do prayers (with the pre-schoolers) that I know and shtick that I know they will go into when they're with us in Kindergarten, first, second, and third grade. So it's consistent, and they can expect it. So if I'm doing my "halleluya" (with special hand motions), then they know that in the third grade, they'all be doing "halleluya" (same hand motions) too. One of the [other] things that's consistent is that there's a format, there's a routine, there's a structure. I think that goes in line with all tefillot because there's a structure with tefillot.

In Chapter Two I pointed out the Rabbis' insistence on tefillah education as a process of habituation and acculturation. One way to fulfill the Rabbis' directive in today's world is through consistency in tefillah education – we must advocate for the consistent use of melodies, shtick, synagogue customs, and *siddurim*. Although some melodies, shtick, customs, and *siddurim* are limited by age-appropriateness, the more consistent tefillah can be, the better habituated our students will become to it.

Self-Awareness

One remarkable feature of the three synagogues I studied is their ability to be self-aware. Each congregation has a good sense of its strengths (both personal and institutional) and its weaknesses. There is a wide-spread recognition among the educators I met that certain people do certain things well, and it is a good idea to maximize those strengths. On the flip side, it is a good idea to minimize people's weaknesses wherever possible (or get others to help fill in the gaps). Instead of getting

upset over an individual's strengths and weaknesses, these congregations find ways to make the most of the talents they have.

Furthermore, all three synagogues have a strong sense of place. The leaders at each congregation are aware of factors like geography, local culture, movement / denominational identification, and the synagogue's history, and they take those factors into consideration when developing educational aims. For example, Temple Sinai is located in the western United States, and Lev reminded me of his cultural milieu while telling me about some of the recent innovations in his congregation:

> *The new is valued [here] more than the old. Sometimes it's a bad thing, but it also opens the doors to innovation. I don't know if I could have pulled off what I pulled off [here] in St. Louis or New York. That's the problem with going to conferences, and they say, "Tell us about your synagogue." No. No. It's an [evergreen]. [Evergreens] grow here. I can't bring you an [evergreen].*

Lev's example about the evergreen serves as a good reminder to all of us trying to improve tefillah education in our congregations: the ideas I encountered in the course of my research may be helpful when *adapted* by other congregations, but they can never be *copied* directly. Geography, history, culture, and denomination significantly affect the way that any congregation operates, and these factors must be considered when one is trying to make congregational change.

Common Challenges

While the congregations I studied have many areas of convergence in their successes with tefillah education, they also have a number of common challenges. I was amazed at how frequently the same handful of difficulties in tefillah education arose in my conversations with a wide variety of people across the country. I believe it is worth

sharing those challenges here to demonstrate that even congregations with "successful" models of tefillah education continue to struggle with particular issues.

Time

It goes without saying that the lack of time is a major issue for supplementary congregational education in general, and particularly so for tefillah education. As Joseph, one of the teachers at Temple Sinai mentioned, tefillah "is a really hard thing to learn," and as is the case for sports, dance, music, or any other expertise, it takes a long time to learn. Nonetheless, most supplementary Jewish schools have two to four hours a week available for cramming in everything they can that's related to Jewish education, and tefillah is just one small part of the puzzle. Every educator mentioned the lack of time as a major challenge they face with tefillah education. Here are just two examples:

> *Tirza (educator at Temple Sinai): In the amount of time that we have, there is no way that these kids are going to become fluent Hebrew readers and understand what they're reading. It's not possible. So that's no longer our goal.*

> *Gail (teacher at KBI): We have very little time, and we have to decide which things to do, because you can't do everything. There's not enough time.*

With just a few hours a week (or less) to teach tefillah, synagogues must be very intentional about what they choose to do with the time they have.

Adolescent Tefillah Education

Adolescent education is entirely different than youth education (i.e. pre-b'nai mitzvah) in most Jewish supplementary schools. It is usually "optional" (in other words, it is not required for bar/bat mitzvah), which means there is no carrot/stick approach for

getting students to attend. Moreover, adolescents usually have some flexibility over what their education looks like – courses are offered as "electives," and students build their own schedules based on their individual interests. I found that tefillah education for adolescents is almost non-existent at the three congregations I studied. They do offer educational programs for adolescents, but tefillah plays a very minor role. Typically, tefillah education for adolescents includes planning youth-led High Holy Day services and/or the occasional youth-led Shabbat service. There are very few opportunities for adolescents to learn / grow in any of the three areas of tefillah education I have highlighted throughout this work: *believing* (What do I believe? What do the prayers mean?), *behaving* (How do I do X, Y, and Z?), or *belonging* (How can I become part of a community through participation in tefillah?). The assumption seems to be 1) that teenagers have already reached maturity in these areas (doubtful), or 2) that teenagers have no interest in learning and growing in these areas (also doubtful). However, one thing is clear to everyone involved in adolescent Jewish education: teenagers are unlikely to attend programs about tefillah that are advertised as such.

Rabbi Joshua Stern, assistant rabbi at Temple Sinai, argues that the lack of high-quality tefillah education for adolescents is itself the most significant problem with tefillah education today. His Kol Nidre sermon this year focused on the need for better adolescent education in the synagogue, and it is worth including an extended portion of it here because it directly relates to the problem of adolescent *tefillah* education:

> *...Cognitive psychology teaches us that children acquire the ability to grasp metaphorical concepts right around fourth grade. Until that point they have a hard time understanding that something may be equated to more than one thing, or that there might be multiple definitions of a single object. As metaphor is <u>the</u> programming language of religion and*

liturgy, the Judaism we teach to our youngest students is most often quite thin and literal.

So we get these students in fourth grade and now they are ready to get their hands dirty with deeper concepts. But hold on a minute, they have bar and bat mitzvahs in three years! And so it is easy for many congregations to fall into the practice of drilling their students with Hebrew letters and prayers. At long last the students finish this long journey and successfully recite these prayers, and read their Torah and haftarah portions. Now at last they are ready for a meaningful discussion of Judaism based upon the questions that naturally arise at this age. What is God? Do I have to believe in God to be Jewish? Where does the Torah come from? How does Jewish tradition fit into my life?

And here, the American Jewish community often meets these questions with a wave goodbye and a push out the door. According to the latest census numbers, 75% of all Jews do not continue their education after their bar and bat mitzvah...

Why is the post b'nai mitzvah period so important? Well, adolescence represents the prime years in which we experiment with who we are, where our interests lie, and who we ultimately want to be... And while it is clearly a time of great creativity, adolescence is also intimidating, as the world is opened up to great questions and fears, and real experiences of rejection and loneliness... Just as we are opening up to the greater concepts of morality, and in need of an outlet for our anxieties and creativity, we find the synagogue doors closed. We are encouraged to explore the wonders of athletics, the arts and humanities, yet Judaism abdicates its seat at the table.

Now let's fast forward a bit. Our proud bat mitzvah student goes to high school and then leaves for college, all the time carrying the same feelings of intimidation and frustration that have marked her religious experience. When, if ever, does she come back into the synagogue? Of course, tonight, on Yom Kippur! And what sort of liturgy does she find? "Who shall perish by fire, who by stoning, who by drowning." And a vision of God as angry Santa Claus: Our father, our king, rewarding good guys and harshly punishing the bad guys. She takes literally the vision of God writing our names in a book of life, or having us pass under His staff like sheep. And she thinks to herself, "Ah yes, this is the Judaism I know. Now I remember why I stayed away in the first place!"

Little does she realize that the High Holiday service is markedly different from the rest of the year. Let me make an analogy: suppose that you had never seen a movie in your entire life. You walk into your first theater, the lights go dark, and they start showing Dracula. You would think to yourself, "Boy, movies are really scary. I never want to see one of those again." Truth be told, the High Holidays comprise the horror section of Jewish liturgy... our congregant may never realize that the liturgy and theology for the rest of the year is entirely different. But it's too late now. She was disregarded in fourth grade, pushed out after her

bat mitzvah, ignored during her formative years of adolescence and now fails to make any connection during this crucial time. Who knows if she will ever return? She is entirely grown and yet the synagogue still speaks to her through a limited vocabulary.

...We stand as modern eavesdroppers upon an ancient conversation, but we have lost the framework to understand the connection. And so we read the (prayer-)book from a linear, non-metaphorical, elementary school perspective, and expect it to make sense to us. No wonder we spend so much time feeling lost and dejected.

I have included a significant portion of Rabbi Stern's sermon because I think he eloquently argues for education that will help adolescents connect to tefillah in a more meaningful way. Unfortunately, the three congregations I studied do not give us much guidance about how to do that. At BRS there is a youth group for teens that meets regularly, but tefillah is all but absent from it. At KBI teens plan monthly tefillah experiences for younger students through the peer-led youth group called "NOAM." However, the Shabbat morning "*minyan*" for teens is called "Teen Schmooze." As Linda says, "The 'teen service' is not a service [at all]; it's a schmooze. They're there to schmooze, they're teenagers!" And at Temple Sinai, teens only experience tefillah through youth-led High Holy Day services and the occasional Shabbat service at youth group "shul-ins." As Talia Dahlberg, Director of Adolescent Education at Temple Sinai, explains,

Post seventh grade, honestly, tefillah does not come into play. It's really hard keeping teens in a supplementary program, and in order to do that, we really want stuff that relates to them on a daily basis... Because we're so limited on time... we have just a short amount of time, so [we try to] give them what they want, what they're yearning for, as opposed to what we think they need.

Cantor Tyler said almost the same thing about doing tefillah with adolescents at BRS:

I've shied away from it, just because I want to attract as many kids as I can and have a program that will be appealing to them. I haven't had the sense yet that tefillah is going to do that.

One of the ways that all three synagogues have managed to keep teenagers engaged in tefillah throughout their adolescence is through serving as *madrichim* (assistant teachers) in classes with the younger students. This is one promising avenue for adolescent tefillah education (through the use of mentoring and leadership opportunities), but there is much more to be done to make tefillah education more meaningful in the teen years. Engaging adolescents in tefillah education is a major challenge (and opportunity for growth!) as we move forward into the twenty-first century.

Hebrew Language Acquisition

As Rabbi Stern began to address in his sermon, one of the tensions in tefillah education is the balance between educating for tefillah (in general) and helping students with their Hebrew reading skills. There is no doubt that Hebrew language acquisition is fundamental to strong tefillah education (much of Jewish prayer is in Hebrew, after all), but there is still a lingering question of how much emphasis we ought to place on Hebrew skills when one's broader goal is education for tefillah. Particularly in congregations where the goal of *tefillah* education is in the realm of believing or belonging (rather than behavior), it is far less pressing to develop students' Hebraic skills, and many of these synagogues might benefit from making the self-conscious choice to spend less time teaching Hebrew phonics.

An interesting corollary is the question of whether we teach Hebrew for the purpose of prayer, or whether we teach prayer for the purpose of learning Hebrew. Most congregations opt for the former, but Cantor Tyler at BRS told me he advocates for the

latter. Hebrew and tefillah are related topics of study in synagogue schools, but they are by no means identical. We must therefore clarify our goals when educating for one or the other or both.

B'nai Mitzvah Training vs. Tefillah Education

Closely related to the challenge of balancing tefillah education with Hebrew language acquisition is the tension between tefillah education and bar/bat mitzvah training. It is true that synagogues feel obligated to make sure students are prepared for bar/bat mitzvah, but I believe they also have the obligation to prepare students for a lifetime of Jewish communal worship. Unfortunately the two goals become obscured in many congregations, where lay and professional leaders begin to confuse b'nai mitzvah training with tefillah education. The two are connected, of course, but they are not one and the same.

Most significantly, the *goals* for b'nai mitzvah training and tefillah education are quite different: for b'nai mitzvah, the primary goal is for students to learn the specific skills they will need for the day of their b'nai mitzvah in order to "perform" well; for tefillah education the congregation's primary goal may be believing, behaving, and/or belonging, but whatever the specific goal may be, its ultimate aim is (hopefully) to prepare children for a lifetime of tefillah. As with the challenge posed by Hebrew language acquisition (see above), we must always be sure to clarify our educational goals and do our best to achieve whatever goals we set for ourselves.

Teach Tefillah During Tefillah?

One of the biggest controversies I encountered during my interviews is the question of whether to teach tefillah during tefillah. By and large it seems that rabbis and educators are in favor of teaching about tefillah during tefillah; they feel it is important to give people landmarks or signs about where they are on the "roadmap" of a prayer service:

> *Rabbi Stern (Sinai): I tell my conversion students that, before the High Holy Days, they should buy a book like Entering the High Holy Days, and I say, "Bring it to services. If you see yourself dozing off, read it!" I would be so happy to see them reading it! [It's helpful] when the siddur gives you like a ramp to get on the train... I think Mishkan T'filah starts to do that. I think that's helpful... It's like, Thomas Friedman always uses that analogy with the info super-highway... we need to give people entrances and exits. People want to be part of it, but they just can't get on. What a weird analogy! But the more we can give them access, I'm all for that.*

> *Rabbi Lev (Sinai): When you think about it, you can do tefillah education in tefillah. If you're leading the service, you can say, "Okay, we're entering Birkot Ha'shachar, we're leaving Birkot Ha'shachar." I think some things are just practical help. "We're entering Sh'ma u'virchotecha"... it really helps them! Instead of saying, "Now we rise for the Call to Prayer." That doesn't help you. You don't know what that means.*

Cantors, on the other hand, generally believe that tefillah should be left alone, that we should leave the teaching of tefillah to another time and place:

> *Cantor Tyler (BRS): I love the way [our services] are set up, we do a lot of poetry, which to me works a lot better than iyyunei tefillah. To me, iyunnei tefillah always feel like, I imagine a tribe around a campfire somewhere, doing their dance. And all of a sudden the dance stops and the tribe leader says, "This is the point that represents the rain from the heavens..." Gives a five-minute speech about the logistics of what they're doing. That just doesn't happen; it's not organic. To try and teach about a prayer as you're doing it... if you have a poem or something that works as liturgy itself... any teaching we do during the service is through the tefillah, not about the tefillah. Although we incorporate teaching about*

tefillah in the synagogue school, when it comes time to pray, it's time to pray.

Cantor Green (Sinai): I don't believe in giving commentary during a prayer service. You want to give commentary? Give a course. Have people come to a course. Have them come twenty minutes before the service and explain the prayers to them. But let them pray. You stop the prayer service dead and say (in a loud voice), "And now we move on to the Mi Chamocha, where the Jews were liberated!" Come on, give me a break. It's like, I'm sorry, I didn't pay for this course, I'm here to pray.

I find it fascinating, and entirely appropriate, that rabbis/educators and cantors feel so differently about teaching during tefillah. Cantors are, first and foremost, artists. In cantorial school they train as artists, learning to create beautiful, meaningful worship experiences. Rabbis and educators, on the other hand, do not usually see themselves as artists. They study liturgy and they must learn how to lead worship, but they do not learn liturgy and music from an artistic, performative perspective. Instead, they see themselves as teachers, and therefore, they believe it is perfectly reasonable to teach tefillah during tefillah, whereas cantors find it too disruptive to the experience of prayer.

Making Tefillah Meaningful, Interesting, and Engaging

It should be clear from Chapter Three that the primary goal of tefillah education at Temple Sinai is to make prayer a meaningful, interesting, engaging experience. The professional staff at Sinai is more concerned with how their students think and feel about tefillah than with how well they can *do* tefillah. However, it is worth mentioning that the other two synagogues I studied also struggle with the question of how to make tefillah more meaningful, interesting, and engaging:

Suzie (BRS): One of the ongoing challenges is making it exciting. You know, making so they're not like, "Oh, (sigh) we have to go to tefillah."

Karen (Teacher at BRS): The challenge is to get [the students] into the Shabbat service and have them actually participate. It's hard to keep them engaged... I think the biggest challenge is to make it meaningful.

Linda (KBI): My whole tefillah stuff is camp... But [even with] camp tefillah, there are problems with that, too. Kids don't follow along, kids think it's a musical... the kids are not engaged in it, it is rote learning, some kids are engaged and some kids aren't. We use shtick in order to keep them, to have them pay attention. We experiment a lot [because] I'm trying to make it more accessible. We experiment, we play with it, we make things up. We try to get them to think, but it's hard.

Even in congregations that have found success with tefillah education, there are many ongoing challenges and a wide variety of ways to keep improving what they do.

~ Conclusion ~

Tefillah Education in the 21st Century

The most important finding from my research is that it is, indeed, possible to succeed at synagogue-based tefillah education for youth in the twenty-first century. Each of the congregations I studied was "successful" in the realm of tefillah education, if "success" is defined by the goals each congregation sets for itself: Temple Sinai succeeds in educating its students for *belief*, Kehillat Beth Israel succeeds in educating its students for *behavior*, and Bayside Reconstructionist Synagogue succeeds in educating its students for a sense of *belonging*. Due to time limitations in supplementary Jewish education, it is impossible to do everything; therefore, synagogue leaders must determine their goals – for Jewish education in general, but also for tefillah education in particular.

It is worth pointing out that the Conservative synagogue I studied (Kehillat Beth Israel) demonstrated the greatest fidelity to rabbinic principles for tefillah education.[116] This is not necessarily a surprising finding, since KBI is the only congregation I studied that operates within a halachic framework and therefore spends most of its energy on demonstrable skills, just as the Rabbis suggest. In contrast, Reform and Reconstructionist synagogues usually operate in non-halachic frameworks, whereby the leadership naturally emphasizes the aggadic, story-line, narrative dimensions of prayer over the halachic dimensions of prayer.

***

[116] See Chapter Two ("Rabbinic Views on Tefillah Education")

In this thesis I chose to use the terms *believing*, *behaving*, and *belonging* to describe the areas in which the congregations I studied have achieved success in tefillah education. However, there are at least two other Jewish triads I might have used:

- God, Torah, Israel
- *Torah* (text, *keva*), *Avodah* (prayer, *kavanna*), *G'milut Chasadim* (community)

The categorization I selected was somewhat arbitrary, but it nevertheless has parallels in Jewish life; indeed, these triads are deeply embedded in Jewish tradition.

For hundreds of years Jews have recognized the tensions inherent in educating for the three main dimensions of Jewish life, however one identifies them: God, Torah, Israel; *Torah*, *Avodah*, *G'milut Chasadim*; Believing, Behaving, Belonging. All three areas of Jewish life are essential, but it is nearly impossible to place equal emphasis on all three. Most synagogues naturally focus more on one area than the others. This is evident denominationally – Reform synagogues tend to focus on *belief*, Conservative synagogues tend to focus on *behavior*, Reconstructionist synagogues tend to focus on *belonging* – and it is also palpable in the thinking of three major Jewish philosophers of the twentieth century: Martin Buber emphasizes *belief* (*kavanna*, the directing of one's heart), Abraham Joshua Heschel emphasizes *behavior* (*keva*, the act of prayer itself), and Mordecai Kaplan emphasizes *belonging* (building community). The congregations I studied did include all three areas of tefillah education in their educational systems, but they weighted the three areas differently depending on their educational goals.

The decision to weigh one area of tefillah education more heavily than the others is best determined by the following question: "In our congregation, what do we see as the purpose of prayer?" If the answer to this question is primarily affective or "spiritual"

("We pray in order to feel a certain way; we pray in order to enhance our connection with God"), it is best to focus the congregation's tefillah education on belief / *kavanna*. If the answer is primarily halachic ("We pray because God commanded us to pray in a particular way"), it is best to focus tefillah education on behavior / *keva*. If the answer is community-based ("We pray to strengthen the community and to connect with the Jewish people"), it is best to focus tefillah education on belonging. How each synagogue views prayer is essential for how they might best proceed with tefillah education.

As a result of this research, I would argue that improving synagogue-based tefillah education in the twenty-first century is, without a doubt, both desirable and possible. If we clarify our goals and tighten our educational aims, success in tefillah education is not far off. The creation of a new generation of Jewish pray-ers that is knowledgeable, passionate, and committed to tefillah is within our reach. In the words of our sacred tradition,

> Surely this Instruction which I enjoin upon you this day is not too baffling for you, nor is it beyond reach. It is not in the heavens, that you should say, "Who among us can go up to the heavens and get it for us and impart it to us, that we may observe it?" Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, "Who among us can cross to the other side of the sea and get it for us and impart it to us, that we may observe it?" No, the thing is very close to you, in your mouth and in your heart.[117]

Outstanding tefillah education is within our grasp. By following the advice of our rabbinic predecessors and taking our cues from congregations that have already achieved success, we can indeed effectively educate our children for tefillah in the twenty-first century.

כן יהי רצון

May this be God's will...

[117] Deuteronomy 30:11-14; JPS Translation (2000)

~ Appendix ~

Interview Questions: Educator[118]

- Tell me about tefillah education at your congregation.
  - What does the program look like?
  - For what ages? Adults, too?
  - How do people learn to be part of the prayer community here?

- How did you come to create the current program/system?
  - What's the vision?
  - Who created it?
  - Have you been guided by any books, resources, thinkers, theories, other synagogue models, articles?
  - Is there anything you read that you found particularly helpful?

- Tell me about tefillah at your congregation…
  - When does tefillah occur? Where?
  - Who participates? Who leads?
  - Are there special customs/ rituals?
  - What does tefillah here feel like? (i.e. what's the culture?)

- How are tefillah and education connected here? ("linking the silos")
  - Where is there room for more integration?
  - What have been the successes?

- What would outstanding / successful tefillah education look like?
  - How have you / could you / do you measure success?
  - What kind of evaluation exists?
  - To what extent do you feel tefillah education is "successful" here?
  - What changes have you observed since beginning X program?
  - What are your goals for tefillah education?
    - What do parents in this community want for their children?

- Is there an element of teacher training / professional development for tefillah education in your congregation?
  - If so, what is it like?

- What are the biggest challenges / obstacles that you've faced, or continue to face, regarding tefillah education?
  - Have there been conflicting / competing goals?
  - What opportunities exist for improvement?

---

[118] This is a list of sample questions. In each congregation I interviewed the senior educator twice – once at the beginning of my research (to learn about the system) and once toward the end (to ask questions based on my observations and other interviews).

- Numbers:
  - # families in the congregation?
  - Average # of people at Shabbat services (Fri/Sat)
  - Are there separate religious school services?
    - Family services?
    - Teen or junior congregation services?
  - Average # of people at HHD services or other special events?
  - What are the age demographics?
  - # / % of interfaith families?

- Roles & responsibilities in tefillah education…
  - Who does what?
  - Who determines curricula, lesson plans?
  - Who teaches?
  - Who leads tefillah?
  - What is the role of outside programs / organizations, such as summer camps, youth groups, Israel trips, etc? How do those things affect tefillah education in the congregation?

Interview Questions: Clergy

- What is the role of tefillah (prayer, worship) at this synagogue?
  - What is your philosophy re: tefillah?
  - What works well?
  - Challenges with tefillah?
  - What does tefillah feel like here?
  - What is the role of prayer / tefillah in your life – as a Jew, as a clergyperson?
  - How do you (did you) build a critical mass of regular worshippers?

- What is the role of education here?
  - What is your role in congregational education?
  - Strengths? Challenges?

- Tefillah education
  - How are education and tefillah connected here?
  - What do you see as the goals of tefillah education?
  - What's the vision for tefillah education?
  - What would outstanding tefillah education look like?
  - How have you / could you / do you measure success?
  - To what extent do you feel tefillah education is successful here?
  - What are current challenges?
  - What do you hope for in the future?

Interview Questions: Teacher

- When/how did you become a teacher here?
  - What are your goals as a teacher?
  - What is your motivation for teaching?

- Tell me about tefillah education here, and your role in it
  - What works? (for you, for the kids/families)
  - What's challenging?
  - What would outstanding tefillah education look like?
  - To what extent do you feel tefillah education is successful here?

- Roles & responsibilities
  - Who determines curricula, lesson plans?
  - Who leads tefillah?
  - Professional development opportunities?

Interview Questions: Parents & Students[119]

- Student: Can you tell me about your experiences with prayer at this synagogue?
  - What's it like to learn prayer here?
  - What have you learned, and how do you think you've learned it?
    - I.e. what do they teach you about how to be part of a prayer service here?
  - Why do you think people pray?
    - Why should people pray, or why do they?
    - What's the purpose of prayer?
- Parent: Can you tell me about your experiences with prayer at this synagogue?
  - What do you hope for in your child's education?
  - What do you want your children to learn regarding prayer / worship?
    - What do you see as the role of prayer? i.e. What's the purpose of prayer?
  - What do you want your children to get out of their prayer education?
  - If there's an adult component (i.e. family education), what have you gained/learned?
- Can you tell me about the bar/bat mitzvah process for you and your family?

[119] I frequently interviewed parents and students together (i.e. a parent and his/her child)

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Alcalay, Reuben. *The Complete Hebrew-English Dictionary.* Jerusalem: Massada Publishing Company, 1963.

"Acculturation." Dictionary.com. *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition.* Houghton Mifflin Company, 2004.

Aron, Isa. "From the Congregational School to the Learning Community: Are We Ready for the Paradigm Shift?" in *A Congregation of Learners: Transforming the Synagogue into a Learning Community*, edited by Aron, Lee, and Rossel. New York: UAHC Press, 1995.

---. *The Self-Renewing Congregation: Organizational Strategies for Revitalizing Congregational Life.* Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing. 2002.

Borowitz, Eugene B. *Choices in Modern Jewish Thought: A Partisan Guide.* 2nd Ed. New Jersey: Behrman House, Inc, 1995.

---. "Please, God, Heal Her, Please." *Studies in the Meaning of Judaism.* Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2002.

"Chinuch" (חינוך). *Encyclopedia Talmudit: Vol 16.* Eds. HaRav Meir Bar-Ilan and HaRav Shlomo Yosef Zavin. Jerusalem: Talmudic Encyclopedia Publ. Ltd, 1982. Col. 161-193.

Cohen, Jack J. *Major Philosophers of Jewish Prayer in the Twentieth Century.* New York: Fordham University Press, 2000.

Cohen, Rabbi Jeffrey. *Blessed are You: A Comprehensive Guide to Jewish Prayer.* Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson Inc, 1993.

Cohn-Sherbok, Dan. *Jewish Petitionary Prayer: A Theological Exploration.* (Toronto Studies in Theology, Volume 35.) Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1989.

Cooper, Rabbi David A. "Meditative Prayer." The *Handbook of Jewish Meditation Practices: A Guide for Enriching the Sabbath and Other Days of Your Life.* Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2000. 50-53.

Dorff, Elliot N. *Knowing God: Jewish Journeys to the Unknowable.* Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson Inc, 1992.

---. "Knowing God through Prayer." *Conservative Judaism*, Winter 1999: 37-52.

Driesen, George. "How God Gets in the Way of Praying." *Moment*, Oct. 1990: 50-51.

Driver, Tom F. *Liberating Rites: Understanding the Transformative Power of Ritual.* Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998.

Fields, Harvey J. *B'chol L'vavcha: With All Your Heart.* New York: UAHC Press, 2001.

Friedlander, Israel. "The Problem of Jewish Education for the Children of Immigrants" in *Jewish Education in the United States: A Documentary History*, edited by Lloyd Gartner. New York: Teachers College Press, 1913/1969.

Frydman-Kohl, Baruch. "The Limits of Knowing God: Response to Elliot Dorff." *Conservative Judaism*, Winter 1999: 53-55.

Gillman, Neil. "Prayer as Ritual." *Sacred Fragments: Recovering Theology for the Modern Jew.* Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1990. 236-242.

---. "Why You Can't Pray and What You Can Do About It." *Moment*, Oct. 1990: 48-55.

Graham, Edward. "Religious Language for a New Millennium." *CCAR Journal*, Summer 1992: 15-22.

Guttoff, Joshua. "Meaning What We Pray, Praying What We Mean: The Otherness of the Liturgy." *Conservative Judaism*, Vol. 42(2), Winter 1989-90: 12-20.

Hammer, Reuven. *Entering Jewish Prayer: A Guide to Personal Devotion and the Worship Service.* New York: Schocken Books, 1994.

Halevy Donin, Rabbi Hayim. "Introduction." To *Pray as a Jew: A Guide to the Prayer Book and the Synagogue Service.* New York: Basic Books Inc, 1980. 3-8.

Heschel, Abraham Joshua. "On Prayer." *Understanding Jewish Prayer.* Ed. Jakob J. Petuchowski. New York: Ktav Publishing House Inc, 1972. 69-83.

---. "The Spirit of Jewish Prayer" and "Prayer." *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity.* Ed. Susannah Heschel. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1996. 100-126, 340-353.

Hoffman, Lawrence A., ed. *Gates of Understanding.* New York: Central Conference of American Rabbis, 1977.

---. *The Art of Public Prayer, 2nd Edition: Not for Clergy Only.* Woodstock, VT: SkyLights Paths Publishing, 1999.

---. "Blessings and Study: The Jewish Way to Begin a Day" in *My People's Prayer Book, Vol. 5: Birkhot Hashachar,* ed. Lawrence A. Hoffman. Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2001.

---. "Illness and Inculturation." Inaugural Lecture, Yale Divinity School. Sept. 2004.

---. *Re-Thinking Synagogues: A New Vocabulary for Congregational Life.* Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing. 2006.

Imber-Black, Evan, Janine Roberts, and Richard Whiting. *Rituals in Families and Family Therapy.* New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2003.

JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh, 2nd Edition. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1999.

Kadish, Seth. *Kavanna: Directing the Heart in Jewish Prayer.* Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson Inc, 1997.

Kaplan, Louis L. "An Educational Credo for our Time." *Jewish Education,* Vol 60 (2), Summer 1993: 35-42.

Kaplan, Mordecai. *Judaism as a Civilization: Toward a Reconstruction of American-Jewish Life.* Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1981.

Kirzner, Rabbi Yitzchok, and Lisa Aiken. *The Art of Jewish Prayer.* Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson Inc, 1991.

Klein, Earl. "The Philosophy of Prayer." *Jewish Prayer: Concepts and Customs.* Columbus, OH: Alpha Publishing Company, 1986.

Kotter, John and Dan S. Cohen. *The Heart of Change: Real-Life Stories of How People Change their Organizations.* Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press, 2002.

Landes, Daniel. "Prayer as Petition: The Philosophic Basis for Halakhic Prayer." *My People's Prayer Book, Vol. 2: The Amidah.* Ed. Rabbi Lawrence A. Hoffman. Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 1998. 1-8.

Lew, Alan. "Prayer and the Uses of Meditation." *Judaism,* Winter 2000: 93-101.

Marcus, Ivan G. *Rituals of Childhood: Jewish Acculturation in Medieval Europe.* New Haven: Yale University Press. 1996.

Moss, Steven A. "Finding Spirituality through Meditation." *CCAR Journal,* Summer 1992: 47-52.

Petuchowski, Jakob J. *Understanding Jewish Prayer.* New York: Ktav Publishing House Inc, 1972.

Postman, Neil. *The End of Education: Redefining the Value of School.* New York: Vintage Books, 1995.

Reimer, Joseph. *Succeeding at Jewish Education: How One Synagogue Made it Work.* Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1997.

Richman, Milton. "Toward a Theology of Prayer." *CCAR Journal*, April 1965: 53-58.

Roberts, Kathryn L. "Why We Pray." *David and Zion: Biblical Studies in Honor of JJM Roberts*. Ed. Bernard F. Batto and Kathryn L. Roberts. Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2004. 97-110.

Roseman, Kenneth D. "Is Prayer Possible? A Suggestion for Liberal Religionists." *Journal of Reform Judaism*, Fall 1981: 32-38.

Schwarz, Rabbi Sidney. *Finding a Spiritual Home: How a New Generation of Jews can Transform the American Synagogue.* Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2000.

Swartz, Michael. "Models for New Prayer." *Response*, Fall-Winter 1982: 36-37.

Wertheimer, Jack. "Linking the Silos: How to Accelerate the Momentum in Jewish Education Today." The AVI CHAI Foundation, December 2005: http://www.avi-chai.org/Static/Binaries/Publications/Linking%20The%20Silos_0.pdf

***

Sources from *Bar Ilan Responsa Project, versions 12 plus and 14:*
Babylonian Talmud, Taanit, Yoma Kiddushin, Sukkah, Megillah. Vilna: [1870?].
Ramban on the Torah. Jerusalem: 1959. Reprint of Vienna: 1859.
Rashi on the Bible. Jerusalem: 1959. Reprint of Vienna: 1859.
Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Teshuvah. Jerusalem: 1974. Reprint of Warsaw: 1881.
Shulhan Arukh, Orach Chayim, Yoreh Deah. Ketuvim, ed. Jerusalem: 1992.