

# Faith Matters: Jewish worship, service of the heart

Jews seek self-evaluation in prayer and see themselves as the object of God's love and justice, writes Moshe Meirovich

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The word prayer is ubiquitous to many of the world religions. Its root derives from the medieval Latin 'precaria-petition' and from the old French 'prier-earnestly request.'

Indeed, Judaism embraces these concepts in the weekday 'Amidah,' the prayer of silent devotion where we beseech the Almighty with 13 specific requests: i.e., enlightenment, forgiveness, good health, salvation. etc.

While we, too, embrace this specific format of petition/request, the heart of Jewish worship is predicated on two unique concepts derived from the Hebrew word for prayer: 'T'filah.'

At first glance we acknowledge the reflexive verb: 'L'hitpallel' embracing the concept of honestly judging oneself while engaged in worship. As we stand before the Almighty we are reminded that God truly knows who we are and therefore it's incumbent upon us to 'Imitatio Dei,' to follow God's essence by being true to ourselves, acknowledging our strengths and our weaknesses.

T'filah is a process of self-evaluation, self-judgment; a process of removing oneself from the tumult of life to moments of truth and reawakening.

Yet, another understanding of the concept of T'filah mirrors an 'indirect' reflexive verb expanding its meaning; namely to make oneself the 'object' of God's perception of us as individuals.

According to this more nuanced understanding of T'filah, each time we engage in prayer, we not only seek self-evaluation or judgment; we also see ourselves as the object of God's love and justice.

"And you shall love the Lord your God, with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your might," (Deuteronomy 6:5)

From the words of the prophet Micah: "He has told you O'man, what is good, and what the Lord requires of you. Only to do justice and to love goodness and to walk humbly/modestly with your God." (6:8).

Justice and love are two sides of the same coin! Indeed, Judaism acknowledges the challenge to articulate and embrace these two crucial components in worship as we engage in self-evaluation recognizing that we are the object of God's pathos.

Thus, the spiritual awakening in the Amidah commences and closes with the words: 'God, open my lips and my mouth will sing your praises/ May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart always be acceptable before you.'