

## What should I do in Shul?



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Ranking 3rd in the top five FAQs for Youth Directors is the difficult question of: what should I concentrate on while I am praying? I believe that examining the content of the three prayers offered by our forefathers may provide an answer.

In the Talmud (Berachot 26b), Rabbi Yosei says that Avraham instituted the morning prayer, Yitzchak (Isaac) instituted the afternoon prayer, and Yaakov (Jacob) instituted the evening prayer.

Avraham challenges God over the

justice of His plan to destroy Sodom, questioning the morality of wiping out any righteous people along with the evil. God agrees to Avraham's pleas to save the city if there exist ten righteous people in the city, but ultimately insufficient righteous people can be found. Then Avraham prays again. But what is the content of his prayer this time? The Seforno (Rabbi Ovadia ben Yaakov, 1475-1550) on Bereishit 19:27 argues that after Avraham fails to overturn God's plans through *din* (justice), he tried instead to bring divine mercy upon the inhabitants of the city. Avraham's prayers to appeal to God's mercy were motivated by the moral issues that inspired his original pleadings.

Yitzchak's prayers seemed to take a narrower focus. The Kli Yakar (Rabbi

Shlomo Ephraim Luntschitz, 1550-1619) tells us that Yitzchak prayed for success in finding a wife.

Yaakov prayed when he was alone, far from his home, at night. He was travelling to Charan, fleeing his murderous brother who had the intention to kill him. He was forced to sleep where he was when the sun set on him; he did not choose to be there. Perhaps Yaakov prayed for his safety.

These three prayers provide three focal points for our prayer today: (1) global moral issues, (2) personal wishes and (3) the safety of the Jewish people. Every time we visit our synagogue is the perfect time to reflect upon these prayers and think about the ways in which we would like to see change in the world.

## Vayigash Number Crunch

1. Yosef had   brother(s) younger than him.
2. There were   years of plenty before the famine in Egypt.
3. Yosef gave Binyamin     silver pieces on leaving Egypt.
4. Yosef sent    donkeys to his father from Egypt.
5. The shortest verse in the whole Torah contains    letters.
6. Yaakov was     years old when he met Pharaoh.
7. The Children of Israel numbered    when they descended to Egypt.

Answers: 1. 1 2. 7 3. 300 4. 20 (10 male and 10 female) 5. 10 (Bereishit 46:23) 6. 130 7. 70

