


BETWEEN ME  OF AND G-D
A WORK
HEART

HOW JEWISH
PRAYER UNITES
HEAVEN
AND EARTH

Jews are a people of prayer. They always have been, from the birth of their existence: the biblical narrative depicts Rebecca praying for children, Deborah singing a victory prayer, and Esther exhorting an entire nation into fervent prayer.

A Jewish day dawns with an awakening praise of G-d and sets with a bedtime petition; lunch is launched and left—and life arrives and flees—on the wings of heartfelt prayer.

Maimonides describes prayer as a daily obligation for each individual, based on the Torah's injunction to "serve G-d with all your heart" (Deuteronomy 11:13). Chasidism regards prayer as the service of the heart: our emotions and character. Above all, Judaism views prayer as far more than an instinctive appeal or a regulated duty; prayer is a live human-to-G-d bonding session.

A Work of Heart flings the cover off the Jewish prayer book, the prayer services, and the synagogue to expose the beating heart of prayer that breathes beneath it all. It reveals prayer as an art and an opportunity, an enriching exercise and a journey of self-discovery, a transformative tool and a productive part of life, a perspective changer and a moment of self-empowerment. And like every specialized art, prayer must be learned.

The fascinating wisdoms, mystical truths, clarity of purpose, and wondrous structure underlying the Jewish prayers are explored through a soulful journey of seven lessons that fuse into a beautiful work of heart.



LESSON 1

A WORK OF SOUL

Prayer gets a bad rap due to misconceptions: Time is money and pray does not pay; conversing with the Unseen is unrealistic; if you are not needy, there is no need to pray; images surpass words—if you dislike the book or the synagogue’s look, why pray?

This lesson cuts to the core of prayer, solving all of the above and presenting Judaism’s powerful vision of prayer: to engage in a deep and meaningful individualistic connection with G-d, as each soul craves. This lesson demonstrates the ways in which Jewish prayer facilitates this remarkable achievement.



LESSON 2

A WORK OF PLEAS

The idea of praying to petition G-d for our needs causes many to bristle: If G-d micromanages us, is it not impudent or heretical to seek alterations to our destiny? Why would G-d pay attention to mortal appeals? Can we influence G-d’s plans? This lesson dives into fascinating mysticism to identify the mechanics that make prayer effective. In the process, it discovers a diamond: there is an approach to prayer that tips the G-d-to-world interface in our favor. We also discover the way in which petitioning G-d advances our personal Divine relationships.



LESSON 3

A WORK OF ASCENT

The notion that whoever desires to pray appropriately *can*—because prayer flows easily upon demand—is undermined by the many who try and fail. The assumption that a prayer book facilitates prayer is dented by those who are baffled at the Jewish prayer book’s confusing structure and choices of texts. This lesson solves both dilemmas: It exposes the brilliance, beauty, and goals behind the prayer book’s ladder-like structure; and this lesson demonstrates the ways in which the prayer book coaxes and guides meaningful and impactful prayer.



LESSON 4

A WORK OF PRAISE

An integral feature of Jewish prayer involves singing G-d’s praises for the wonderful universe He created. Why is this necessary? Does G-d need to hear us admire His work? On a daily basis? This lesson reframes our understanding of praising G-d, unveiling the act as a beautiful bridge that spans the unbridgeable gulf between finite mortals and the Infinite Creator. The art of praise, done right, is transformative, entirely revamping our view of ourselves, our universe, and our purpose.



LESSON 5

A WORK OF TRANSCENDENCE

We use the context of our own experience to relate; we identify with G-d according to His interface with and reflection within our universe. But miracles of birth, natural wonders, and the complexities of the cosmos are mere expressions of G-d's creativity. Can we transcend that? Can we connect with G-d Himself? Can there be a meaningful relationship with the Transcendent? This lesson reveals that Jewish prayers contain an entire section for transcendence. It delivers profound insights that empower our personal Divine relationships with wisdom, enthusiasm, and an invitation to venture beyond.



LESSON 6

A WORK OF SYNTHESIS

Materialism and spirituality appear to be in conflict: bodily indulgences seem to be at the expense of soul nurturing, and spiritual figures prefer frugal lifestyles. Accordingly, the masterpiece of Jewish prayer, the Amidah, which forms the epicenter of each service, is a hopeless contradiction: our pinnacle of sanctified bonding with G-d predominately consists of requests for material needs and wants. This lesson utterly reconstructs beliefs regarding our material-spiritual dissonance, giving rise to a brilliant appreciation of prayer, G-d, and our purpose on planet Earth.



LESSON 7

A WORK OF ALLIANCE

Prayer is personal—an individual reaches out to their Creator, contemplates their existence, or reflects on G-d's presence in their life. Why, then, does Judaism emphasize communal services and prayer halls? Isn't praying solo, and solitude in general, more genuine and conducive to prayer? This lesson investigates the goals and functions of Jewish communal prayer, demonstrating its indispensability to the ultimate goals of prayer. It charts a unique path to balancing our personal life with our collective reality, to reap the advantages of both.