

PRAYING with *Fire*

PRAYER POINTS



How To Get Your Prayers Answered

Do you feel like you're talking to a wall when you pray? Here's five key tools for getting your prayers answered.

by [Rabbi Noah Weinberg](#)

Let's get one thing straight: God wants to answer our prayers. He is our Father in Heaven, and we are His children. He loves us unconditionally.

So why does it seem that God ignores so many prayers? And if He already knows what we want, why is prayer necessary in the first place?

The Infinite Love

Even those who stay far from a synagogue intuit the existence of God. As the saying goes, there are no atheists in a foxhole. When a guy is dug in and the enemy is coming, he will cry out: "Almighty, get me outta here! I want to live!"

What is he really saying?

"Dear God: Although I have ignored You for all these years, denied Your existence, and not appreciated all You have done for me, I'm in trouble now. And I know You're the only one Who can help."

To pray properly, you have to understand that not only God loves you, but His love for you is infinite.

God has given you eyes, ears, intelligence, life itself! Every morning, a Jew recites blessings of thanks to God for all the gifts He has bestowed upon us. These blessings remind us of how deeply God loves us.

If we appreciate what God can do for us, it is crazy not to stay in touch.

Why Do We Need To Pray?

When we pray, of course, we are not pointing out anything new to God. He does not need us to remind Him of our needs. So why doesn't God just give without our asking?

Because we need to pray. Prayer helps us refine and affirm what we want out of life. It's a process of maturity.

If a billionaire father handed over unlimited cash on a silver platter, his child would grow up spoiled and irresponsible.

So too, if God gave us everything automatically, we may never define for ourselves what we want in life. True, life would be easy. But we would not grow.

Since God has our best interests at heart, He wants us to earn it. Because that's what will make us great.

Why Do We Have Problems?

God has all the right connections. He can find you the right spouse. He can solve your financial problems. So why in the world do we have all these problems?

Because no matter how brilliant or powerful you are, you will never be able to live your children's lives for them. In fact, part of genuine love for your children is to allow them to branch out on their own, to be independent.

If we were just robots, mechanically following every instruction, the world might be neat and tidy. But life would have neither significance nor meaning.

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We have the "free will" to make decisions that are eternally meaningful. We can choose to move away from God – and He will let us do that. Not because He wants that to happen, but because He

wants us to have independence – even at the risk of it being misused. We may suffer the consequences, but it keeps our independence intact.

Answer to Your Prayers

Have you ever had a prayer answered?

Stop for a moment and consider the implications...

You live in a small town in Midwestern America. There is an extremely large and unsightly pothole in front of your house. For the last four months the local municipality has ignored your insistent requests to have it fixed. Finally, in an act of frustration, you call the White House and ask for the president. (Hey, it's worth a try.)

To your utter amazement, the president himself gets on the phone. You quickly explain your problem. The president listens for a minute and then hangs up. You don't really expect anything to be done about it.

The next morning you look out your window and, lo and behold, the army corps of engineers is busy at work fixing your road. The President of the United States took your request seriously and sent in the troops to help!

That is what it means to get your prayer answered.

Now who is the one person who can always get through to the president?

The president's son, of course.

That is our relationship with God – Father and child. Just as a parent fulfills a child's request, so too God answers prayers. The Infinite Genius Who created every molecule on this earth, can alter the course of existence in order to answer your prayer.

To really talk to God, you need to know He is willing and able to do it all. Otherwise, you're only talking to your finite concept of God – and not to our true Father in Heaven.

The Prayer of an Atheist

Here is a true story about a young man who got his prayers answered:

Many people who visit Jerusalem are tourists who come to get a sense of Jewish culture and history. One day, a young tourist named Jeff was brought in to meet me at Aish HaTorah.

"What are you doing?" I asked him.

"I'm working for my MBA at Harvard University. And I'm an atheist."

"Fantastic! A real atheist! Whoever was able to convince an atheist like you to speak to a rabbi like me deserves a medal."

"Nah," Jeff says, "he doesn't deserve anything. I'll tell you how I came..."

Jeff had been in Norway, visiting his Norwegian fiance. And he decided it was now or never: either he is going to come to Israel or he'll never make it.

So, he headed for Jerusalem and the Western Wall. He figured he would stop by the Wall to see some old stones. Yet upon his arrival he was amazed. He felt something heavy. He was moved.

Jeff stood before the Wall and made up an atheist's prayer. He looked at the stones and said: "God, I don't believe in You. As far as I know, You don't exist. But I do feel something. So, if I'm making a mistake, I want You to know, God, I have no quarrel against You. It's just that I don't know that You exist. But God, just in case You're really there and I'm making a mistake, get me an introduction."

Jeff finished his prayer, and one of the Aish HaTorah students who happened to be at the Wall, saw Jeff and thought, "Perhaps he'd be interested in learning some Torah."

He tapped Jeff on the shoulder, startling him so much that he jumped three feet in the air. Jeff whirled around and shouted,

"What in the blankety-blank-dash-bang do you want?!"

"I'm sorry. I just want to know if you'd like to learn about God."

That question hit Jeff like a two-by-four right between the eyes. He had just finished asking God for an introduction, and immediately someone was offering to introduce him to God.

Jeff learned at Aish HaTorah for the next six weeks. He was a very serious student and went back to the States with a commitment to continue learning. A year later, Jeff came back to Israel and told me the end of his story.

During that previous summer he had been meandering through the cobblestone alleyways of the Old City when he saw a pretty, sweet, religious girl walk by. He said to himself, "Look at the charm of this Jewish woman. May the Almighty help me meet someone like this."

One Shabbos morning during the next year, Jeff entered a synagogue in Boston for prayer services. Standing there was the same young woman he had seen in the Old City. He made his way over to her and said:

"Excuse me, but I believe I saw you last summer in Jerusalem."

She answered, "You're right. I saw you, too."

They are now married and living in New Jersey.

Remember Jeff's prayer. If you know any atheists, you can teach it to them. Because when you are sincere with God, your prayers are answered.

The Almighty is near to all those who call unto Him in truth. (Psalms 145:18)

FIVE TOOLS OF BEING SINCERE WITH GOD

Tool #1: Expect The Good

Anticipate that God wants to help you. Anything that you could ask Him for is infinitesimally small compared to what He has already given to you.

If you don't expect the good, God is not going to invade your space. He wants you to connect to your Father in Heaven. Yet He wants you to work for that understanding.

By not answering you, God is telling you that you've got a problem, that you need to change. That's doing us a big favor. Because if He wouldn't do that, we'd just remain stuck in our illusions, unclear on the idea that God can do it all.

You're 22-years-old and driving through Manhattan in rush hour in the middle of July. Red lights... Gridlock... Honking... Summer heat... A-g-g-r-a-v-a-t-i-o-n.

What if your father was in charge of all traffic lights in New York City and was able to track your location at any given time? He would arrange for green lights all the way! Green light! Zing... green light! Ding... green light!

The Almighty can arrange it for you. He created the universe. Traffic in Manhattan is not overly taxing for Him.

So here you go. Green light, green light, green light, green light. You say to yourself: This is too good to be true. I don't deserve this.

Red light.

If you don't anticipate God's help, then you have lost sight of God as your Father. So God breaks the flow in order to realign your focus.

Focus on the fact that the Almighty wants everything good for you. When you do that, He'll move mountains to answer your prayer.

Tool #2: Be Shocked If You Don't Get It

Nothing God does is by accident. If things don't go smoothly for you, your first reaction should be: "What's going on? Why is God doing this? Why is He trying to get my attention?"

An uncle wrote newsy letters to his nephew at college. After six months and numerous letters, the nephew hadn't written back once.

In the next letter, the uncle wrote his standard letter. But this time, he added a P.S.: "I've enclosed a hundred-dollar check for you." Then he deliberately mailed the letter without a check.

The nephew received the letter and (of course) couldn't find the check. As expected, the uncle immediately got a letter in return: "College is great... I like my dorm room... I'm taking physics. By the way, you forgot to enclose the check. Love, your favorite nephew."

The Almighty knows how to get our attention. When we forget that He loves us, He sends a red light to refocus us.

But there's one big difference between the uncle and God: God is not hurt when we ignore Him. We are. God has no needs and doesn't need a relationship with us. It is we who need a relationship with Him. Our greatest pleasure is being in touch with God. That's why He arranges small mishaps to get our attention. All for our own benefit.

Tool #3: Listen To God's Lessons

If you are serious about a relationship with God, then you understand that God is always teaching you.

When life is suddenly full of inconveniences thrown your way, stop and ask: Why is He trying to get my attention?

When the problems are larger than minor inconveniences – i.e. an auto accident or financial stress, then God is calling out to you on a different level. There is something deep within yourself that you need to rectify.

A young man came into Aish HaTorah to meet with me. "Rabbi," he said, "I've got news for you. I don't need a yeshiva. You see, God and I are very close. God does miracles for me."

I looked at him a little suspiciously. "Would you mind illustrating a miracle or two?"

"Sure. Once I was riding my motorcycle up a winding mountain road. A truck came around a curve and swerved into my lane. My only choice was to either smash into the side of the mountain, or to go off the cliff. Next thing I know, I'm flying through the air with nothing but rocks beneath me. I screamed out, 'God! Help!'

"I hit the ground and it was a miracle. My bike landed between two rocks, which acted like shock absorbers and cushioned the impact. I was gently tossed off my bike into a hedge of bushes. I didn't get a scratch! So, you see, God does miracles for me."

I looked at him and said, "Tell me, my friend. Who do you think pushed you off the cliff?!"

God is not Superman. He doesn't wait until you stumble off a cliff, so He can fly in at the last moment to save you. He controls everything in your life: the troubles and the solutions.

Don't wait for God to push you off a cliff and catch you.

Don't wait for God to push you off a cliff and catch you. Pay attention now and ask: "What do you want from me, God? What is the message? And if You want to get my attention, please do so without too steep a cliff!"

Tool #4: Focus On What You Want

To get our prayers answered, we have to be clear that what we are requesting is really the right thing – and not just some momentary whim.

When I was 8-years-old, the World's Fair came to New York. My whole class decided they were going to play hooky one day and go to the World's Fair. But there was one condition: Everyone had to bring a dollar. No freeloaders allowed. If you didn't have a dollar, you couldn't come.

I didn't have a dollar, and the only way I could get a dollar from my father was to learn a chapter of Mishna by heart. But there was no way I could pull off a whole chapter on such short notice. So I figured I might as well go to school that day. I'd be the only one there – a hero!

I started walking to school, when it suddenly occurred to me: Keep your eyes on the pavement, Noah, maybe you'll find a dollar!

I started looking. One block. No dollar. Two blocks. No dollar. I started to pray, "Almighty, a dollar bill... You have them around the street all the time. Just this one time, let me find a dollar bill."

Two more blocks, no dollar. I thought maybe God wants something from me. So I said, "Almighty, I'll take out the garbage. And I won't fight with my sister." I was determined to strike a deal.

No dollar.

Finally, I round the corner and the school is in sight. The moment of truth. "Almighty, give me one dollar, and I'll never, ever do anything wrong again for the rest of my life."

And then I caught myself. "Noah, who are ya kidding? If you find the dollar, you're gonna play hooky!"

Many times, the Almighty sends us what we truly need, but we don't recognize it because we haven't done the work of clarifying our needs! God's answer – whether yes or no – always tells you something important about yourself.

So, before you ask, make sure it's good for you.

Tool #5: Make An Effort

Prayer is not an escape from personal effort or responsibility. It is a vehicle for us to refine our choices, and to realize that God is the source of all that we accomplish.

Prayer focuses us on reality and keeps us in touch with where our life is heading. It's not just a pipe dream. You have to work for what you want. If you're half-hearted, you're not serious about it.

When you pray, reevaluate every step of the way:

Do I really want to accomplish this?

How much am I prepared to sacrifice for it?

Is it worth the price?

Are my goals realistic and right for me?

Am I getting there?

The purpose of life is growth. Prayer is not a magic button to escape that process. By compelling us to make an effort, God gives us the means to truly grow.

God is always waiting for your call. The lines are open. Toll-Free. Pick up the phone today.