

Why do people pray?

1. MC Hammer, *That's why we pray*

All my life, I wanted to make it to the top  
Some said I wouldn't they told me no, but I didn't stop  
Working hard making those movies every day  
And on my knees every night, you know I pray

Now I just think that you can do what ever you want  
I'm bustin' these rhymes, making this money and I won't  
forget my people or my town or my ways  
And on my knees every night I'm still gonna pray

Time and time and time and time again  
I kept on knocking, but these people wouldn't let me in  
I tried and tried and tried and tried to make a way  
But, nothing happened 'til that day I prayed

Children dying, oh so fast from this or that  
Needing that money, smoking that dope and doing that crack  
Ten years old stand outside, better look out  
Dead and gone, never had a chance , what's it all about

On a mission, start to doubt, here we go  
Kicking back, read these words we need to know  
Living high, living good, living long  
Take a minute, bust a prayer and you're good to go

2. Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, Horeb 618

‘Hitpallel תתפלל’, from which ‘tefillah תפילה’ is derived, originally meant to deliver an opinion about oneself, to judge oneself... Thus it denotes to step out of active life in order to attempt to gain a true judgment about oneself, that is, about one’s ego, about one’s relationship to G-d and the world, and of G-d and the world to oneself.

The Book of Genesis: Verbal Prayer and Korban

3. Forms of Verbal Prayer

Thanking G-d		Request		Repentance	
Malki Tzedek	14:18-20	Abraham	18:23-25	Cain	4:13
Leah	29:32-35	Rebecca	25:22		

4. Instances of Korban

Abraham	12:7	Isaac	26:25	Jacob	31:54
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5. Genesis 12:8

And Abraham traveled from there to the mountain, east of Bethel, and he planted his tent; Bethel was to the west and Ai to the east, and he built an altar for G-d there, and he called in the Name of G-d.

6. The role of korban: consecration of a location

12:7	Shechem/Elon Moreh (Abraham)	12:8	East of Bethel	13:18	Elonei Mamre
22:13	Mount Moriyah	26:25	Be'er Sheva (Isaac)	31:54	Galed (Jacob)
33:20	Shechem	35:1	Bethel	46:1	Be'er Sheva

## Evolution of verbal prayer and korban

### 7. Spontaneous prayer remains

Exodus 2:23-24      The Jews cry out to G-d in Egypt  
Exodus 15:1, 15:21      The Jews sing to G-d after crossing the Sea  
Exodus 32:11-13      Moses prays on behalf of the nation  
Numbers 11:4      We want meat!  
Numbers 12:13      Moses prays for Miriam  
Deuteronomy 3:23-25      Moses prays to enter Canaan

### 8. Prayer becomes more national and ritual

Deuteronomy 26:5      The Speech of the First Fruits  
Deuteronomy 26:15      The Declaration of the Tithes

### 9. There is a special site for prayer

Exodus 33:7      In the wilderness  
Deuteronomy 26:2      In the Land of Canaan

### 10. Time

Genesis 19:27 and 24:33      Prayer in the morning and evenings  
Numbers 28:4      Korban in the mornings and evenings

## Summary

- Our goals for prayer are varied
- Biblical verbal prayer begins in a mode that reflects this variety, while korban is communal and ritual
- Over the course of the Bible, prayer becomes more communal and ritual
- The question remains: Can the original goals be met with a communal ritual?