

NVHC Lifelong learning course, Winter/Spring 2022

The History, Structure, and Meaning of Jewish Prayer

Synopsis: The late Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz wrote that the Talmud was “the central pillar supporting the entire spiritual and intellectual edifice of Jewish life.” This 10-part course will speak to the origins of Jewish prayer in the Hebrew Bible, rabbinical literature, and subsequent development over the past two thousand years in the Land of Israel and the Diaspora, especially in the US over the past century-plus. We will explore the link in Judaism between prayer and study, how prayer conveys the intellectual, spiritual and emotional yearnings of the Jewish people, and how synagogue prayer balances the traditional, set order and spontaneous prayer on the one hand, and speaks at once to the individual and the community, on the other hand. Finally, we will discuss the centrality of prayer in Hebrew over the course of Jewish history, but also discuss prayers composed in Aramaic, Greek, Yiddish, Ladino, and other Jewish and vernacular languages.

TOPICS TO ADDRESS

- I. An overview of Jewish prayer and the prayerbook, per Hoffman, Hammer **(Feb 6)**
- II. The evolution of the Reform prayerbook, 1890s to 2007 **(Feb 13)**
- III. The evolution of the Reform machzor for Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur **(Feb 27)**
- IV.** An examination of the Passover Haggadah as a prayerbook, liturgy **(Mar 6)**
- V. Other prayerbooks: Orthodox, Conservative, and Reconstructionist **(Mar 13)**
- VI. Torah and prayer—origins in the 5 Books of Moses, the Prophets and Writings **(Mar 20)**
- VII. The Five Megillot, the Psalms, and Jewish Wisdom Literature and prayer **(Mar 27)**
- VIII.** Ashkenazic vs. Sephardi/Mizrachi prayerbooks and varieties across time/place **(Apr 24)**
- IX.** Liturgy in Ladino, Yiddish, other Jewish languages and vernaculars **(May 1)**
- X. Jewish education and insights gained by study of Jewish prayer **(May 15, 22)**

FOR FURTHER READING

1. Rabbi Lawrence Hoffman, *The Way Into Jewish Prayer*, (Jewish Lights, 2000).
2. Rabbi Lawrence Hoffman, editor, *My People's Prayer Book: Traditional Prayers, Modern Commentaries*, (Jewish Lights, 10 volumes, 2004-2013). <http://www.jewishlights.com/>
3. Also by Hoffman, see series of JL books on Ashamnu and Un'taneh Tokef, Kol Nidre prayers of Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur, and his commentary, *My People's Passover Haggadah*.
4. Ismar Elbogen, *Jewish Liturgy: A comprehensive History* (Jewish Publication Society, 1993; original in German, 1913)
5. Stefan C. Reif, *Judaism and Hebrew Prayer: New Perspectives on Jewish Liturgical History*, (Cambridge University Press, 1993).
6. Reuven Hammer. *Entering Jewish Prayer*, (Schocken Books, 1994).
7. Reuven Hammer, *Entering the High Holy Days: A guide to the Origins, Themes, and Prayers*, (Jewish Publication Society, 2005).
8. Macy Nulman, *The Encyclopedia of Jewish Prayer: Ashkenazic and Sephardic Rites*, (Aronson, 1996).
9. Simon Glustrom, *The Language of Judaism*, (Aronson, 1994).
10. Nahum N. Glatzer, *Language of Faith: A Selection from the Most Expressive Jewish Prayers*, (Schocken Books, 1947/1988).

11. Nahum N. Glatzer, *The Schocken Passover Haggadah*, (Schocken Books, 1953/1996).
12. Vanessa Ochs, *The Passover Haggadah: A Biography*, (Princeton University Press, 2020).
13. Ilana Kursham, *Why Is This Night Different From All Other Nights? The Four Questions Around the World*, (Schocken Books, 2008).
14. Rabbi Herbert C. Dobrinsky, *A Treasury of Sephardic Laws and Customs*, (KTAV, 1986).
15. Rabbi Marc Angel, *A Sephardic Passover Haggadah*, (KTAV, 1988).
16. Rabbi Marc Angel, *Exploring Sephardic Customs and Traditions*, (KTAV, 2000).
17. *Mishkan T'Filah: A Reform Siddur*, (CCAR Press, 2007).
18. *Mishkan Ha-Nefesh: Machzor for the Days of Awe* (CCAR Press, 2015).
19. Michael A. Meyer, *Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism*, (Oxford University Press, 1988).
20. Joseph Blau, *Varieties of Judaism*, (Columbia University Press, 1964).
21. *The Union Prayer Book*, (UAHC, 1894, 1922, 1940, 1978).
22. *Gates of Prayer*, (UAHC, 1975).
23. David De Sola Pool, *The Traditional Prayer Book for Sabbath and Festivals*, (Behrman House, 1960).
24. Yosef Haim Yerushalmi, *Haggadah As History*, (Jewish Publication Society, 1975).
25. Aryeh Kaplan, *Maimonides' Principles: The Fundamentals of Jewish Faith*, (Orthodox Union, 1984).
26. Marcia Falk, *The Book of Blessings*, (Harper Collins, 1996).

AND THESE REFERENCE BOOKS

Encyclopedia Judaica, 16 volumes (Jerusalem, 1972/2008)

Oxford Dictionary of the Jewish Religion (Oxford University Press, 1997/2011)

Haim Barnavi, *A Historical Atlas of the Jewish People*, (Schocken Books, 1991)