



The Gift of Tefilla

Inspiration from the TBDJ Youth Minyan

Rabbi Eddie Shostak

Requiring active concentration and participation in dialogue with our Creator, teenage prayer may be one of the most challenging aspects in the religious life of a Jew. For teens, this sometimes seems like an insurmountable challenge, with everything stacked against them.

First, adolescents are biologically wired to simply be un-functional in the earlier hours of the day, and their attention spans are getting shorter and shorter. It is the nature of adolescents to sometimes be moody, secretive and sarcastic, and teens are developmentally primed for a quest of identity and rebellion.

With all these factors at play and more, we expect our teens to wake up earlier than their bodies are ready for, we put words into their mouths that, even if they understood them, are not their own and demand that they repeat them back with passion and fervor. On top of it all, we expect this on a regular basis --rinse and repeat.

Why would we encourage an endeavor that seems doomed to failure? Firstly, as an Orthodox institution we believe in a halachic system that was set in motion by God and was guided by our sages with our best interests in mind. Second, our youth minyan serves as a kind of minor league farm system, where teens train to one day populate our main sanctuary pews and lead our 'adult' service.

But, perhaps most importantly, we do this because we believe in our youth. We believe that they have in them the ability to express themselves religiously through tefilla, enabling them to develop their spiritual selves, their relationship with God, and connection to each other. Now and not only in the future.

It is this last reason that got me involved in working with teens.

For the last several years I have had the privilege to pray on a regular basis together with our youth. While I officially serve as the Rabbinic presence and resource in the room, my recurring message to the teens in my *Divrei Torah* is that it is *their* space. That each one of them is charged to discover and to bring their uniqueness, becoming essential contributor to the building of our tefilla and wider

community. This group never ceases to amaze me with their care and pride for each other, as well as their devotion in ensuring success in our little corner of the "Baily Shul".

As adults, perhaps we understand a little better the value and power of prayer --as a mitzvah, as self-reflection, as a means for us to come closer to our Creator and to each other. But, for teens it is sometimes less obvious.

So how do we make tefilla a more engaging and meaningful experience?

By the ongoing development of three foundational aspects of prayer:

1. **Keva**, skills and literacy.
2. **Kavanah**, the emotional & spiritual connection to tefilla.
3. **Kehilla**, a sense of belonging & building of community.

In our TBDJ Youth Minyan we aim to focus on each of these areas in both traditional and innovative ways.

When it comes to **Keva**, we have a "know-by-doing" attitude in our minyan, where we encourage our teens to develop their skills by actively participating in reading from the Torah portion and leading as *chazanim*. Risk taking is welcome and mistakes are appreciated as learning opportunities.

New for this year -- we will be introducing a 5 minute *Dvar Tefilla* during kiddush, that will hone in on different practical aspects of tefilla.

We work on deepening **Kavanah** through introducing new melodies as well as weekly *Divrei Torah* that are relevant to the teenage religious experience.

New for this year -- we plan on introducing the Koren Ani Tefilla Shabbat Siddur developed educationally specifically for teens. These siddurim will allow our youth to explore an innovative tefilla resource that is filled with developmentally appropriate translations, thought-provoking questions, narratives, and quotes to help them think and feel beyond the standard text.

We build **Kehilla** by empowering students to take leadership roles whether as *gabbaim*, as *chazanim*, and as mentors to

newer members. We ensure a warm and welcoming young ladies section and encourage their maximum participation. And, of course, no tefilla community is complete without a proper weekly *kiddush* serving to both satisfy teenage hunger and to ensure proper time for socializing.

New this year -- we will partner with **Camp Ilan @TBDJ** to create an integration program for pre-Bar/Bat Mitzvah kids.

The TBDJ Youth Minyan has always had an important place in the life of our shul. Year after year, teens take ownership of their beautiful prayer space, making it come alive in enviable ways. We invite teens of all ages and backgrounds to join us to discover an appreciation of the gift of tefilla. A gift filled with religious, emotional and social benefits that challenge us to grow as individuals, build community and develop our relationship with our Creator.

Blessings for a sweet, happy and healthy new year.

Shana Tova.



Youth Minyan Gabbaim Yoni Drazin and Binyamin Freundlich, together with Rabbi Eddie Shostak



Émet LeYaakov Minyan Sepharade de TBDJ

Edouard Sabbah & Jessica Benmergui

Dear TBDJ family,

This has been a year of growth for the greater TBDJ family and as well for our close-knit & friendly Émet LeYaakov family. Led by our dedicated spiritual leader, **Raphy Benisti** and our talented Baal Korei **Vidal Gabizon**, our shabbat services are warm and lively.

Baruch Hashem we had a wonderful turnout for our annual activities: the Simchat Torah dinner was intimate and delicious---a lovely way to close the yamim norayim. Our casino-themed Purim Mishte, our biggest ever, was fun for young and young-at-heart; wowed by the magician, bellies filled with delicious food, we partied in costumes to the beats of our DJ for hours.

Notre minyan à grandit cette année avec plus de six nouvelles familles, et nous anticipons IYH une année avec encore plus de programmation, dont des shiurim, des Melave Malka et une hilloula.

Shanna tova ve'khatima tova.

Eddie & Jessica,

Le comité organisateur du minyane Sépharade
Emet LeYaakov de TBDJ

