

When You Pray, Go Into Your Room and Close the Door

Matthew 6: 5-15

DIG: What does the **hypocrisy** look like? What is its motivation? Its reward? How does it contrast with genuine compassion for **the needy**? How does the **hypocrisy** of the Pharisees and Torah-teachers affect their **prayer**? How does their reward contrast with that of those who **pray** sincerely? According to verse 6, what is the antidote to worry and the **secret** to peace? In Yeshua's model **prayer**, what three concerns related to **God** did He **pray** about first? What personal concerns follow? What is the relationship between forgiveness and **prayer**?

REFLECT: How does it help you to know that **God** stays calm and does not get stressed out? That **He** is called the **God** of shalom? What do you feel most stressed about, your mind or your heart? In verse 6c how do you think shalom guards your heart? Since **ADONAI** is trustworthy in keeping **His** promises, what promise do you need for your life today? If **our Father** knows what we need before we ask, why **pray**?

In the **Meshiach's** eighth example of true righteousness, He gives us a model when we pray. It shows us the vital themes and principles desired for effective worship in contrast to the hypocrisy of the prayer of the Pharisees and Torah-teachers.

During the High Holy Days, Jews seek t'shuvah (or repentance); **t'fillah** (or **prayer**); and tzedakah (or charity), to avert judgment. In the Jewish tradition, one is obligated **to pray** in the morning, the afternoon and the evening. The patriarchs prayed at those times and we see a similar pattern in **Daniel 6:10**. As a traditional Jew **Himself**, **Meshiach** believed **His** followers would model the same behavior.

The Jewish believe that **prayer** is more about listening to **ADONAI** than telling **Him** what you want. It is not a monologue, but a dialogue. And the word **t'fillah**, or **prayer**, comes from the Hebrew, *to judge*. It is derived from the word **l'hitpallel**, meaning *to judge oneself*. These words provide insight into the purpose of Jewish prayer, which is making sure that your will is aligned with **God's** will. **Prayer** should not be something that happens once a week. It should be a vital part of everyday life. In fact, one of the most important **prayers**, the Birkat ha-Mazon, is never recited in synagogue services. Instead of counting sheep, we should listen to **the Shepherd!**

The Jewish mindset for **prayer** is referred to as kavanah, which is generally translated as "concentration" or "intent." Those of the Quaker faith call it "centering-down." The minimal level of kavanah is an awareness that one is speaking to **the LORD** and an intention to fulfill the obligation **to pray**. If you do not have the minimal level of kavanah, then you are not **praying** - but merely reading. Not only that, it is preferred that you have a mind free from other thoughts, that you know and understand what you are **praying** about and that you think about the meaning of the **prayer**.

The Talmud states that it is permissible **to pray** in any language that you can understand; however, traditional Judaism has always stressed the importance of praying in Hebrew. A traditional Hasidic story speaks glowingly of the **prayer** of an uneducated Jew who wanted **to pray** but did not speak Hebrew. The man began to recite the only Hebrew he knew - the alphabet. He recited it over and over again, until a rabbi asked him what he was doing. The man told the rabbi, "**The Holy One, Blessed is He, knows what is in my heart. I will give Him the letters, and He can put the words together.**"⁵⁵²

A wonderful definition of the attitude toward **t'fillah** is that it is a way of serving **ADONAI**. It is called **the service of the heart (Tractate Taanit 2b)**. The Lord's warning, however, is against those who would **pray** in a hypocritical manner. **He said: And when you pray . . . not if you pray, but when you pray . . . do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full (Mattityahu 6:5)**. **Prayer** should not be an opportunity to show off your oratory skills, the Pharisees prayed in public so everyone could see how "spiritual" they were. **Jesus says to pray in secret.**

Instead of making a public spectacle of your **prayers**, **Yeshua** offers a much better alternative: **But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen (Matthew 6:6a)**. But **the Father** being **unseen** does not mean **He** is not present when we **pray** in public, or with our families or other small groups of believers. **He** is very much present whenever and wherever **His** children call on **Him**. True **prayer** is always intimate - even in public. Even if the whole world hears what we say, there is an intimacy and focus on **God** that is unaffected. **The Lord is near. Don't worry about anything; on the contrary, make your requests known to God by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving. Then God's shalom, which surpasses all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds safe in union with the Messiah Yeshua (Philippians 4:5b-7)**.

Then your Father, sees what is done in secret (Matthew 6:6b). This concept reflects the understanding in the TaNaKh that nothing is hidden from Him (Deuteronomy 29:29; Psalm 90:8, 139; Jeremiah 23:24). **ADONAI sees what is done in secret**, in the sense that **He** never betrays a confidence. Many things we share with **the Lord** in our private **prayer** garden are for **Him** and **Him** alone. Confidences we share even with our dearest loved ones or closest friends may sometimes be betrayed. But we can be sure our secrets with **HaShem** will be safe forever, and that one believer praying **in secret** with a pure **heart** has the full attention of **the Father**.

Not only that, when **your prayer** is sincere, **our Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you (Matthew 6:6c)**. The most important secret **He** sees is not the words we say but the thoughts we have in our heart. When we genuinely have an audience of **One**, we will have **the reward** only **He** can give. **The Holy Spirit** gives us no idea in this verse as to what **ADONAI's reward** will be. The important truth is that **He** will faithfully bless those who come to **Him** in sincerity. Without question, **God** will reward **you**.⁵⁵³

And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words (Mattityahu 6:7). Do not turn **prayer** into vain repetition **like babbling pagans**. To this day, Jews do not practice extemporaneous **prayer**, but use **prayer** books instead. **Rabbi Shim'on said, ". . . When you pray, do not make your prayer fixed [repetitive, mechanical], but [appeal for] mercy and supplication before the Omnipresent, blessed be He" (Avot 2:13).** And the Gemara says, **"When you address the Holy One, blessed be He, let your words be few" (B'rakhot 61a).**⁵⁵⁴ Again, repetition, in itself, is not necessarily a problem. Many of the **Psalms**, which are the foundation of the Jewish prayer book, have repetitious themes. **Yeshua Himself** prayed in the garden of Gethsemane three times that the cup of death be removed from **Him (Matthew 26:39:44)**. The problem is not with repetitive **prayers**, but with meaningless **babbling**, thinking the **pagan** mantra will lead to a response from **God**.⁵⁵⁵

Jesus commands us: **Do not be like them**. There is no need for that kind of prayer because **your Father knows what you need before you ask Him (Matthew 6:8)**. **He** wants us to ask **Him**, **He** wants to hear us, **He** wants to communicate with us more than we could ever want to commune with **Him** - because **His love** for us is so much greater than our **love** for **Him**. **Prayer** is **God's** way of giving us the opportunity to demonstrate **His** power and **love** in our lives.⁵⁵⁶ The prophet **Isaiah** wrote about **the LORD** saying: **Before they call I will answer; while they are still speaking I will hear (Isaiah 65:24)**. We can turn to **Him** in our time of need.

In the small Texas town of Mt. Vernon, Drummond's Bar began construction on a new building to increase their business. The local Baptist church started a campaign to block the bar from opening with petitions and prayers. Work progressed right up until the week before opening when lightning struck the bar and burned it to the ground. The church folks were rather smug in their outlook after that, until the bar owner sued the church on the grounds that the church was ultimately responsible for the demise of the building, either through direct or indirect means. The church passionately denied all responsibility or any connection whatsoever to the building's demise in its reply to the court. As the case made its way into the court system, the judge looked over the paperwork. At the hearing he commented, "I don't know how I'm going to decide this case. But, it appears that we have a bar owner who believes in the power of prayer, and an entire church congregation that doesn't." Nevertheless, despite our human failings, **prayer** changes things.⁵⁵⁷

Then we are given a beautiful example of **prayer** known as "The Lord's Prayer," because **the Lord Jesus** taught it, but could more accurately be described as "The Disciples Prayer." How ironic it is that some groups have used this model **prayer** in the very way that **Messiah** warns against - vain repetition! It is not meant to be a magical mantra, but rather, a model for **how to pray**.⁵⁵⁸

This, then, is how you should pray (Mattityahu 6:9a). All of its components may be found in the Judaism of **Messiah's** day, and is revered for its beauty and economy of words. This, then, is a model when we **pray**. It shows us the vital themes and principles desired for effective worship:

1. **Our Father in heaven** or **Avinu sh'baShamayim (Matthew 6:9b)**, opens many Hebrew **prayers**. The concept of **ADONAI** being a loving **Father** is not a new concept in Judaism. Isra'el was called **His** firstborn son in **Exodus 4:22**, and **Isaiah** proclaimed to his generation: **You are our Father (Isaiah 63:16)**. In addition, numerous **prayers** in the Siddur also address **God** as **Avinu**. So **our prayer** should be addressed to **the Father**, through the ministry of **the Son**, by the power of **the Ruach ha-HaKodesh (Eph 2:18)**. **Our Father**, the **God** of Isra'el, is still to be the focus of our **prayers**. The next two lines in **Matthew** recall the first portion of the synagogue **prayer** known as the Kaddish.
2. **Hallowed be Your name (Mattityahu 6:9c)**. When reciting the well-known Kaddish in the synagogue, the leader begins with these words, "May **His** great **name be magnified and sanctified**" or **yitgadal v'yitadash**. **An entire tractate of the Talmud deals with the details of how to offer up prayers and blessings (Tractate Berakhot)**. The common formula continues today: Barukh Atah, **ADONAI** (Blessed are You, **LORD**), reminding us to bless **Ha'Shem** before other prayers are offered. To honor **God's** name is to honor **Him**. The Egyptians had many gods by many different names. Moses wanted to know **His** name

so the Jewish people would know exactly who sent him to them (see my commentary on Exodus At - I AM Has Sent Me To You). ADONAI called Himself I AM, a name describing His eternal power and unchangeable character. His name is like His signature guarantee of His promises. In a world where values, morals, and laws change constantly, we can find stability and security in our unchanging God. The LORD who appeared to Moshe is the same God who can live in us today. Hebrews 13:8 says: Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. Because Ha'Shem's nature is stable and trustworthy, we are free to follow and enjoy Him rather than spending our time trying to figure Him out.

- 3. Your Kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven (Matthew 6:10).** Jesus instructs His disciples to focus on the coming messianic Kingdom. We are to pray that this same Kingdom will be established on earth during our lifetime. Continuing the Great Kaddish, the leader continues and says, ". . . in the world that He will create anew, when He will raise the dead, and give them eternal life, will rebuild the city of Jerusalem, and establish His Temple in the middle of it; and will uproot all pagan worship from the earth, and restore the worship of the true God."⁵⁵⁹ The liturgy of the Torah service also elaborates on this and quotes First Chronicles 29:11-12 when it says, "The Kingdom is Yours, ADONAI." All true believers desire for God's messianic Kingdom to come to this earth because that means that Yeshua ha-Meshiach will have returned. When He rules and reigns from Jerusalem (see my commentary on Isaiah Jg - In Righteousness You Will Be Established, Terror Will Be Far Removed), His desire will be done on earth as it currently is in heaven.
- 4. Give us today our daily bread (Mattityahu 6:11).** While it is essential for us to pray for the bigger picture of the messianic Kingdom, Christ also reminds us that the Father is also concerned about our daily needs. This reminds us that for forty years YHVH took care of the practical needs of His children. The manna, for example, was edible only on the very day it was given. The Israelites learned to thank the LORD for their daily bread without worrying too much about the future. When we pray before a meal, we need to be reminded that we are not blessing the food, but are blessing God for providing our food!
- 5. Forgive us what we have done wrong, as we too have forgiven those who have wronged us (Matthew 6:12 CJB).** Christ's prayer gives us a strong reason to seek forgiveness. Since we too have forgiven those who have wronged us, we can ask for the same kind of forgiveness. Sometimes it is necessary to forgive in order to be forgiven; sometimes it is necessary to forgive because we are already forgiven, and sometimes it is necessary to forgive as we are in the process of being forgiven by others.⁵⁶⁰ These principles of giving and receiving forgiveness are common in Judaism.

Each Shabbat, those who **love the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob** recite the sixth blessing of the Amidah, the Standing **Prayer**, which is the central **prayer** of the Jewish liturgy. It asks for **forgiveness** for all **sins** and praises **God** as being a **God of forgiveness**. This **prayer**, among others, is found in the Siddur for messianic Jews (2009).⁵⁶¹ **As traditional Judaism's central prayer, the Amidah is often designated simply as tefila, "prayer" in rabbinic literature.**

The concept of forgiveness is the central theme of the High Holy Days of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. The **Avinu Malkeinu prayer** calls on us to **forgive** others as well as receiving **forgiveness**. We must remember that **forgiveness** is more than merely forgetting the things **we have done wrong**, or the fact that **we have** been **wronged**. The perfect example is **Yeshua's** actions towards **us**. **He** does not forget our **sins**, but chooses not to dwell on them once we are adopted into **His** family (see **Bw - What God Does For Us at the Moment of Faith**). In the same way, as **His** child, our **forgiveness** of others cannot be conditional. This is demonstrated in a special ceremony that takes place on Rosh Hashanah (the first day of the Jewish New Year). Traditional Jews go down to a lake or the ocean and **throw** breadcrumbs or stones into it. This ceremony is called Tashlikh, or *you will throw*, based on **Micah 7:19 CJB**, where the prophet says: **You will throw all their sins into the depths of the sea**. If **God** has buried our **sins** in the **depths of the sea**, we would do well to let them stay there and not go fishing!⁵⁶²

The LORD forgives us instantly (**Isaiah 55:7; First John 1:9**). So how long should I feel guilty? Not very long! **He forgives** me repeatedly (**Nehemiah 9:17; Hebrews 7:25**). **ADONAI** forgives me freely (**Romans 3:23-24; Ephesians 2:8-9**). It is a gift. I can't pay for it. **God forgives** me completely (**Colossians 1:14, 2:13-14; Romans 3:25; Matthew 26:28**). **Psalm 51:1-19** was King David's written confession to **Ha'Shem** after an especially sinful episode in his life. David was truly sorry for his adultery with Bathsheba and for murdering her husband Uriah to cover it up (**Second Samuel 11:1-27**). He knew that his actions had hurt many people. But because David repented of those **sins**, **ADONAI** mercifully forgave him. No **sin**, except the rejection of **God the Holy Spirit Himself** for salvation, is too great to be forgiven! Do you feel that you could never come close to **the LORD** because you have done something terrible? **He** can and will forgive you of any **sin**.

6. **And lead us not into temptation (Matthew 6:13a)**. There is no definite article before the word **temptation**. Even though the article is not necessary in a prepositional phrase to make the noun definite, its omission here is significant. This indicates that this term is used in a more general sense to refer to inward seductions.⁵⁶³ **Jesus** said: **In this world you will have trouble (Yochanan 16:33b)**, and there are many twists and turns. There is no doubt that we will be tested, yet it is appropriate for **us to pray** that **the Father** would **not lead us into hard testing** (the Greek for **temptation** can also mean **testing**).

ADONAI does not tempt anyone into **sin** (**James 1:13**). That would be entirely contrary to **His** nature. And our will power is overrated. Our **sin** nature will take us further than we want to go and cost us more than we want to pay. Yet, we are told **to pray** that we might not endure **hard testing** no matter what the source.

The prayer spoken of by **Jesus** transcended any that Jewish rabbi ever conceived. **Forgive us what we have done wrong, and lead us not into temptation** find no real counterparts in the prayers of the rabbis. **In the Temple, the people never responded to the prayers with an "Amen," but always with this blessing, "Blessed be the Name of the glory of His Kingdom for ever!"** The rabbis teach that it was traced all the way back to the patriarch **Jacob on his deathbed**. In regard to **the Kingdom**, whatever the rabbis understood by it, the feeling was so strong that it was said by them: **Any prayer that makes no mention of the Kingdom, is not a prayer at all.**⁵⁶⁴

7. **But keep us safe from the Evil One** (**Mattityahu 6:13b CJB**). Besides our own flesh, **Yeshua** mentions another source of tempting, which is **the Evil One** or **the devil**, who is alive and well, seeking to devour any unsuspecting soul (**Job 1:6-7; Zechariah 3:1; First Peter 5:8**). In the midst of this great spiritual battle for our souls, this part of **the prayer** reminds us **to pray** that **the LORD** would **keep us safe**. **The Father** has not left us as orphans to fend for ourselves, but has provided powerful spiritual **armor** for our protection. As we walk through this life, the battle rages all around us. As a result, we must keep on **the helmet of salvation**, wear **the breastplate of righteousness**, and wield **the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God** (**Ephesians 6:10-18**). There is no doubt that this battle is intense; however, we are promised victory **because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world** (**First John 4:4 CJB**).

The oldest and most reliable manuscripts do not include the words, "for yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever," so I have not included them here. The plural phrasing . . . **give us** . . . **forgive us** . . . **lead us** . . . **keep us** . . . is characteristically Jewish, focusing on the group rather than the isolated individual.⁵⁶⁵ What kind of protection does **He** offer **us**? King David said: **ADONAI is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge. He is my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold** (**Psalms 18:2**). The **LORD's** protection of **His** people is limitless and can take many forms. **He** characterized **God's** care with five military words. **HaShem** is like (1) a **rock** that can't be moved by any who would harm us; (2) a **fortress** or place of safety where the enemy can't follow us; (3) a **shield** that comes between us so that no one can destroy us; (4) a **horn of salvation**, or a symbol of might and power; and (5) a **stronghold** high above our enemies. If you need protection, look to **Yeshua ha-Meshiach**.

In addition, the Lord's protection is certain. Luke wrote: **And everyone will hate you because you are Mine and are called by My name. But not a hair on your head will perish! For if you stand firm, you will win your souls (Luke 21:17-19 TLB).** Jesus warned that in the coming persecutions, their family members and friends would betray His followers. Believers of every age have had to face this possibility. It is reassuring to know that even when we feel completely abandoned, the **Ruach HaKodesh** will stay with us. He will comfort us, protect our souls, and give us the words we need. This assurance can give us the courage and hope to stand firm for **Messiah** no matter how difficult the situation.

This lesson on **prayer** ends with a reminder that follows the teaching of **forgiveness** in **Matthew 6:12**. This is **Ha'Shem's** own commentary on our appeal to **Him** for **forgiveness**. This importance of this added insight is greater than before. **For if you forgive other people when they sin against you** puts the principle in a positive light. Believers should **forgive** just as they have received **forgiveness** from **Him** (**Ephesians 1:7; First John 2:1-2**). I am not discounting that this is easy to say and hard to do. However, when the heart is overflowing with such a **forgiving** spirit, **your heavenly Father will also forgive you (Mattityahu 6:14).** **The Talmud teaches that he who is [non-judgmental] toward others' faults will be mercifully dealt with by the Supreme Judge.** Those who love the Lord cannot know His forgiveness apart from truly **forgiving others**.

Bitterness is its own prison. A floor of muddy anger stills the feet. The stench of betrayal fills the air and stings the eyes. A cloud of self-pity blocks the view of any escape. Step in and look at the prisoners. Victims are chained to the walls. Victims of betrayal. Victims of abuse. The dungeon, deep and dark, is beckoning you to enter. You've experienced enough hurt. You can choose, to chain yourself to your hurt, or you can choose to put away hurts before they become hates. How does **God** deal with your bitter heart? **He** reminds you that what you have is more important than what you don't have. You have your relationship with **ADONAI**. No one can take that.⁵⁶⁶

But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not hurl your sins away (Matthew 6:15), because the Greek word for **forgive** (*aphiemi*) literally means *to hurl or toss away*. This states the truth of the previous verse in a negative way for emphasis. The **sin** of an unforgiving **root of bitterness (Hebrews 12:15)** in the ground of your **heart** only forfeits blessing and invites **judgment**. To desire forgiveness from **ADONAI**, and yet deny it to others is the abuse of **mercy**.⁵⁶⁷ **And judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment (James 2:13).**

The story is told in Isra'el of a father and his teenage son who had a very strained relationship. As a result, the son ran away from home. After a time, the father began a journey in search of his rebellious son. Finally, in Yerushalayim, in a last desperate effort to

find him, the father put an ad in the newspaper. The ad read: "Dear Aaron, meet me in front of the newspaper office at noon. All is **forgiven**. I love you. Your father." The next day at noon in front of the newspaper office a thousand "Aarons" showed up. They were all seeking **forgiveness** and love from their fathers.

James tells us: **You do not have because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive because you ask with wrong motives (James 4:2b-3a).** God has His part, and we have our part in our prayer life. Our part is to ask *persistently*, and His part is to give *according to His will*. Even if we do not receive what we have been praying for, it helps to build our faith. At that point we must have the faith to trust in Him, and believe that He knows what is best for us, even though it is counterintuitive to what we think is best. We must have faith that **prayer** changes things. In other words, if we don't **pray** - some things just will not change! And if you **pray** regularly, you will learn how to express yourself in **prayer**.

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus (Phil 4:6-7).

Grant to us, Almighty God, the peace of God that passes all understanding, that we, amid the storms and troubles of this life, may rest in You, knowing that all things are within You. We are not only beneath your eye but under Your care, governed by your will and guarded by Your love. With a quiet heart may we see the storms of life, the cloud and the thick darkness, ever rejoicing to know that the darkness and the light are both alike to You. Guide, guard, and govern us to the end, that none of us may fail to gain eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. By Robert Louis Stevenson, 1850-1894.