

Lesson Plan – Tefillah

The following lesson plan is a suggestion of how some of the Tefillah ideas and resources contained in this unit could be incorporated into a 60-minute class period for a high-school age class. This lesson plan will focus solely on one particular idea within the thought of Rabbi Sacks. There are many other themes found in this unit of resources which would take more classroom-time to explore with your students.

Goal: To be inspired by some of the ideas of Rabbi Sacks on prayer to help improve our tefillah skills.

1-10 minutes: Activator

Watch this video together. It is the first in a series of short videos created by Rabbi Sacks on understanding prayer in Judaism. [www.rabbisacks.org/videos/spiritual-exercise/]

Use the following questions to hold a short discussion on prayer in Judaism, and how we can find meaning within our prayers.

1. Why does Rabbi Sacks think prayer is so important to the human spirit? Do you agree with him?
2. If prayer is to the soul what exercise is to the body, can we train to get better at it? How?
3. How can prayer increase our sense of the following:
 - Happiness
 - Fulfilment
 - Meaning
 - Gratitude
 - Pleasure
 - Delight
 - Joy
4. Why are meditation and mindfulness important?
5. How can prayer contain meditation and mindfulness?
6. How can we make prayer feel like a “Jewish wedding”?

11-30 minutes: Group work

Divide your students into 5 groups, (if you have a large class and more time, you can have up to 9 groups, using the other videos in the series also). Assign each group one of the videos listed below and ask them to watch it (on their own private devices) and then discuss what message they can take from it to improve their tefillot. The transcripts for all the videos can be found here:

rabbisacks.org/videos/understanding-prayer/. Then ask each group to create a practical activity or prayer exercise to bring to the rest of the class to help everyone develop a “tefillah skill” to achieve what Rabbi Sacks spoke about in the video they watched.

- Thanking & Thinking
- Praise
- Growth
- Framing Beliefs
- The Soul’s Language

31-55 minutes: Presentations

Give each group 5 minutes to present the ideas they learned from the video they watched, and the practical activity or prayer exercise they created to help hone the new tefillah skill they identified from the video.

56-60 minutes: Summing Up

Prayer is a skill that must be mastered, and our soul is like a muscle in any other part of our body that must be used in order to improve it and to increase its capability. The ideas and activates discussed in this class should be able to help each of us to do that.

You may wish to ask your students to keep a journal of their experiences using the activities as part of their preparation for tefillah.