

woodlands community temple
Confirmation Class

PREPARING AN *IYYUN T'FILLAH* FOR CONFIRMATION

- What is the purpose of an *Iyyun T'fillah*:

- 1) To give every congregant something that will help make the recitation of prayers a more meaningful experience;
- 2) To help unify our shared worship under one thematic umbrella.

- What is an *Iyyun T'fillah*?

An *Iyyun Tefillah* (more than one are *Iyyunay Tefillah*) is an introduction to a prayer in the service. It literally means something akin to, “directing prayer.” This gives meaning to our *tefillot* that goes beyond the simple recitation of the prayers. To prepare an *Iyyun Tefillah*, select a story, a topic from current events, a poem or song lyric, or any idea that is important to you, and connect its message to the message of your prayer.

- How long is an *Iyyun T'fillah*?

Around 200 words.

- How do I prepare an *Iyyun T'fillah*?

- 1) In 200 words, combine the theme of the Confirmation service with the theme of the prayer you’re introducing, and share an idea about what that might mean for each of us.
- 2) Theme for the Confirmation service: Confirmation! That is, finding meaning in being Jewish and articulating what it is that has become meaningful for you.
- 3) Theme(s) of the Prayer. Each prayer has many facets that can be explored. Please refer to the “Participant Sign-up Sheet” for a synopsis of each prayer. But note: These are ideas which I happen to have found in the prayers. There are many, many more just waiting for you to use that great brain and heart of yours to uncover them!

What materials can serve as the basis for an *Iyyun Tefillah*?

- Here are some of the resources that are available to you (but certainly not the only ones!):

A personal experience	A biblical or Talmudic text
A poem or song lyric	A midrash
A Jewish story	Insights of your own creation are great too
A quotation (brief)	A humorous story
A news or magazine item	A poignant story
An excerpt from a book or article	An historical reference

How do I present my *Iyyun*?

- Your *iiyun* must be written out.
- You’ll come up to the bimah just prior to the prayer you’re introducing.
- Speak clearly (not too fast, not too slow) and with modulated tones (be interested in your words).

EXAMPLES OF IYYUNEI T'FILLAH

Introduction to *Barekhu* ... using a humorous published story

Before the train pulls out of Penn Station, a passenger asks the conductor to make sure he gets off the train in Huntington. The passenger then closes his eyes for the hour's ride. At Stonybrook, half an hour *past* Huntington, the man, still on the train, realizes what has happened and gives the conductor a real tongue-lashing before getting off. Another conductor witnesses the entire exchange and says to the first conductor, "Wow, have you ever seen anyone so angry?" Says the first conductor, "Yep. The guy I just threw off the train in Huntington."

To change the world, one could say, "The important thing is to try." But we don't really want things to be worse for our efforts. Nevertheless, the *Barekhu* is calling our stop ... change is needed ... so let's not just act; let's use our heads and try to get it right.

Introduction to *Mee Khamokha* ... using a contemporary Jewish text

In the Book of Exodus, we encounter the original appearance of *Mee Khamokha*. Reaching *Mee Khamokha* during our service is always significant, and worth a moment's reflection. But scholars, fearless in their pursuit of historical truth, are more and more convinced the Exodus may never have happened. And that can be a very disappointing thing to hear.

But listen to the words of Rabbi David Wolpe: "The Torah is not a book we turn to for historical accuracy, but rather for truth. The story of the Exodus lives in us."

So whether or not there was an actual Exodus ... whether or not there was an Egyptian enslavement ... whether or not any of our sacred stories took place as described in Torah ... does not change one iota the FACT that these stories are sacred. They are still thousands of years old. They are still the texts our ancestors have always loved, and always studied. And they still retain the power to affect us, to challenge us, and to shape the kind of people we choose to be.

Mee Khamokha is the song that was sung after a sea broke wide open and an entire people moved from danger to safety. Isn't that story happening all the time? Isn't that song being written and sung in every age? It is the "Song of the Sea." It is ours. We love it, we respect it, and we learn from it ... forever.

Introduction to *V'shamru* ... using a personal anecdote

My son never much liked services. It was difficult for him to sit still too long for anything. As an 11th grader, he was here for the 12th grade Graduation service ... which was especially tough because, most of the time, he sat while the 12th graders did their thing. That's why, sitting up here on the bimah, I was amazed to see him thoroughly immersed in ... well, in something. It couldn't have been text-messaging or playing a game ... there wasn't enough movement. It couldn't have been the service itself, could it? Nope. At the end of the evening, I noticed he'd left his service on his chair. I picked it up, and saw something I'd never seen before ... hands ... he'd been drawing hands! Throughout the evening, he'd been selecting different ways to hold his booklet in his hand ... and then drew the picture of him holding it. Now, as a rabbi, I could have been upset that he paid little attention to our service. Or as a father, I could have noticed that he's really good at drawing hands! I decided on the latter.

Shabbat is gorgeous. It's a gorgeous spiritual moment. It reminds me just how blessed I am ... to be part of such a beautiful world. Like a couple of drawings reminded me just how blessed I am to have such a beautiful son. "It is a sign forever between Me and the people of Israel, for in six days God made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day God rested and was refreshed."