



## The Necessity Of A Messianic Jewish Prayer Life

An exhortation by Rabbi Reuel Dillon

Do you believe that there is power in prayer? Well, the Messianic community needs more power. It is my observation that outside of our various holy convocations, too many within the Messianic community have struggled with having a regular and daily prayer life, and that amongst too many in the Messianic community it has not been a central part of what is being describing as their “Torah observant” or “Torah pursuant” walk. I submit to you, and it is my personal belief through my own experience, that if we don't have a regular and healthy prayer life...a Torah pursuant life will either be impossible, or at the least, we will be greatly handicapped in our pursuit of a Torah life. And, I don't know about you...but, I need all the help and power I can get.

As we seek to be better talmidim of our Master Yeshua, seeing that he is the perfect picture of a Torah life, one thing we see our Master doing on a regular basis all throughout the scriptures, that no-doubt further enabled his righteous Torah walk, was that He was in constant connection with His Heavenly Father through prayer. We see one example of this in Luke 5:16 were we read of our Messiah Yeshua; “...he made a practice of withdrawing to remote places in order to pray”. Has it been our practice each day to withdraw to a set-apart place for prayer? If we read in the next chapter, our Rabbi Yeshua teaches us in Luke 6:40 the following, “A talmid is not above his Rabbi; but each one, when he is fully trained, will be like his Rabbi”.

Thus, when it comes to our conference theme of “Pursuing A Messianic Torah Centered Life”, it is with a great urgency that I believe that Adonai has impressed upon me to teach on this subject of Messianic Jewish prayer. As I have prayed that Adonai would show me wondrous things from His Torah, and as I d'rash (search) through the scriptures, other than the example of our Master Yeshua, one of the first portions of scripture that inspires me is found in Shemot (Exodus) 30:1. It states, "You are to make an altar on which to burn incense; make it of acacia-wood”.

Here we see that Adonai instructed Am Yisra'el (The People Of Yisra'el) to make an altar of incense and overlay it with "zahav tahor" (pure gold). It was most holy and very valuable in the eyes of Adonai. In fact, it was one of the central objects of the Mishkan and later in the Beit HaMikdash. It was located in front of the parochet (curtain), which concealed the "Aron HaBrit" (the Ark of The Covenant), as seen in Shemot (Exodus) 40:5, which states, "Set the gold altar for incense in front of the ark for the testimony, and set up the screen at the entrance to the tabernacle". It stood in the holy place between the menorah on the south side and the table on the north (Shemot/Exodus 26:35, 40:22, 24). It was placed in the closest relation to the "kadosh hakodashim" (the most holy place) and the place where atonement was made for God's house and for the people of Yisra'el.

In Ivrim (Hebrews) 9:2-4 we see the intimate connection between the Kadosh Kodashim (Holy of Holies) and the altar of incense as it states, "A tent was set up, the outer one, which was called the Holy Place; in it were the menorah, the table and the Bread of the Presence. Behind the second parochet was a tent called the "Holiest Place", which had the golden censer for burning incense and the Ark of the Covenant, entirely covered with gold...". As a side note, some versions translate the phrase "golden censer", a literal translation, instead as "golden altar", but the Torah clearly tells us that the golden altar of incense was placed just outside the Kadosh Kodashim. To some, this makes it look like the writer of Ivrim had no idea what he was talking about. But, what we see actually being described in Ivrim (Hebrews) 9:2-4 is rightly translated as, a "golden censer", which was brought into the Kadosh Kodashim by the Cohen Hagadol once a year during Yom Kippur. We see a description of this in Vayikra (Leviticus) 16:12-13 where it says, "He is to take a censer full of burning coals from the altar before HaShem and, with his hands full of ground, fragrant incense, bring it inside the curtain. He is to put the incense on the fire before HaShem, so that the cloud from the incense will cover the ark-cover which is over the testimony, in order that he not die". But, what is of importance and relevance here is to see that the coals and incense are brought from the altar of incense and brought directly into the Kadosh Kodashim, the most holy place where communion with El Elyon (God Most High) would take place, especially in connection with the atonement for God's people.

Again, the Cohen HaGadol (High Priest) would take some of the coals from the altar of incense and some of the ground fragrant incense and bring it into the Kadosh Kodashim (Holy of Holies) and ignite the incense before Adonai. The incense would envelope the cover of the Ark of The Covenant, the Mercy Seat, where the Cohen would meet with Adonai. Just as Moshe (Moses) met with Adonai on top of Mt. Sinai, as it was enveloped with thick smoke and fire, so too did the Cohen HaGadol go to communicate with Adonai and to make atonement

for Am Yisra'el (The People of Yisra'el).

Today we are not to attempt to recreate the physical incense that was burned on the altar that stood before the Ark, as described in Shemot (Exodus) 30:37-38. Although, various sects of Christianity will employ the burning of incense in connection with their religious services, it has not been a part of the synagogue services, most likely to avoid any appearance that we would be burning incense as it was burned in the Beit HaMikdash (Holy Temple). With that being said, there are other ways that we can relate to this Altar of Incense today in practical ways and within the realm of a Torah pursuant life. Throughout the scriptures the concept of incense and prayer are closely tied together and are connected to coming before the throne of El Elyon.

In Tehillim (Psalms) 141:1-2 we read, "A psalm of David: HaShem, I have called you; come to me quickly! Listen to my plea when I call to you. Let my prayer be like incense set before you, my uplifted hands like an evening sacrifice". Also, Hoshea 14:1-2 exhorts us with the following, "Return, Yisra'el, to HaShem your God, for your guilt has made you stumble. Take words with you, and return to HaShem; say to him, "Forgive all guilt, and accept what is good; we will pay instead of bulls [the offerings of] our lips". Likewise, Ivrim (Hebrews) 13:15 tells us, "Through him, then, let us offer up a sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of lips which proclaim allegiance to his name". As we can see, our prayers are correlated to the ritual sacrifices and offerings that Adonai commanded.

Revelation 5:8-9 says, "When he took the scroll, the four living beings and the twenty-four elders fell down in front of the Lamb. Each one held a harp and gold bowls filled with pieces of incense, which are the prayers of God's people; and they sang a new song, "You are worthy to take the scroll and break its seals; because you were slaughtered; at the cost of blood you ransomed for God persons from every tribe, language, people and nation". We not only see the strong connection between the altar of incense, the offerings, and our prayers before Adonai, we not only see that it is the Cohen Gadol (High Priest) that brings the incense into the Kadosh Kodashim, into the presence of Adonai, but we also see that it is Cohen Gadol makes atonement for God's people so that their prayers will be accepted. Shemot (Exodus) 30:10 states, "Aharon is to make atonement on its horns once a year - with the blood of the sin offering of atonement he is to make atonement for it once a year through all your generations; it is especially holy to HaShem."

Through Yeshua we have a new and powerful way to stay in communion with Adonai. It is from the heavenly altar of incense that was cleansed by Yeshua's

blood that our prayers our made holy and acceptable before Adonai. In Yesha'yahu (Isaiah) 6:1-7 we see it described in the following manner; "In the year of King 'Uziyahu's death I saw Adonai sitting on a high, lofty throne! The hem of his robe filled the temple. S'rafim stood over him, each with six wings - two for covering his face, two for covering his feet and two for flying. They were crying out to each other, "More holy than the holiest holiness is HaShem-Tzva'ot! The whole earth is filled with his glory!" The doorposts shook at the sound of their shouting, and the house was filled with smoke. Then I said, "Woe to me! I [too] am doomed! because I, a man with unclean lips, living among a people with unclean lips, have seen with my own eyes the King, HaShem-Tzva'ot!" One of the S'rafim flew to me with a glowing coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. He touched my mouth with it and said, "Here! This has touched your lips. Your iniquity is gone, your sin is atoned for."

Through Yeshua our Messiah, our Cohen Gadol, and through his offering, he can purify our iniquity, and we can come with confidence before the throne of God and speak with purified lips, and instead of paying with bulls, we will be able to bring forth the offerings of our lips. It was through the torn veil, that is, through Yeshua's flesh, and through his sacrifice and offering that we are enabled to do this. Yeshua The Messiah is absolutely essential to having a close communion and a personal relationship with the God of Yisra'el. He must be completely central to a life of Torah, for without him we can do nothing.

Ivrim (Hebrews) 10:19-23 assures us with the following; "Having therefore, brothers, boldness to enter into the holy place by the blood of Yeshua, by the way which he dedicated for us, a new and living way, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; and having a great priest over the house of God, let's draw near with a true heart in fullness of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and having our body washed with pure water, let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering; for he who promised is faithful". And, Ivrim (Hebrews) 4:14-16 states, "Therefore, since we have a great Cohen Gadol who has passed through to the highest heaven, Yeshua, the Son of God, let us hold firmly to what we acknowledge as true. For we do not have a Cohen Gadol unable to empathize with our weaknesses; since in every respect he was tempted just as we are, the only difference being that he did not sin. Therefore, let us confidently approach the throne from which God gives grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace in our time of need".

The incense-offering and its connection to prayer is the physical representation of a spiritual truth. It represents the exaltation of the spiritual man (or woman) to God. When we pray we are elevated to a very holy state. It connects us with the spiritual Altar of Incense, with the Kadosh Kodashim (holy of holies), and with the

Aron HaBrit (the Ark of The Covenant). Shemot (Exodus) 29:37 says, “Seven days you will make atonement on the altar and consecrate it; thus the altar will be especially holy, and whatever touches the altar will become holy”. This passage is why in 1Timothy 2:8 that I believe the Emissary of Yeshua tells us, “Therefore, it is my wish that when the men pray, no matter where, they should lift up hands that are holy...”. The lifting of holy hands is a physical representation of a spiritual truth. When we come into contact with the holy Altar of Incense, when we go to Adonai in prayer, it is a very, very, holy activity and should not be treated as a common activity. Every aspect of it should be treated with the utmost holiness.

Yeshua gives us unprecedented access to The Father. But, once we do gain this access into the Kadosh Kodashim, and once we are cleansed by Yeshua and made holy by coming into contact with the holy Altar of Incense, and the Kadosh Kodashim, we should be careful not to offer unauthorized incense before Adonai. For after we come to faith in Yeshua The Messiah, this by no means gives us a warrant to act in ways that are not holy. In fact, through the grace and empowering the Yeshua grants us...Adonai has even higher expectations of us. When it comes to our prayer life, Shemot (Exodus) 30:9 sternly warns us with the following words; “You are not to offer unauthorized incense on it...”. So, if the altar of incense is tied to the concept of prayer, is it possible for us to offer “unauthorized incense” today? The answer is “yes”. Just because we have gained access to these holy areas before Adonai doesn’t mean that we can conduct ourselves carelessly or in any way that we please. Everything still needs to be in accordance with Adonai’s instructions and with the models that He has given us in His Torah to pattern our lives after. We must still come before the Father with a great awe and holy reverence. We must not offer unauthorized incense. We are only to offer incense that is in accordance with Adonai's will.

Unauthorized incense or offerings can be compared to prayers that are not in accordance with Adonai’s Torah, which in Hebrew means “instruction”. Mishlei (Proverbs) 28:9 teaches us, “Whoever turns aside his ear from hearing the Law (Torah), even his prayer is an abomination”. This doesn't even necessarily mean that you have to be perfect in your Torah observance, but if you turn your ear away and turn your feet away from keeping any of Adonai's mitzvot and don't at least try to listen and obey his mitzvot and you have un-repent sin in your life that you are not actively trying to turn from...than as the scripture says of such a one... “even his prayer is an abomination”. In Kefa Alef (1Peter) 3:10-12, the Emissary Kefa also teaches us, "Whoever wants to love life and see good days must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit, turn from evil and do good, seek peace and chase after it. For ADONAI keeps his eyes on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayers; but the face of ADONAI is against those who do evil things”. Remember, he is speaking to believers in

Messiah. Therefore, as some may suppose, a saving relationship with Yeshua the Messiah doesn't exempt you from these truths. And, as I mentioned before, if anything, believers in Messiah Yeshua are even more responsible and have a greater obligation when it comes to applying these truths to our lives.

The God of Yisra'el cannot stand when we come before Him and offer up prayer or offerings when they are mixed with known un-repentant sin, as defined by His Torah. In Yesha'yahu (Isaiah) 1:11-13 He makes His disgust of this type of behavior clear. He says, "Why are all those sacrifices offered to me?" asks HaShem. "I'm fed up with burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fattened animals! I get no pleasure from the blood of bulls, lambs and goats! Yes, you come to appear in my presence; but who asked you to do this, to trample through my courtyards? Stop bringing worthless grain offerings! They are like disgusting incense to me! Rosh-Hodesh, Shabbat, calling convocations - I can't stand evil together with your assemblies!"

Yochanan Alef (1John) 3:21-22 says, "Beloved, if our hearts don't condemn us, we have boldness toward God; and whatever we ask, we receive from him, because we keep his commandments and do the things that are pleasing in his sight". Along these lines, there is also a particular mitzvah that married couples should be concerned with. Remember, if we turn our ear away from Adonai's Torah, His instruction, our prayer is said to be an abomination and "disgusting incense". Kefa Alef (1Peter) 3:7 reveals to us the following; "You husbands, likewise, conduct your married lives with understanding. Although your wife may be weaker physically, you should respect her as a fellow-heir of the gift of Life. If you don't, your prayers will be blocked". This is something we should take seriously if we are seeking to have a healthy and effective prayer life. Because if our marriages are not healthy, this will serve to handicap our prayer life, and will directly effect our walk with our Father in Heaven. If as men we get into a fight with our wives and treat them with less respect than what they deserve as fellow-heirs of the gift of life...and we then go off to pray...guess what will be the only thing we hear in return... "blocked". The subject of our marriages within the Messianic Community deserves a whole separate conference to focus on this crucial area of a Torah life, especially because too many of them are either suffering or have been dissolved altogether. But, for now, we will move on.

What Adonai finds favor with and accepts is a heart that is humble and comes before Him in submission to His will, His Torah, and His mitzvot (commandments). The following passage is also the opening of the Amidah, the standing prayer of Yisra'el, which observant Jews pray several times a day. Tehillim (Psalms) 51:15-17 states, "Adonai, open my lips and my mouth shall declare your praise. For you don't delight in sacrifice, or else I would give it. You have no

pleasure in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit. A broken and chastened heart, O God, you will not despise”.

The Hebrew word for prayer is "tefillah". The etymology of this word has its origins from the Hebrew root comprised of the three Hebrew letters “peh-lamed-lamed”, from the word “palal”, and the word "l'hitpallel", meaning "to judge oneself". This interesting word origin provides insight into one of the purposes of prayer. In 1Corinthians 11:31 the Emissary Sha'ul (Paul) teaches us, “If we would examine (judge) ourselves, we would not come under judgment”. One of the most important and profound parts of any prayer, whether it be a prayer of petition, of thanksgiving, of praise of God, or of confession, is the introspection it provides, the moment that we spend looking inside ourselves, judging ourselves, understanding our role, and our relationship to God.

Speaking of a healthy and effective prayer life, if we take all the before-mentioned teaching seriously we can have a seriously powerful prayer life, the likes of which we have never experienced before. For Ya'akov (James) 5:16 teaches us, “Confess your offenses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The insistent prayer of a righteous person is powerfully effective”. It says, “the insistent prayer” of a righteous person is powerfully effective. The word being translated as “insistent” here comes from the Greek word “energeo” and it means “to be active, efficient: - do, be effectual (fervent), be mighty in, shew forth self, work”. This is where we get our word “energy” or “energetic” from.

Ask yourself, “Do I have an energetic prayer life, or an apathetic one?” This may be a reality check for many of us. Do we have a working prayer life? Or, is it kind of broken? Have we made it a priority in our life to establish a prayer schedule that insures we have a regular and active prayer life, or do we just pray every once and a while for a few seconds here and there, or if we happen to have time or if we happen to get around to it? Yeshua set the example of having an active and habitual prayer life for us to follow. So, you cannot claim to be a true talmid (disciple) of Yeshua The Messiah and neglect this area of your walk. You see, God wants us to have a “energeo” prayer life, a prayer life that is regular and active. It should take precedence over your favorite TV show, over your hobbies, and even over your customary work or employment.

This is a central and crucial part of a Torah pursuant life and one we just can't ignore if we claim to be living a life of Torah. It is just as important as having a kosher diet, observing the moedim, or any of the other greater mitzvot. It really is essential to a successful Torah pursuant life. Otherwise, we will just be trying to keep the Torah on our own, on our own strength, on our own wisdom, and apart from God. And that, chaverim v'mishpochah (my friends and family), is a recipe

for disaster.

As we meditate about not turning our ear from what the Torah teaches us about how to live life...the Torah lays the ground-work and a model for what a Torah based prayer life should look like. As we further consider the connection between the altar of incense and our prayer before The Father, Shemot (Exodus) 30:7-8 teaches us the following; “Aharon will burn fragrant incense on it as a pleasing aroma every morning; he is to burn it when he prepares the lamps. Aharon is also to burn it when he lights the lamps at dusk; this is the regular burning of incense before HaShem through all your generations”.

There are a few things to notice in our passage. The incense was to be offered every morning and every evening. And, this concept was to apply “through all your generations”. In Judaism today, these are known as the “shacharit” or morning offerings and the “ma’ariv” or evening offerings. In the second Temple era, the incense service occurred simultaneously with the recitation of the Amidah prayer. In Judaism today, the Shema, Amidah, and various other prayers are offered during these times. Each morning men dawn their tallits and tefillin as they begin their day in spiritually elevated holiness, in connection with the Heavenly Altar Of Incense, giving the first-fruits of their day to Adonai. Tehillim (Psalms) 5:3 states, "HaShem, in the morning you shall hear my voice. In the morning I will lay my requests before you, and will watch expectantly".

Our passage in Shemot (Exodus) 30:8 says, “this is the regular burning of incense”. The Hebrew word for “regular” here is “tamid” also meaning, “continual or constant”. Could this possibly be what Sha’ul (Paul) meant when he stated in 1Thessolians 5:17; “Pray regularly”, or in some versions “Pray without ceasing”? We are supposed to have a regular prayer life, and it is supposed to be in accordance with Adonai’s Torah. At a minimum, every morning and evening we are to come before Adonai in holy prayer. Tehillim 92:1-2 says, "...It is a good thing to give thanks to HaShem, to sing praises to your name, Most High; to proclaim your loving kindness in the morning, and your faithfulness every night". They are to be set-apart times for us.

Although, not directly connected to the altar of incense, there also was the minchah offering that took place and is known as the afternoon or “minchah” prayer time. The minchah prayer time coincided with the tamid service when the morning and afternoon lamb was offered. We see mention of this special prayer time in Acts 3:1 where it says, “One afternoon at three o'clock, the hour of minchah prayers, as Kefa and Yochanan were going up to the Temple...”. Tehillim (Psalms) 55:16-17 proclaims, "As for me, I will call on God. HaShem will save me. Evening, morning, and at noon, I will cry out in distress. He will hear

my voice".

Do these passages of scripture describe your Torah life? If not, there is something important that is missing. These various times are appointed times all throughout the day where we can commune with Avinu Shebashamayim (our Heavenly Father). So, in a sense they are daily "moedim", or appointed times that Adonai seeks to meet with us. Have you ever thought of it that way, that we not only have appointments throughout the year when we gather for the Holy Days of Adonai, but that Adonai also has daily appointments that He calls us to meet with Him, each and every day? Just as the Shabbat and yearly moedim and festivals of Adonai are...the daily times of prayer are God-given sanctuaries in time for us to meet with Him. We just need to make the time. And, when you do...I assure you, you will see the difference.

When I was in Eretz Yisra'el (The Land Of Yisra'el) one of the things that really impressed upon on me, that we don't see enough of in our country, and even in our communities, is the amount of prayer and constant communion that many have with Adonai and with one another. Everywhere I went observant Jewish men were coming up to me, a complete stranger, and inviting me to come pray with them. It didn't matter if it was while waiting in the airport, while on the plane, or while walking down the streets of Tel Aviv. Jewish men seek out other Jewish men all throughout the day, and they make it a priority to stop what they are doing and lift up praise and prayer to El Elyon. Where else does this happen on a regular basis? Sadly, not where I live in Spokane, Wa. Other than the wonderful sight of observant men all over the place with visible tzitziyot, kippot, with kosher restaurants everywhere, and with men praying everywhere all throughout the day...I thought to myself ...this is my type of land! I already knew that Yisra'el was my home, but I thought, this really is my type of environment. A holy environment, where the things of Adonai are paramount and the things of this world can wait and take a back seat. For me, it was a little taste of Heaven upon Earth. And although many of us cannot live in Yisra'el now to enjoy all of this, each one of us can take responsibility to the spread the commonwealth and to expand her boarders where ever we find ourselves living. Wherever we go we are to bring the Kingdom of God with us. In Luke 17:21 Yeshua said, "...behold, the Kingdom of God is within you." And, as Yeshua taught us to pray, "May your will be done on Earth as it is in Heaven". May it be so. May we all take steps to make it so.

But, for things to change in our life, in our communities, in our country, and in our world, each one of us has an obligation to set a holy schedule each day, and let the rest of life revolve around these times. Does that sound extreme? What about when Yeshua told us to take up our own execution stake (or cross) daily...does that sound extreme? There are many obstacles that we have allowed to get in our way

in life and Adonai is looking for people who will do what it takes to remove those obstacles in order to have communion with him.

But, one will say, “You don't know how incredibly busy my schedule is and what I have to do to make a living and you don't know all the obstacles that I have and how impossible what you are saying is for me”, but Yeshua in response says to such a person, as seen in Mattityahu (Matthew) 6:33, “But seek first God's Kingdom, and his righteousness; and all these things will be given to you as well”. You see, we often have things all backwards and upside down. But, Yeshua came to set our lives upside right(eous).

2Chronicles 16:9 tells us, “For the eyes of HaShem move here and there throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong on behalf of those who are wholehearted toward him”. When it comes to our prayer life we need to diligently seek Him and cannot be a half-hearted attempt. In Yermiyahu (Jeremiah) 29:12-13 Adonai says, “You shall call on me, and you shall go and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You shall seek me, and find me, when you shall search for me with all your heart”. Adonai is looking for men and women all around the world who will diligently seek Him out and He tests those upon the Earth to see who has a fervent love for Him. As He says in Mishlei (Proverbs) 8:17, “I love those who love me. Those who seek me diligently will find me”. So, the question is...what is getting in the way of your love for The Father? What greater love do you have in life?

Rabbi Yisra'el Baal Shem Tov, the founder of Hasidism, once taught a mashal (parable) that is worthy to repeat. It goes like this, “A King, by miraculous power, surrounded his palace with many walls. Then he hid himself within the palace. The formidable walls were arranged in concentric circles, one inside the other, and they grew increasingly larger as one approached the center. They had fortified battlements and were manned by fierce soldiers who guarded from above; wild animals -- lions and bears -- ran loose below. All this was so that those who approached would have proper awe and fear of the king and so that not all who desired to approach would be allowed to do as they pleased.

The king then had proclamations sent throughout the kingdom saying that whoever came to see him in his palace would be richly rewarded; he would be given a rank second to none in the king's service. Who would not desire this? But when many came and saw the outer wall's awesome size and the terrifying soldiers and animals, most were afraid and turned back.

There were some, however, who succeeded in scaling that wall and fighting past the soldiers and animals, but then the second wall loomed before their eyes, even more imposing than the first, and its guards even more terrible. Seeing that, many others turned back.

Moreover, the King had appointed servants to stand behind the walls to give

money and precious stones to whomever got beyond each wall. Those who had crossed one or a few walls soon found themselves very rich and satisfied with what they had gained from their efforts; so they too turned back. For one reason or another, either from fear at the increasing obstacles or satisfaction with the accumulated rewards, none reached the king . . . .

Except for the King's son. He had only one desire: to see the face of his beloved father. When he came and saw the walls, soldiers, and wild animals, he was astonished. He could not understand how his dear father could hide himself behind all these terrifying barriers and obstacles.

"How can I ever reach him?" he thought. Then he began to weep, and cried out, "Father, Father, have compassion on me; don't keep me away from you!"

His longing was so intense that he had no interest in any rewards; indeed, he was willing to risk his life to attain his goal. By the courage of his broken heart, which burned to see his father, he ran forward with reckless abandon and self-sacrifice; he scaled one wall and then another, fought past soldiers and wild animals. After crossing the walls, he was offered money and jewels, but he threw them down in disgust. His only desire was to see his father.

Again and again he called out to him. His father the king, hearing his son's pathetic cries and seeing his total self-sacrifice, suddenly, instantaneously, removed the walls and other obstacles. In a moment they vanished as if they had never existed. Then his son saw that there were no walls, soldiers, or animals. His father the king was right before him, sitting on his majestic throne while multitudes of servants stood near to serve him and choirs sang his praises. Gardens and orchards surrounded the palace on all sides. And the whole earth shone from the king's glory. Everything was tranquil, and there was nothing bad or terrible at all.

Then the son realized that the walls and obstacles were an illusion, and that his father the king had never really been hidden or concealed, but was with him all the time. It was all just a test to see who truly loved the king?.

There are many voices in this world that scream for attention in your life...but what place does Adonai's voice have in your life?? Perhaps you temporarily diligently sought Him in a time of need and after that need or desire was fulfilled you turned back and no longer diligently sought His face. Or, perhaps you feel like you have "tried" prayer and you didn't get the desired results. But, maybe you weren't diligent enough. In Luke 18:1-8 Yeshua teaches about not giving up when it comes to prayer. It says, "He also spoke a parable to them that they must always pray, and not give up, saying, "There was a judge in a certain city who didn't fear God, and didn't respect man. A widow was in that city, and she often came to him, saying, 'Defend me from my adversary!' He wouldn't for a while, but afterward he said to himself, 'Though I neither fear God, nor respect man, yet because this widow bothers me, I will defend her, or else she will wear me out by her continual coming.'" The Lord said, "Listen to what the unrighteous judge says. Won't God

avenge his chosen ones, who are crying out to him day and night, and yet he exercises patience with them? I tell you that he will avenge them quickly. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?"

Or, perhaps you haven't established regular prayer times in your life and made this a priority because there is something frightening or imposing in your life that causes you to turn back from the task of diligently seeking Him. We are all sons and daughters of El Elyon. The son in the previous parable that overcame all those obstacles succeeded because his love overcame his fear. So, too we must increase our love for The Father until all our barriers fall before us. The son longed to see His Father so much that nothing else held value for him in comparison to being in the presence of his Father. When we diligently seek Him first day by day and we cry out to Him...he will level our path and remove any obstacles that may be in our way. Once we make this our heart and the way we live our lives...than the path will become easier and easier to walk down and over time we will have less and less obstacles to overcome, and truly, the joy of the The Lord will be our strength and we will rejoice in Adonai. But, we must seek the face of our Father daily and throughout each day on a regular basis.

God made us to be creatures of habit and whether we think we need it or not, we need to establish ritual in our life. Otherwise, if we don't set these regular and continual appointments with God, we often don't find the time and we quickly find that our days slip by too quickly before we do anything about it. Even though we may have good intentions to find time to pray throughout each day, we often don't. Without a set schedule, where we schedule in time to pray, and not just try to find time if it happens to be there...we may flounder in our prayer life for months, and usually years before we realize that trying to find time, as apposed to making time, each day simply doesn't work when it comes to establishing a regular and healthy prayer life.

For some the word "ritual" is like the sound of fingernails on a chalk board. But, we need ritual, and God knows it, and that is why we see so much of it in the Torah. For example, amongst other books, in the book of Vayikra (Leviticus) we see a lot of ritual taking place. Although, it is true that God is not pleased with simply ritual, as He is looking for the true service of the heart that accompanies it. It is up to each one of us to be sincere and put our own kavanah (meaning and intent) and heart into these things.

As we are meditating on the subject of sincere prayer and "kavanah", other than establishing regular set times of prayer throughout our day...what do we pray about? I suggest that it should be a combination of personal and liturgical prayer. Each day we have personal requests that can be made that are specific to our life

and to those around us and specific to what is going on in the world at any given moment. These kinds of prayers can constantly change and can be different from one day to another. But, there are other things that should be lifted up daily in prayer every day all throughout our lives. You can think of these type of prayers as “permanent prayer fixtures”. Or, we may refer to them as “liturgical prayer”.

What is the point of using Hebrew liturgical prayers in our services or in our personal life? Why all the Hebrew? Why just repeat a bunch of prayers that somebody already wrote? What about just praying when you feel like it and just say what you feel like saying? There certainly is a time and place for this, but the point to Jewish and Hebraic liturgical prayer is not to be religious, but to bring Yisra'el together in prayer to glorify the God of Yisra'el and to beseech Him as one people. When we join the nation of Yisra'el in prayer, we engage ourselves in a very ancient rhythm of prayer. In *First Fruits Of Zion's Torah club volume 5, "Rejoicing Of The Torah"* (pgs 532-533) it is stated, "When we join ourselves to the liturgical prayers of the Nation of Yisra'el, we join ourselves to a continuous chorus of voices praying those same prayers for millennia. It stretches back, generation before generation, all the way back to the days of the Master. In that sense (and in the timelessness of the throne of heaven) the worshipper's voice is lifted before God along with the voices of the Apostles, the voices of the earliest believers, the voice of Yeshua, even the voices of the Priesthood of Yisra'el. By entering this rhythm of prayer, the worshipper has entered an unbroken cycle marking the daily times of worship. For almost 3,400 years the people of God have prayed liturgically".

Many of us believe that the Hebrew language is “Lashon HaKodesh”, “The Holy Tongue”, and that this is the special language that Adonai gave Adam and Chavah in Gan Eden (The Garden Of Eden) from the beginning when He taught mankind language. Although not necessary, we believe this is the preferred language to praise Adonai in and to pray to Him in. And, if we are becoming part or are part of the commonwealth of Yisra'el, the language of that commonwealth is Hebrew. It is important as Messianic believers that we not only have a healthy prayer life ourselves, but that we are able to join the broader commonwealth of Yisra'el in prayer so that we are not alienated from the national prayer life of Yisra'el. These things are more important than many give credit to or understand. In addition, our synagogues can be compared to an embassy. When one visits the embassy of another country, or commonwealth, they get to experience the language and customs of that people. In our case, the people of Yisra'el. Therefore, we in many ways act as an embassy for the commonwealth of Yisra'el.

Regardless if we say our prayers in Hebrew or English, the prayers and blessings that are spoken, chanted, and sung are comparable to the regular offerings that

were offered in the Beit HaMikdash (The Holy House/Temple). Adonai gave instructions regarding the offerings that were to be made on a regular basis at their set times. They were always the same offerings and procedures given for their appointed times and respective circumstances. But, just because these offerings were not spontaneous and different on a regular basis doesn't mean that they were not Spirit-led. Why didn't Adonai just allow the Cohenim (Priests) to just do things as they were inspired? Why couldn't they just be sporadic in their service, prayer, and offerings? First of all, Adonai is a God of order. Therefore, He has no problem with doing things in a prearranged set order. And, that is what a siddur is. The Hebrew word "siddur" means "order".

Many of the Hebrew liturgical prayers and traditions are indeed derived from the ancient Cohenim and the Temple services. Just as the same offerings were brought daily - morning, afternoon, and evening in the Beit HaMikdash, so too can we bring the regular offerings of our lips in a manner that is pleasing to Adonai. In our services within our synagogues and within our personal lives there of course should also be a time for spontaneous inspired prayer. But, even when we are reciting liturgical prayer we should do so with "kavana", and add our own meaning to it. The Hebrew word "kavana" implies not only concentration, but meaning and intention in expressing ourselves before God. The word "kavana" basically means "to aim." Therefore, when we pray, whether we employ liturgical prayer or spontaneous prayer, it should always be personal. The point and aim in either case should be to draw closer to God.

Many times when we pray with others we are listening to their words and we simply say "Amein" at the conclusion of the prayer. Liturgical prayer is similar in this sense. We are listening to someone else's words and simply say, "amein". The main difference is that we are actually uttering the words ourselves, which tends to make them more personal and meaningful than just listening to someone else say them. And, instead of being someone else's offering...we make them our own.

Biblical prayer is often liturgical, especially when it is public prayer. Liturgical prayer is conducive to unity. Yeshua the Messiah taught us about this. In Mattityahu (Matthew) 6:9-13 Yeshua teaches us to pray in the plural. Rather than "My Father in Heaven", he taught us to pray "Our Father In Heaven". Instead of "Give me my daily bread", he taught us to pray "Give us today our daily bread". He taught us to pray, "Forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors. Bring us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one". Although we all come from diverse backgrounds, peoples, and religious upbringings, liturgical prayer enables us to be united as one voice in our worship of God. In the book of Revelation all mankind is portrayed worshipping around the throne in one voice and one mode. That mode is liturgical and Hebraic. Revelation 19:5-7 states, "A voice came forth

from the throne, saying, “Give praise to our God, all you his servants, you who fear him, the small and the great!” I heard something like the voice of a great multitude, and like the voice of many waters, and like the voice of mighty thunders, saying, “HalleluYah! For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns! Let us rejoice and be exceedingly glad, and let us give the glory to him. For the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his wife has made herself ready.”

Another edifying aspect of liturgical prayer is that sometimes someone else can articulate prayer with words we would not think of. So, in this regard, one may think of liturgical prayer as a tool to help express yourself in a way that you may not have thought of before or in a way that you were even capable of before. It can act as a guide or an outline to help remember what we need to even be praying about. Yeshua the Messiah taught us a short liturgical prayer in the form of the “Tefillat HaTalmidim”, otherwise known as, “The Disciples Prayer”, or the “Our Father”. This was probably just one example of a prayer that our Rabbi Yeshua taught his talmidim (disciples), as I am sure that he and his talmidim prayed other prayers.

A Rabbi by the name of Reuven Hammer speaks of liturgical prayer in the following manner, “Prayer should always be a combination of set words and spontaneous expression. We utilize the magnificent texts that others have written and we add to them, through variations and interpretations and whatever words we wish to add in order to bring our feelings to the fore. Since expression in prayer is so difficult, when geniuses have left us such a rich heritage it seems wasteful not to utilize their words. Even more: human culture is based on the use of creations of the past. Words have echoes. They are enriched by the ways they have been uttered before. Every new text is built on the texts of the past, and the more echoes, the richer the new text. On the other hand, there is a danger in using words simply because they are there, not understanding them or not investing them with meaning. Making meaningless sounds cannot possibly be prayer--it is magic. It is as if we believed that by saying the right sounds we could bring about the effect we want. Such a concept is a regression to paganism in which the gods are subject to the forces of magic and recitation of formulas can force them to do our will. Judaism rejected all of that at the very beginning. We cannot compel God to do anything; we ask Him.

Using traditional prayer therefore requires us to bring meaning to the sounds we utter. That meaning can be on the emotional level or the cognitive one, or a combination of both. This is not merely a question of understanding Hebrew. Even if one understands the language, words can be meaningless if they are recited totally by rote or with no attempt to understand them. The more we understand the words and what lies behind them, the greater the opportunity to use them

well.”

God used the Jewish people to bring His Words and the Bible to the Nations. And, it is my hope that both Jew and Gentile will take advantage of the rich heritage that has been left to us by God’s people in the form of Hebrew prayer liturgy. But, their needs to be a balance. As already mentioned, the danger of these type of prayers is that they can turn into simple ritual and we can recite these same prayers everyday throughout the day without much thought and only by rote. But nonetheless, these type of prayers, the “permanent prayer fixtures”, are still necessary. But, as already discussed, it is up to each one of us to say them with sincerity, with “kavanah”, and with passion.

What would be some examples of some “permanent prayer fixtures”? To name just a few, It could start out with something as simple as a prayer called the “Modeh Ani”. This prayer that observant and traditional Jews pray the moment they become conscience in the morning say, “Modeh ani l'faneycha Melech chai v'kaiyam shehechezarta bi nishmati b'chemlah rabbah emunatechah”, which means, “Thankful am I before, living and eternal God, for you restored to me my soul in compassion, great is your faithfulness”. Each morning that we wake we should give thanks for another day of life. As it is a mitzvah, this is something that should occur every day of our life. We should wake up each morning with thankfulness and with a grateful heart. It is a permanent prayer fixture. There are other examples of prayers like this at the beginning of our day.

When we come into a Beit Tefillah (House of Prayer), we should always be thankful that Adonai has granted us a special place to pray where family, and brothers and sisters in Adonai can come together to lift up prayer together. We should also come before Adonai with a humble spirit and in awe before The Father. The Mah Tov prayer would be a great prayer that communicates all of the pre-mentioned, as the theme of this song and prayer is to express our appreciation for how good it is to have a place where the tents of Yisra'el can come together in unity for prayer, worship, and fellowship and to humbly come before Adonai to ask Him to hear our prayers. More examples of permanent prayer fixtures can be found in the daily Shema. As many of us bind tefillin upon our arms and foreheads as a physical representation of a spiritual truth, and as we remember the words of the Shema, together as His people, all over the world, we proclaim allegiance and obedience to the one true God, the God of Yisra'el.

The Amidah, the standing prayer of Yisra'el includes many permanent prayer fixtures that we should pray about every day throughout the day. Some of these include prayers that include many praises of Adonai...In Avot we call to mind before Adonai the kindness and favor that He has shown to the Patriarchs and we

make the request that he shows us and our children this same kindness, and that he would be our redeemer, our help, and as He was for Avraham - that He would be our shield. In Gibor we praise Adonai for resurrection and for life eternal that He will bestow upon us and for all the mighty deeds that He has performed throughout history, in our lives, and for what He will do in the future. We remember His holiness and praise Him for it. In the Amidah prayer we also ask Adonai to grant us chabad, which stands for, “chochmah, binah, vada-at” (wisdom, insight, and knowledge). We pray that Adonai would return our people to the Torah, to His service, and to t'shuvah (repentance).

In this liturgical prayer we pray for forgiveness for ourselves and for our people and we acknowledge our rebellion and bless Adonai for being so gracious to us and for forgiving us. We pray that Adonai would deliver and redeem us and relieve us from our suffering and we bless Him for being our Redeemer and the Redeemer of Yisra'el. We also pray that Adonai would heal us and our loved ones. We ask Adonai to bless and prosper our year and to bless our produce and the work of our hands. We pray that Adonai would blow His great shofar and return our exiles from the four corners of the world. We ask for our righteous Judges and Counselors be restored to us, that Adonai would remove pain and agony from us and that Adonai, Himself, would rule over us. Prayers that Adonai would fight our spiritual enemies and the dark powers in the heavenly realms are offered. We pray that Adonai would bless and provide for the righteous and safeguard, the devout, the elders, our scholars, and the righteous ones from the nations who have become part of the commonwealth of Yisra'el. We also pray that Adonai would return His Shechinah and dwell once again in Yerushalayim and to establish the throne of Melech David, the throne of Yeshua.

In the next segment of the Amidah we pray that Adonai would bring forth the Messiah and that He would once again cause Adonai's Salvation to flourish amongst Yisra'el. As we begin to close the Amidah we beseech Adonai to hear our prayers and to have mercy and compassion upon our requests and we thank and bless Him for hearing our prayers. We ask that Adonai would be favorable towards our people Yisra'el, that the Beit HaMikdash (Holy Temple) would be restored to us and that our eyes would behold Adonai's return to T'zion. We finally close with offering thanks that Adonai is our God and that He is the Rock of our lives and the shield of our salvation. We thank him for all the wonders and miracles that He has done on our behalf and at all times. We ask Him to establish shalom, goodness, blessing, grace, kindness, and compassion upon us and upon all of Yisra'el. We ask Him to guard our tongue and lips from speaking deceit and that Adonai would open our heart by His Torah so that we may pursue His mitzvot (commandments). And, finally we earnestly beseech Adonai to act upon our requests for the sake of His name, for the sake of His Right Hand, for the sake

of His holiness, and for the sake of His Torah.

When you pray each day do you remember all of these things each time you come before Adonai? If not, the Amidah beautifully and ingeniously weaves all of these prayers together for us to remember and for us to sincerely and passionately pray, making the prayer our own. Our Rabbi Yeshua also taught us the “Tefillat HaTalmidim”, otherwise known as “The Disciple's Prayer” or the “Avinu” (Our Father), which shares various aspects of the Amidah and the Kaddish. Again these are just a few examples of wonderful liturgical prayers that we can employ each day, which can serve to enrich our prayer lives.

As we keep this in mind, and as we read in the Torah that Adonai did command ritual, we realize that ritual in and of its self is not bad. But, Adonai doesn't care for it when it is just ritual alone and when it is done simply because it is expected to be done and it is done only to impress others, but not to truly draw closer to HaShem.

One of the pitfalls is that often people will only pray when they are around other people or when they come together for holy convocations. But, when it comes to their private lives, when no one is around, they are a much different person and they don't make it habit to spend significant time in daily personal prayer to draw close to The Father. Don't get me wrong, there is nothing wrong with praying in front of others, but when this is the extent of your prayer life...there is a problem. And, if it is done for the wrong motivation...it has little worth. Each person has to determine what is in their heart and to direct their hearts towards God.

Our Master Yeshua teaches us not to pray only when we are seen. We should have the same practices and be the same spiritual person in public that we are in private. Are goal should always be to seek and please God and not men. In Mattityahu (Matthew) 6:5-6 he tells us, “When you pray, you shall not be as the hypocrites, for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Most certainly, I tell you, they have received their reward. But you, when you pray, enter into your inner chamber, and having shut your door, pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly”.

There are so many ways we can pray before Adonai. I may be more traditional than others when it comes to some of these things, and I am sure that there are many who are much more orthodox than I, and many are not traditional at all...and, that is alright. What I have described are simply some options that I would recommend, but there are other prayers one could use to express oneself. In any case, what Adonai is truly looking for is a heart-felt cry to Him.

Sometimes, we just may be so broken before God and we are so overwhelmed that we don't even know what to say or where to start. We may just go into our private place of prayer and cry before Adonai with sounds that are inexpressible and unintelligible.

The Chofetz Chaim taught a parable about a poor young man from a village who opted to travel to the big city and try his luck at earning a livelihood. At first he worked as an apprentice in a blacksmith's shop and after some time opened a small blacksmith shop of his own. He subsequently began to operate a small business, which ultimately became extremely successful. He accumulated more and more wealth, and was even appointed to be one of the king's most prominent ministers.

Despite his prominence, he never forgot his modest beginnings. One day he commanded his servants to harness his carriage, as he wished to visit the village where he had been born. Accompanied by an impressive entourage, he set out to visit his old village.

The news of his imminent arrival quickly spread, and all of the villagers stopped working in order to greet the distinguished visitor. Needless to say, it was quite a humbling experience to hear the minister's mighty steeds galloping into the center of town in a loud and thunderous fashion...

The minister alighted from his carriage and ascended the podium that had been set up many days earlier in his honor. With emotion-laden words, he addressed the capacity crowd: "My dear friends! I remember well my days of poverty and severe deprivation; on more than one occasion there were days when I was literally starving for bread...Now that I stand before you having achieved great prominence, I would like to bestow kindness upon each and every one of you. Let every man return home and write down a request on a piece of paper. Tomorrow, each one of you may present me with one request, and I guarantee to fulfill it!"

The excited crowd dispersed, each man quietly returning home – after all, it is not every day that such a golden opportunity arises. The following day, they presented the minister with their requests: One individual wanted a new home, another asked for a plow, and so on and so forth...

In the crowd was a pauper whose financial straits were horribly severe. The roof of his home leaked, there was no bread for his children, and he was up to his neck in debt. As a result, he was unable to decide what to ask for; what did he need the most?

Not knowing what to do and lacking any more strength, the pauper began to cry...

The minister approached him and asked softly, "My dear sir, why are you sobbing so? What is your request?"

The pauper related his dire predicament and said, "I simply do not know what to ask for; therefore I cry. If my sobs lead you to believe that I need a new home – it would certainly be true. If they lead you to think that I require money with which

to pay off my debts – that would also be true. If you decipher my cries as a plea for bread in order to feed my little ones – that would also be absolutely true...”

The Chofetz Chaim concludes, “We pray to HaShem, “May Your ears be attentive to the sound of my pleas (Tehillim/Psalms 130:2). We simply do not know what to request and therefore we wordlessly beseech Him in a way that expresses all of our needs at once!”

If we establish regular set times of prayer each day and we cry out to the Father and diligently seek Him...this is holy ritual that God will greatly reward and bless. Not only will we be blessed, not only will God be blessed, but the whole world will benefit from our prayer life. Shemot (Exodus) 30:7 says the following in connection with the regular incense that is offered every morning and evening. Adonai says that it is a, “fragrant incense” that is “a pleasing aroma”. This is a special fragrance and aroma that has miraculous properties. Our prayer not only can be effective in our immediate vicinity, but our prayers can also have a far reach and can effect the world in wondrous ways.

The Sages suggested that part of the miraculous properties of the incense that came from the altar was that its reach was far reaching as its fragrance was said to have reached from Yerushalayim (Jerusalem) as far as Yericho (Jericho) and that it even stretched as far as Shiloh where the Mishkan (Tabernacle) had been during the days of Eli. B.Yoma 39b states, “The goats in Yericho used to sneeze because of the odor of the incense. The women in Yericho did not have to perfume themselves because of the odor of the incense. The bride in Yerushalayim did not have to perfume herself because of the odor of the incense. Rabbi Yosi bar Diglai said, “My father had goats on the mountains of Mikwar and they use to sneeze because of the odor of the incense.” Rabbi Chiyya bar Abin said in the name of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Karchah, “An old man told me, ‘Once I walked towards Shiloh and I could smell the fragrance of the incense coming from its walls.’”

When we spend regular time with Adonai in prayer, we also spend time with His Anointed One, HaMashiach, The Messiah Yeshua, the Cohen Hagadol of Adonai. When we spend time with Him we begin to take on a wonderful and pleasing aroma about us when we come before the Father. As parashah Vayikra begins we read the following passage in Vayikra (Leviticus) 1:9, “...and the Cohen (Priest) is to cause all of it to go up in smoke on the altar as a burnt offering; it is an offering made by fire, a fragrant aroma for HaShem”. Instead of “fragrant aroma” some versions of the Bible say, “a soothing aroma” or a “sweet savor”. In the Hebrew the phrase is “rayach nichoach”. This particular phrase is used all throughout this parashah, so Adonai must want us to pay special attention to it.

Therefore, let's further investigate the Hebrew phrase “rayach nichoach”. The

Hebrew word for “fragrant” or sometimes translated as “soothing” is “ray-ach”. The Strong’s dictionary of Hebrew defines it as a, “odor (as if blown): - savour, scent, smell”. But, it actually comes from the root “ruach”. The same Hebrew word where we get “Ruach HaKodesh”, otherwise known as the Holy Spirit. The second word, “nichoach” is translated as, “restful, that is, pleasant; abstractly delight, sweet (odor)”. This word communicates that this “fragrant aroma” when sent up to Adonai has a soothing effect upon Him. He tells us that it is very pleasing to Him. As we have already discussed, willing obedience from the heart is what Adonai is so pleased by and what He describes as a “fragrant or soothing aroma”, or perhaps an underlying understanding could possibly be understood as a “pleasant spirit”. Because our obedience is only made possible through the Spirit of God (see Yechezk'el/Ezek. 36:26-27 & Romans 8), this pleasant aroma or spirit is none-other than the Ruach Hakodesh (Holy Spirit).

And, when all followers and disciples of Yeshua the Messiah throughout the world corporately become living altars of incense through the indwelling of the Ruach HaKodesh, we bring this fragrant incense and pleasing aroma all throughout the world, which has miraculous and restorative properties, leading to “tikkun olam” (the fixing of the world). This will also lead a multitude of weary souls, which cannot be counted, to the pleasant rest that Adonai has prepared for them. In closing, 2 Corinthians 2:14-16 tells us, “But thanks be to God, who in the Messiah constantly leads us in a triumphal procession and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of what it means to know him! For to God we are the aroma of the Messiah, both among those being saved and among those being lost; to the latter, we are the smell of death leading only to more death; but to the former, we are the sweet smell of life leading to more life...”

L'chaim b'Yeshua!  
(To life in Yeshua)

And, as Rabbi Cohen always says, "Keep praying..."