

## Prayers and Religious Services

First, let me very briefly state my understanding of the laws behind religious services. My reading of the Five Books of Moses results in the view that we are not commanded to have the types of services held these days by the various Jewish denominations.

Yes, we are required to assemble in Jerusalem for the holy days and to support the activities of a Temple there. Since the Temple is not currently functioning, these laws cannot be obeyed.

We are also required to learn, discuss, and teach the laws but these activities are a very small part of today's services.

It seems to me that frequent and lengthy religious services are not mandated. Yes, we are commanded to love G-d but that does not necessarily mean heaping praises on him all the time.

For these reasons, I believe we have a great amount of flexibility with religious services, in terms of frequency, duration, and what occurs when we do come together. I believe services should be:

- 1) increased in intellectual content
- 2) increased in interpersonal activity
- 3) increased in self-expression
- ) increased in emphasis on Jewish law and ethics

Services should also be shorter so that they do not take up large portions of our days of rest and holidays.

Intellectual content is increased by reading, explaining, voicing of questions and answers, and discussing ...of the laws, of history, of current events, and of any other topics relevant to Jewish life.

The increase in interpersonal activity comes from questions to and answers from the rabbi and from discussions within groups of congregants, all as part of the service.

The increase in self-expression would be the result of more private prayers and meditation, as well as more personal discussion during services of our relationship with G-d, with other people, with work, and with life's many challenges.

Why is the average age at services so large? Why is the attendance so small, with 90% or more of the seats empty on Shabat and almost as many on the seasonal holy days? This happens while congregations have many hundreds or even thousands of member families. Where is everybody, and in particular, where are the younger and middle-aged people? Many things are not right with services these days and that is clear to me. I cannot accept the attitude of resignation that seems to be prevalent. Surely things can and should be done by those members, and especially by the clergy, that care about the future of Judaism. We have to try things!

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