

How institutionalized prayer can rob you of your connection to Hashem

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Synagogues, as institutions of prayer, aren't necessarily an authentic part of Judaism. Before Beit Hamikdash was destroyed, there was no institutionalized prayer; no set language, no time constraints, no need for a quorum. A person got up in the morning, saw the rising sun, felt the falling rain and burst into a spontaneous prayer of thanks, praise or request (the 3 types of prayer). Prayer was the most direct and personal way for a Jew to express their relationship with Hashem. Just think of the Avot and Imahot throughout the book of Bereshit.

So how did we get to what someone defined for me as: "Why do I pray to a God I can't see in a language I don't understand for things I don't need?"

The destruction of the 2nd Beit Mikdash included the cancellation of the "Tamid" ("always") sacrifices. The Korban, brought twice daily, was an expression of the relationship of the entirety of the nation, as a whole, to Hashem, and executed by their representatives - the Cohanim- in the communal place of devotion - the temple.

When Beit Hamikdash was destroyed, so too was the peoples' ability, as a community, to express and manifest their relationship with Hashem.

This is when prayer as we know it today, was instituted. That is why we do it as a community. That is why the heart of prayer – Amida, the silent prayer – is worded in the plural and the requests are for communal needs.

So, there are 2 distinct concepts of Tfila in Judaism:

1. Personal expression of one's relationship with Hashem
2. Representing the communal needs of the Jewish people

Over time, people seem to have substituted the first with the second and have almost lost the ability, and possibly the inclination, of having a relationship with Hashem as individuals and not exclusively through their association with the congregation.

Of course, institutionalized prayer is still very important, just don't let it prevent you from speaking to Hashem whenever, wherever and however you want. Think of it this way – instead of using "thank God" in conversation with other people – try it in a conversation. With Him. You may be surprised with the results both in and outside Shul.

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