

## From the Rabbi



As we anticipate the beginning of a New Year and the many hours that we will share in synagogue, it is important to remember that in Hebrew the verb to pray is the reflexive verb *l'hitpalel*. A verb is reflexive when the action that is being done is an action that is done to oneself. One might think that since we “pray **to** God” to thank, praise or ask God for something, the verb should **not** be reflexive. After all, praying is an action that is done **to** God.

This detail of Hebrew grammar associated with the word, *l'hitpalel*, can teach us something profound about the Jewish concept of prayer. Based on the grammatical construct of the word *l'hitpalel*, when we pray something should be happening to ourselves. The three letter root of the verb, *l'hitpalel* is pey, lamed, lamed. The meaning of this root is to judge or evaluate. Therefore, according to the Hebrew, praying is meant to be the process of self judgement or self evaluation.

With all the prayers we say to God, I have often wondered if God really needs to hear all of those prayers. My sense is that God does not have such a need. I would like to suggest that we have a commandment to pray because we need to hear ourselves in prayer. When we engage in the process of thanking, praising or asking God for something, we are helping ourselves to clarify our needs and priorities. We are developing a sense of humility and encouraging ourselves to take actions and to embrace values motivated by the words of prayer that emanate from us.

When praying the goal is not to do something for God, but it is to do something for ourselves. Jewish prayer is meant to be transformative. A prayer experience is meant to have an impact on the way we think and the way we act. The most important thing about services is not what happens during services, but what happens after we leave. If the act of prayer is meant to be a self evaluation, the important question is what will be the outcome of that evaluation?

A colleague of mine, Rabbi Barry Blum wrote a new prayer for Rosh Hashanah. I would like to share this prayer as a great example of how a prayer can have the potential to be transforming if we allow it to penetrate our being.

***Today, let us hear the sound of the Shofar and respond to the cries of others through acts of loving kindness.***

***On this day, may we pledge to take care of our bodies and souls with exercise and spiritual enrichment, through prayer and study.***

***Today, let us treat others with the same respect and tolerance that we expect in return.***

***On this day, may we vow to strengthen family ties, to be more tolerant of people of diversity, and be and supportive to our friends.***

***Today, let us live, learn and safeguard the ideals of freedom, and liberty we enjoy in this land, The United States.***

***On this day, may the prayers we recite be transformed into actions. May our prayers for peace in Jerusalem, move us to support Israel, and make plans to visit.***

***Today, let us transmit the essential themes of the High Holy Days, Midor L'dor, from one generation to the next. Let us embrace Malkhuyot, belief in the Divine, Zikhronot, our sacred memories and Shofarot, the call of the Shofar for us to repair our broken world.***

***Hayom, on this day, may our lives be dipped in the Devash, the honey of a good life filled with sweet and meaningful experiences for the coming New Year.***

Let us pray not only for God to hear our prayers, but let us pray for us to hear our own prayers.  
L'shanah Tovah Tikateivu,

*Rabbi Gordon Waffe*