

PRAYING THAT TEFILLOT ARE SUCCESSFUL
Developed by Shalom Orzach and Cheryl Magen
FJC LEADERS' ASSEMBLY 2018

Predictors of Tefillah Success

1. Cannot teach meaning to all tefillot in one summer.
2. Different age groups need different amounts of prayer infusion.
3. Day 1 is not day 50.
4. Prayer is: skill based, emotionally charged, takes constant and consistent repetition.
5. Need some God Talk for staff – if the goal is to create community around prayer moments then do 2 things: ritualize what happens so there is consistency and predictability AND be intentional about creating magical moments (even if it means being spontaneous)
6. Use as many modalities as possible.

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13. Have campers and staff create prayers based on their experiences in camp.

14. Think about how to incorporate Israel shlichim into prayer.

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GOAL SETTING:

Literacy:

- Read and chant
- Variety of tunes
- Choreography
- Skills of a prayer leader

Understanding:

- Basic meaning
- Key phrases
- Core concepts
- Places in siddur
- Key Hebrew roots

Deeper Meaning:

- Relevance
- Spirituality
- Personal meaning
- Symbolism
- Connections with God

Community:

- Creating unity
- Camp Identity
- Camp's spiritual personality
- Overt expression of the "we" of camp

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ROADMAP AND IDEAS:

BEFORE YOU START:

1. Set clear, concise and directed goals ahead of time and refer back to them often.
2. Plan a balance between *kevah and kavanah*. - the notion of a fixed regular experience as opposed to providing experiences less unvarying but potentially more creative
3. Look at all aspects of physical space. Intentionally plan the space to help support and attain your goals.
4. Train the staff on a regular basis and check in often.

SUGGESTED METHODOLOGIES:

1. Hang a poster with the *matbeah* (set parts of tefillah) written out with page numbers. Put special parts in a different color (e.g. Torah service).
2. Announce the page numbers more than once AND show them. Keep the page numbers in a three-ring binder for easy reference. Bend one cover back to the other and the binder can stand on its own.
3. Pair up buddies (a la swimming buddies). Campers who feel more confident than others sit next to those who are less confident. Being in pairs helps both stay on the same page. In younger groups, every now and then say "Buddies?" (whatever you say when swimming to check that everyone is accounted for.)
4. Encourage keeping your index finger on the word and follow along – at the beginning it is important to make a visual connection with the written word. It's corny but it works.
5. If you are projecting the words so everyone faces up to the screen for hands-free praying. All eyes are on the words. You can highlight words and focus everyone on the word you want to teach. Try using a fun pointer (big foam finger?) to show the place.
6. Teach hand motions to go along with the tefillot. Utilize the natural energy that campers have and direct it in a positive way. Asking/expecting (young) kids to sit quietly without fidgeting is not a reasonable expectation.
7. Sing or read almost everything out loud together.
8. Build from a basic structure and add to it. Incorporate prayers as you teach them. Repetition will reinforce the learning.
9. Tefillah "shorts": Staff can model this by talking about their favorite prayer. A two-sentence explanation right before a prayer works best. Asking questions is also good. Take one or two possible answers from the group. Table it for another time or give a short explanation and go back to the service (e.g. "my favorite tefillah is the Shema because it connects me with Jews all over the world." OR "Why do some people move around when they pray?")
10. During the Torah service, ask questions or give challenges for each section that is being read. The campers will have something to look for as the Torah is being read. At the end of that section ask for the answers, while the next aliyah is being set up.
11. Act out the parsha on days when the Torah would be read, but you may not be reading formally.

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PRAYER LEADER:

With younger children, it helps to “chunk” the prayer service. Rotate who leads a specific prayer by bunk group, by going around the room, or have two or three campers lead together. Up until Bar/Bat Mitzvah age, campers can lead tefillot together to build confidence. Find a theme for each prayer and vary the ways you introduce the theme or main point. Instead of trying to teach every word of every prayer, teach big concepts and some Hebrew roots* instead. Keep it light and engaging, so campers will want to come back for more.

Ashrei:

1. Alternate boys/girls, top bunk/bottom bunk, left side of the room/right side. Be creative so that each day there is a different twist.
2. Put large sheets up with the letters A to Z along the left side of the page and (if appropriate) aleph to tav on the right side of the page. Leave markers hanging by the paper. Ask campers and staff to come up with their own acrostic, one word for each letter that describes a positive aspect of their relationship with God or nature OR gratitude. It may take a few days but people need time to think about their responses. Leave the papers up so that everyone can read them.

Amidah:

3. Start with body language, first paragraph, and opening chatimot (signature brachot that end each paragraph). End with oseh shalom. After a few days of mastering that, add one or two *chatimot* each day, explaining the meaning as you add them. Hang up a piece of poster board with the ending of the chatimah and a short synopsis of the meaning. Put them in order where everyone can see them.
4. Give a 30 second break before the blessing shome'ah tefillah to encourage personal prayers.
5. Get a list from the infirmary of people who are staying overnight and add them to the *rofeh cholim* Healing the sick section.

Decoding tefillot is a skill that can be taught easily and help answer the adolescent resistance of “I don't know what the prayers mean so I don't feel comfortable saying prayers.” One way to decode is to teach the main root words*. Teach one each day of the summer and constantly reinforce and quiz everyone on their meanings. By the end of the summer, every camper will be able to give you a quick summary of the theme of each prayer.

THE MOST IMPORTANT WEEK OF THE SUMMER:

You need buy-in from staff so this is a chance to teach, practice, gain skills and confidence for them to be role models and educators throughout the summer. Day 1 is not Day 7!!

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THE TWO MOST IMPORTANT DAYS OF THE SUMMER:

1. The first day it is crucial to set a tone and make the prayer experience so special and WOW that even the most resistant camper will be drawn to it.
2. About ten days before the end of the session, begin to discuss ways to take prayer home.** If we don't make the bridge accessible and doable, then praying remains a "summer-only-with-a-group-and-a-lakefront" experience and we have not succeeded. *A list of the most common Hebrew roots can be found on p. 421 in *Siddur Lev Yisrael*, published by KTAV.

** See page 358 in *Siddur Lev Yisrael* for a guide to making tefillah part of your everyday life, how to abbreviate prayer services and more.

MORE IDEAS:

1. Take us to the place where you feel....the presence of God, feelings of gratitude etc. Each camper in the bunk takes the group to that place and you take a picture of the group with that camper highlighted. Print the pictures and decorate picture mat boards and/or frames. In addition you can pick a verse from Torah, Pirkei Avot or other texts and write that on the frame as the bunk "motto".
3. Write a personal tefillat haderech (traveler's prayer) – teach traditional one and give a rubric for people to write their own. Then share. This is very appropriate for campers in their last summer of camp or for the staff. You can collect them and mail them later in the year (make sure everyone gives you an envelope with the address where they will be) or print them and put in frames imprinted with the camp name and/or year.