

I want to start with a question for our students. Just give me a thumbs up or thumbs down.

I am going to name a few things, and you tell me if you think you can pray for them.

Can you pray for good health?

Can you pray for someone you love to feel better?

Can you pray for help on a test?

Can you pray for peace?

Can you pray for courage?

Now here is a funny one.

Can you pray for a puppy?

The answer to all of those is yes. You can pray for all of that and more. But talk to your parents about the puppy.

That idea goes all the way back to this week's Torah portion, which tells us about the Mishkan, the special place the Israelites built in the desert. It was a holy tent, but it was not a palace and it was not permanent. They could take it apart, carry it with them, and set it up again wherever they went. That teaches us

something important. God did not say, “Only talk to Me in one place.” God said, “Build Me a place so I can be close to you.” Wherever the people went, God went with them.

We do not have the Mishkan anymore. But we do have something else. This siddur is a lot like the Mishkan. It is something you can carry. It is something you can open. And when you do, you are making space for God. Prayer is not magic and it is not about saying everything perfectly. Prayer is about bringing your real life into that space.

There is a story the rabbis tell that helps explain this. They say there was a time when the people desperately needed rain. The adults gathered together and prayed. They used beautiful words and long prayers. They knew exactly what to say. But the rain did not come. Then a child stepped forward. The child did not know all the prayers and did not use fancy words. The child simply said, “God, we need rain. Please help us. Amen.” That was the whole prayer. And the rabbis said that prayer went straight to heaven. Not because it was long or impressive, but because it was honest.

That is something I want you to remember today. You can pray for wisdom and for health. You can pray for courage and for peace. You can pray when you are thankful and when you are worried.

God listens to all of that. Sometimes the simplest prayer is the strongest one.

And I want to say something to the parents as well. Today is not only a gift for your children. It is a gift for you. This siddur is the foundation of Jewish prayer for more than a thousand years. It holds words that Jews have whispered, sung, argued with, and leaned on in moments of joy and moments of fear. Receiving this siddur is also an invitation. An invitation to explore it again, or perhaps for the first time in a new way. Not to pray more perfectly or more often, but to ask what prayer might mean in your own lives now. Prayer changes as we change. The words may stay the same, but the way we hear them does not. And sometimes the most powerful thing children learn is not from what we explain, but from what they see us wondering about alongside them.

So today, as you receive this siddur, you are receiving more than a book. You are receiving a way to carry prayer with you. A way to build a small Mishkan inside yourself. A place where God can meet you exactly as you are. May this siddur remind you that your voice matters. May it grow with you as you grow. And may you always know that even the simplest prayer is worth saying.