

TALMIDEI YESHUA MESSIANIC MINISTRY OF NZ

This handout is a compilation of some thoughts and insights written over a few years as to the use of Liturgy in Talmidei Yeshua Messianic Kehilot Services

WHY LITURGY? - WHAT IS WORSHIP?

Have you sometimes wondered?

- Why do we repeat the same or similar liturgy each week in our Shabbat Service?
- How can we “worship” with set words?
- Isn't it all too formal?
- Aren't we meant to be free in the Spirit from set words when worshipping our Father in Heaven?

Our Response:

Yes, we certainly are meant to be free in the Spirit to worship Our Father in Heaven, but does using words from Scripture limit that freedom?

By using liturgy when in a Congregational Setting, we are speaking out with one mind and one heart, we are expressing the fundamental truths from YHVH's own words and heart.

The practice of speaking out in unison dates back to the Mt Horev, when all Israel said with one accord– “Everything YHVH has said, we will do”. Sh'mot (Exodus) 19:8

As we speak forth from Our Father's Torah (His instructions) and words from the Brit Hadashah as well, unbelievers coming in will hear and speak for themselves, the truths of God from his own words. The words of God alone are the ones that are alive and are as sharp as a two edged sword.

The Torah is of the Spirit and is the Truth of the Father and because of that, as we speak it out, we trust that the Spirit will magnify the words. As Yeshua said, we must worship in Spirit and Truth. Yeshua himself is the Torah (Word) of The Father manifest to us. That is why He is called the Way the Truth and the Life.

Before and after speaking from Torah and from the Brit Hadashah, we sing praises and dance for joy. We also hear Our Father's word expounded upon and we respond with our hearts and minds according to our individual understanding as the Spirit (the Ruach Ha Kodesh) enlightens us. The speaking out is communal, but the response is internal and individual. The response to Our Father's words should always show our love for Him.

So, whether we hear, speak out, sing about, dance to, pray with, or act upon the words of Scripture, **it is all Worship**

There is a time in our Services for individuals to pray aloud and respond with an individual prayer e.g. individual prayers for Isra'el and each other. We do not close down spontaneous prayer if a heart is touched after our Dvar when we have a time for reflection and response, if one is moved to respond to what they have heard in the readings and in the Dvar. These prayers are usually ones of thankfulness and joy and encourage us all. Occasionally a voice

of admonition is also heard as well, as the Ruach Ha Kodesh determines and at times there has been an individual as well as a congregation response to a song or a dance.

At home we all pray as individuals. Some love to use Scriptural liturgy even at home, others do not.

We all pray with out ceasing as individuals, as we are always in communication with the Father and Yeshua because of the gift of the Ruach Ha Kodesh living in us.

The following article from www.myjewishlearning.com gives a glimpse into the ancient Jewish practice of using liturgy in worship

WHY LITURGY?

In some ways, liturgy translates the Hebrew term *avodah* (עבודת), which means worship (or work). Liturgy is, broadly, a description of the drama of worshipping God. Liturgy is not just the words that are recited, whether fixed or spontaneous, it also includes the actions, the occasions for the worship, and the gathering of the participants. Liturgy is in some ways akin to a screenplay, but just as screenplays have differing degrees of flexibility in the hands of different directors, so do different liturgical moments.

Types of Liturgy

Judaism has a broad range of liturgy: Worship in formal prayer in a synagogue at one of the appointed times with a quorum of at least ten adults (a *minyan*) is only one kind of Jewish liturgical expression, and it is not even the most common. The most common liturgical moments are the occasional blessings that a person recites upon performing certain commandments, or mitzvot (*Birkot Mitzvah*), or on eating, or on experiencing some wondrous aspect of nature (*Birkot haNehenin*). Rituals such as wedding ceremonies, the Passover seder, ritual circumcisions, and putting up a mezuzah (the box containing selections from the Torah) on a doorpost of a new home, are all liturgical activities that have their own choreography and texts.

The Challenge of Liturgy

The basic challenge of liturgy is that, on the one hand, we expect conversation with God to be intimate and real and spontaneous, as one might speak with a parent; on the other hand, we approach God with the images of royalty, and royalty has a defined protocol. Jewish law defines a requirement of three daily prayers with set liturgies, and it is very difficult to be spontaneous on a schedule with a familiar text. Through our history, Jewish liturgy has swung back and forth between these poles of the spontaneous and occasional (*kavvanah*, or true intention) versus the fixed and routinized (*keva*, or fixed and established). On the side of keva are the established texts that have been used for centuries: the siddur for daily prayer, the machzor for prayer on the High Holidays, the haggadah for the ritual of the Passover seder (the ritual meal on the first night or nights of Passover). On the kavvanah side are the new *siddurim*, *machzorim*, and *haggadot* (as they are known in their plural forms) that are continually published, along with the new commentaries, poetry, and melodies that are designed to accompany them, and the entire area of private, personal prayer.

Compare Jewish liturgy to producing music. Different musicians can play identical notes off of the same sheet music, but produce startlingly different musical experiences. Alternatively, some musicians would not consider a piece of music “their own” without adding their own

embellishments. And some musicians can take a short melody and produce an entire performance. Similarly, some Jews can personalize the traditional texts of the liturgy simply by focusing their own associations and emphases differently, while others need to modify the prayers in different ways in order to “own” the experience.

Making Liturgy Relevant Today

How does one make an ancient liturgical text “new and relevant”? Until modern times, each generation would supplement the traditional text; occasionally, materials would drop out, but the overall works grew. In modern times, editors subtract, add, and substitute, sometimes creating new materials and sometimes restoring materials “lost” to tradition. Prayer texts have changed as a result of differing theological concerns, especially as regards the relationship of the Jewish people to other peoples. The use of gender-specific language, both for God and for referring to people, is an issue that has informed the editing of some contemporary siddurim. Finally, new liturgical texts have been published that include modern commentaries or different aesthetic changes that make the texts more user-friendly.

Learning about Jewish liturgy can provide tremendous insight into how Judaism thinks about all kinds of issues, **but liturgy is really about engaging God.**

AN EXAMPLE OF OUR PAST EACHING ON KAVANAH.

Kavanah: Having the right frame of mind!

D’var 26/06/2010 - “Last week, I (Graeme), looked at the function of our Shabbat liturgy and how it creates a pathway into and out of the Holy presence of YHVH. How the prayers form a framework for the Sacred Drama, that is our Shabbat service. The prayers we say together, enable us to walk through that drama week after week.

However, when we repeat the same Shabbat prayers week after week, it is natural to expect them to become routine - and slowly lose their meaning. But, that should not be the case with our liturgical prayers. It is only by having the right frame of mind, that the prayers will remain alive.

But, what is the right frame of mind that will ensure these prayers do stay alive?

That frame of mind is referred to by the Hebrew term **kav-an-ah**, which is generally translated as "**concentration**" or "**intent.**"

Having a level of kav-an-ah, is an awareness that one is entering into the presence of YHVH, and that we are fulfilling our obligation to pray. If we have a reasonable level of kav-an-ah, then we are truly praying and not just reading the words as they are written or singing empty songs. What is our intent when read from our Siddur?

Further, Kav-an-ah enables us to free our minds from other thoughts of the world around us. It helps us understand what we are praying about and to think more deeply about the meaning of the prayers.

In orthodox synagogues liturgical melodies are canted as an aid to forming the proper mind-set. Many prayers and prayer services have traditional canting melodies associated with them. These can increase the worshippers focus on what they are doing by blocking out extraneous thoughts.

In orthodoxy it is also found useful to move while praying. Often you will see traditional Jews routinely sway back and forth during prayer, as an aid to concentration. Such movement is not mandatory, and some may find it distracting, but, if it helps with concentration and focus, then it can't be a bad thing to do.

So, we see that by applying kav-an-ah to our weekly prayer service, we avoid reciting the same words, as if the process were nothing more than a boring weekly ritual.

Jumping back again to what I was saying last week – our Shabbat service format has been structured round the model published by Richard Nicol of Congregation Ruach Israel, in USA. He is the one who published the idea of the Shabbat service being a Sacred Drama.

I would like to take a few minutes to reflect on his comments as to why he adopted the Sacred Drama approach for the theme of the Shabbat service. It all grew from his visit to a Congregation, what he called in his article – **“Beth Anonymous”**

Paraphrasing his words, I will share some of his thoughts on the origin and practices of Shabbat services of some in the Modern Day Messianic Community”.

‘Neighbor’s are amazed by it. Jewish community leaders are perplexed by it. We are glad about it. The startling truth is that Saturday mornings, people -- even lots of people -- are willing to buck the rhythm of American life, get out of bed early, put on nice clothes, and come worship God at Messianic Jewish synagogues.

Why do they come? Many reasons may be offered:

- *the need for human contact other than the competitive, superficial kind experienced at work;*
- *a desire to provide moral education for children;*
- *free desserts provided during Oneg Shabbat.*

However, the dominant motivation expressed by Messianic Jews (and Gentiles) is the desire to experience at some level the reality of God. Other motivations may or may not be worthy, but surely this one seems close to the heart of the Creator. Scripture is filled with exhortations, prescriptions, and encouragements to this end. God likes having people get together for the purpose of experiencing his presence.

All this seems obvious. What is not so obvious is how Messianic Jewish leaders can facilitate worshipers' experience of the transcendent truths we proclaim. This article will examine our Shabbat worship in light of our mandate to give people the best experience of sacred truth every week.

Our premise is that Shabbat services should be experienced as the weekly enactment of a drama -- a story. But not just any story: God's story, Messiah's story, and our story as his children. Thus, the elements of a Shabbat service -- singing, dancing, traditional liturgy, newer Messianic liturgy, the offering, blessing children, welcoming visitors, proclaiming the Word -- all should be aligned with a central, controlling purpose. This purpose is to enable the congregation to participate in the drama of God's truth so that true worship may occur.

We do not imagine that worship is entirely the function of such orchestration. God's Ruach must do his work in yielded hearts. True worship, however, is a divine-human partnership. Leaders must become intentional and thoughtful here or risk a great deal.

The Wrong Way

Messianic Judaism has deep roots in the Evangelical Christian tradition. The Anglicans reached out to Jewish people in the Nineteenth and early Twentieth Centuries, but the baton has more recently been carried by others, such as Baptist, Assembly of God, and Foursquare churches. Since these traditions derive from the Radical Reformation, they tend to reflect great suspicion of the symbolic, the sensual, and the mysterious in worship. Historically, this was a response to the excesses of the medieval Roman Catholic Church. Such traditions often view spontaneity as belonging to the highest spiritual order. All else can be an afterthought. Add to this mix the inexperience of many Messianic Jewish leaders with respect to traditional Jewish forms, and the general American anathema, "this is boring," and we have a problem: Messianic Jewish worship services tend to be patchwork quilts, reflecting little concern for the unfolding of the great story, expressed without much forethought and depth.

A case in point:

*The Sabbath service at **Beth Anonymous** began with a long period of singing. Most of the songs were of a slow "inner court" type. It was a very long session. The abrupt entrance into such worship was disquieting, and it seemed interminable. The Jewish liturgy following was presented on a screen instead of a siddur. This, plus the brevity of this section, gave a casual, off-the-cuff feeling. As a visitor to the congregation, I felt the traditional Jewish dimensions of the service were mere accommodations to residual Jewish sensibilities. The message was, "The real substance today lies elsewhere." But where? More lengthy singing. People were encouraged to come up front for healing prayer. I observed that two congregations had emerged that morning. The real congregation was up front getting prayer. Bodies shielded the leader from view. The other congregation stood (and gradually sat down) in another space -- a nether world of detachment, escalating boredom and clock-watching. I could hardly wait for this session to end and could hardly bear the thought of what the uninitiated Jewish visitor might be experiencing. The leader then gave a fine sermon. He touched, ironically, on the perplexity of the congregation's leadership as to why more Jewish people in the city had not been attracted to their Messianic Jewish synagogue. After the sermon the service abruptly ended. I wanted to respond to God's truth in some way after the message, but no such opportunity presented itself.*

What was the problem at Beth Anonymous? First, the service had no discernible flow or sense of coherence. There was no sacred drama here. No story was being told. Second, the experience could be appreciated only by a kind of spiritual elite, marathon men and women who could get out of the car, settle the kids, and immediately worship deeply for long periods of time. Few people can do this today. I myself, (and I speak as a Messianic rabbi, a professional) could not keep pace. I do not look forward to another such endurance contest.

No story, no sacred drama- the story of God, to give form and coherence, left this Messianic Rabbi at a loss and exhausted.

What about Talmidei Yeshua Kehilah?

*For our Shabbat Siddur we chose to adopt our format based around our Shabbat service **being a Sacred Drama.***

*As shared at our Kehilot, our format is simple and takes us on a collective Scriptural journey. Our Shabbat Service, as set out in our Siddur (order of service), moves through three steps, enabling the Kehilah (congregation) to draw close to **Yud, Hey Vav Hey** (YHVH) (The name of our God and Father, as given to Moshe.)*

We commence with a collective call to worship, followed by affirmation of our relationship with YHVH then affirmation of the day of Shabbat, and finally of Yeshua our Mashiach (Messiah).

We then enter into the Torah Service, which is the middle portion of the Service, where we meet YHVH and listen to his Holy (*set apart Word*), from the whole Tanakh, which comprises – Torah the five books of Moshe (*Moses*), the Nevi'im (*Prophets*), Ketuvim (*Writings*), and the B'rit Hadashah (*the New Covenant*). *This includes a teaching from one of our teachers which we call a D'var.*

Finally, we conclude the Service by reaffirming our place before YHVH as our Elohim and give thanks that we have been called to serve him alone as we wait patiently for the return of our Redeemer Yeshua HaMashiach.

The liturgy (*corporate worship*) in our Shabbat Service is gathered from the whole of Tanakh (The Torah, the Prophets, and the writings) and from the Brit Hadashah. We follow the same pattern of communal prayers as found in Acts 2:42 where it talks about the fellowship of talmidim, breaking bread and saying the prayers. Scriptural liturgy provides us with the communal prayers we can offer to YHVH with one collective voice when we meet as a Kehilah. This follows the same model, as that which was used by Messianic Community of the 1st century. They in turn followed the liturgy that had been passed down through Isra'el, since it was given to Moshe as Torah at Mt. Sinai. So, we draw on an unbroken line of sources, both ancient and modern to form our liturgy.

The Barchu - is one of the oldest prayers in the Jewish Siddur. It was recited in the Holy Temple in Yerushalayim. Very early in the morning, just after sunrise, a Cohen (*priest*) would call out the Barchu and the entire congregation answered, just as we do today. Bowing our

heads (and knees) on the word Barchu, which means bend the knee, indicates we are bowing before YHVH's presence and our humility before Him.

The Shema - is also an everlasting call from YHVH to His people, the importance of which Yeshua reiterated when asked what was the most important commandment. He answered with the Shema, and then followed with a shortened version of the second half of the Shema, the V'ahavta, (*and you shall love*), telling his Talmidim to love their neighbour as themselves.

Most of the time we choose to stand before the presence of YHVH when praying the liturgy together out loud and also when singing. If you are unable to stand for prolonged periods, please feel entitled exercise your free will choice in this matter.

In this Kehilah, we sing songs of praise and worship and dance them as well, in Davidic style. This differs from the more orthodox synagogues, who usually have a cantor to sing many of the prayers and blessings and dance as a community outside the formal service.

The way our Siddur is structured, gives an opportunity for all present to be actively engaged at all stages of the service. It does not focus on any one individual. We have just one song before we start our walk through the courts of the Temple toward the Sanctuary. This is because we realise that there is a transition from the outside to the inner sanctuary. *This process starts in our homes on Erev Shabbat, when we separate the week from the beginning of the Shabbat on Friday evening after 6:00pm.*

Having spent time in the Sanctuary (Our Torah Service) where we meet with YHVH himself and hear from his word, we again withdraw slowly back out into the courts we have ample time to reflect and sing about what we have heard and again we all partake as one body in the corporate worship of our God.

Coming back to the main focus, it is through the Sacred Drama, that we are able to exercise - **kav-an-ah** – giving intent and meaning to all aspects of the service. We are able to put our hearts into being one body together in the story of our God, not just as a group of individuals, taking all we can as individuals, but forgetting that this is **a Corporate Story and a Family story. We are in it together as God's Children, Yeshua's body and as the Isra'el of God.**

We hope this handout gives you a little more insight into how and why we use liturgy in our Services.

Shalom – Graeme & Caroline.