

# Prayer is Our Sacrifice

*Parashat Tzav*



## Parashat Tzav

This Shabbat we read and study Parashat Tzav. This is a Torah portion intended for priests:

*“Give Aaron and his sons this command: ‘These are the regulations for the burnt offering...’” – Leviticus 6:9 [NIV]*

Our parasha continues on the matter of sacrifices. Today, I would like to explain the concept of Judaism that replaces the sacrifice with prayer. After that, I would like to discuss prayer and the importance of it in Judaism as well as in our lives as believers.

## Prayer as a Sacrifice

What sacrifice are we to offer to God, now that the Temple has been destroyed? The destruction of the Second Temple took place in 70 CE, some 40 years after Yeshua ascended to heaven, where He currently sits on the right hand of power. After the Temple was destroyed, all sacrifices were canceled.

The Sages determined that, without any real choice, prayer should be a substitute for the sacrifices based on the following verse from Hosea:

*“Take words with you and return to the Lord. Say to him: ‘Forgive all our sins and receive us graciously, that we may offer the fruit of our lips.’” – Hosea 14:2 [NIV]*

Judaism after the destruction of the Temple interpreted this verse as follows: “Instead of sacrificing bulls, which we cannot do since there is no Temple, we will offer prayers and thanksgiving from our lips to God, which are more precious to Him than any sacrifice or altar.”

Therefore, in Judaism, the laws of prayer are determined according to the laws of sacrifices. This means that the time and the name of each prayer are in accordance with a corresponding sacrifice.

So that the morning, afternoon, and evening prayers, which a religious Jew prays each day, serve as an alternative to the constant offering of sacrifices that occurred in the Tabernacle and in the Temple.

In addition, the “Mussaf” prayer that the Jewish worshiper adds on Shabbat and holidays is a replacement for the “Mussaf” sacrifice added on Shabbat.

Indeed, there are many types of prayers:

- \* Hallel (praise) – usually taken from the Siddur or a congregational hymnal
- \* Thanksgiving
- \* Requests
- \* Forgiveness
- \* Group prayer and personal prayer

## How Should We Pray?

Yeshua gave us certain instructions concerning prayer in Matthew 6:5-8. We should not be like the hypocrites who love to be seen praying; those who “show off” in prayer. For they have already received their reward – meaning that the reward for prayer is an answer, the strengthening one’s relationship with God, the gratitude towards God.

When we pray a personal prayer, we need to be in a place where we will not be disturbed, that is, to close the door, to disconnect from the world, and to be in a private place. Today that also means turning off cell phones and any other electronics.

One of the main purposes of prayer is to remind us of all the goodness we have received from God. God knows all our needs, and He does not need our list of requests. He created us, and He knows better than us what we need.

So, prayer is for us, to remind us of our dependence upon God, our need for His blessings, and to always remind ourselves of all the good that God blessed us with until now.

It is important that each of our prayers have the element of gratitude towards God. The importance of this is that it will help us to see the cup as being half full in our lives, it will get us used to seeing and identifying the blessing, and it will help direct us on the positive path of life.

## **How Should We Not Pray?**

Does our faith in God, as being the source of all that's good, and the fact that we are dependent upon Him, require of us to forgo practical steps towards providing for our everyday needs? Is there something wrong with a believer working towards helping himself with his own strength?

For example, should you pay for insurance for your house, your car, your business, and even your life? Is this permitted?

Jewish understanding, which I believe to be correct and biblical, is that we must do the maximum to preserve our property, so that it's actually required for us to insure all we own. No one should neglect his security and his livelihood.

The expectation that prayers will bring our livelihood or the supernatural protection of our property is forbidden and is against Judaism. A person must work to provide for himself and his family, and to take care to safeguard his property.

In Judaism, we also treat sickness in the same way. Indeed, we pray for health and healing, and indeed God heals the sick, but in no way should the

patient refrain from professional medical treatment, believing that God will heal him.

It is worth noting that according to traditional Judaism, one must not pray for a visible miracle nor for change that occurs naturally. The Mishnah provides the following example:

*“...If his wife was pregnant and he said, ‘May it be your will that my wife give birth to a boy,’ this prayer is in vain. If he was coming on the way and heard the sound of screaming in the city, and he said, ‘May it be your will that these are not the children of my house,’ this is a prayer in vain.” – Mishnah Berakhot 9:3b*

If a person comes near his house and hears screaming, according to Judaism, he should not pray that this would not be his house, for the people in the neighborhood already know what the source of the screaming is, the source of the problem, and a prayer to change the course of nature, to change the essence or to change something that already happened, is unacceptable and contrary to the way God leads the world.

## **A Breakdown of the Lord’s Prayer**

Prayer is a fundamental component of faith, and it serves as a means of communication between man and God, it’s important to remember that prayer is not a means through which to acquire benefits from God.

Yeshua taught us to pray like this:

*“In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done On earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, As we forgive our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, But deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.” – Matthew 6:9-13 [NKJV]*

In this prayer, Yeshua teaches us the basis for any good and proper prayer, the prayer begins with the greatest precept in Judaism: Kiddush Hashem

(the sanctification of the name of God).

In Judaism, the highest value is life, and above life is the sanctification of the name of God. We are familiar with the concept of dying for Kiddush Hashem.

There is praise to God, there is the element of us being actually small, and that God will do on Earth as it is in Heaven, meaning His will and not our will.

Finally, we must remember that we are instruments in God's hands and not the other way around, that God forbid we may not err to think that God is an instrument in our hands, intended to give us gifts, but no. We are tools in the hands of God and our prayer is not our will, but Your will!

"Our daily bread," could be a reference to a number of topics: it can be the Torah, as in, "help us to keep Your commandments", it could serve as a request for our daily needs, or it could serve as a regular habit.

For example: it's his daily bread to volunteer once a week at that place. In other words, it means give us the strength to serve You habitually and faithfully.

Yeshua continues with one of the most basic principles in the Torah, the principle of measure for measure. Forgive us our sins to the same degree that we forgive those who owe us. The principle of measure for measure is elemental not only in what we call the "Old Testament" ("an eye for an eye"), but throughout all of God's word:

*"Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you." – Matthew 7:1,2 [NIV]*

Yeshua teaches us that whatever we do not want to be done to us, we should not do to others, and whatever we do want done for us, this we must do for others, for the merciful will receive mercy, those who give will also receive.

We conclude the Lord's Prayer with the request for protection from all temptation and all evil, for He is the ruler, the King of Kings.

## In Conclusion

In addition to our requests, in our prayers we must also thank God for our lives, for the food we eat, for His protection over us. We must also think of others in prayer, meaning we should pray for the healing of others, for their salvation, and for the protection of our nation.

Our job is to carry in prayer the members of our home and our community, and to place them before the throne, in the prayer that we will be used for His glory.

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