

# Women's prayer: A voice from the heart

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I understand that I'm not the typical Jew who prays at the Kotel. I'm not even sure I can label myself. In fact, I think it would be a lot easier for the rest of the world if there was such a label. My home is kosher, I keep laws of *taharat ha-mishpachah* (family purity), I am shomer Shabbat, I pray in an Orthodox shul in the Jewish suburbs of Detroit, Michigan and look forward to moving back to Israel in the future. Prayer is very important to me. Yet, I personally struggle with prayer and the lack of options available in my community.

I am not Conservative or Reform. I believe a minyan consists of ten Jewish men. Yet, every morning when I daven, I wear a tallit and lay tefillin. Mostly, I daven at home because these practices simply wouldn't be welcome in the shul I would attend. On Shabbat, it's the most difficult. Women can't kiss the Torah, touch it, or even get close. To be honest, I feel so far away from Torah sometimes I cry. But I feel like HaShem sent me here for a reason.

I teach Talmud to students who have never been exposed to Jewish texts before. So, for now, I just bear the separation until I can go back to Israel. I understand that everyone, men and women, connect to HaShem, tefilla, and their Judaism in different ways. Some people love to pray and it comes naturally to them, some dive into Halakhah, some are blessed with an abundance of joy on Shabbat. I understand that many people may judge, criticize, or simply not understand the things that make/help me feel connected to HaShem, as my ways aren't widely practiced in our tradition.

Yet, despite the things or people that made me feel far from Torah, there is one place that always made me feel close. I had the Kotel. For years, I have loved going to the Kotel. Whether it was on the holiday of Shavuot, after studying all night, as a tour guide taking a group of American teens there for their first time, going to beg HaShem for healing because someone I loved was sick, supporting a friend being sworn into the IDF, crying on the stones the night before I had to fly to America because leaving Israel is never easy. Whatever the reason, the Kotel was always there to witness my happiness, struggles, pain, celebrations and to soak up my tears and prayers.

After my first year back in the US, I returned to Israel for the summer. On Rosh Chodesh Tammuz, my birthday, HaShem gave me another blessing: surrounded by other women, in the

women's section, I read the day's Torah reading from a *Sefer Torah* — the actual scroll — with tallit and tefillin. In the hopes of not sounding too much like one of my high school students, but for lack of a better phrase: it was AMAZING!

For many years, I have loved davening — at the Kotel and other places — with women. The tefilla is an immensely fulfilling experience and I always leave feeling uplifted. Women's tefilla provides a unique space that I haven't found in other sacred spaces. That is true whether we are praying together once a month simply because we can, or if there is a special celebration, or if, God-forbid, someone is sick and we join our voices together for stronger prayer, or even if a woman who feels comfortable participating publicly only in an all-women service wants to read the Torah. I am able to be vulnerable when I daven with women, and share with them why I'm davening, what I need, and any personal struggles.

Once, I remember saying in the middle of davening, "Ladies, please pray hard! I want to find my bashert (soulmate)." I truly felt them davening for me and I know I never would have shared that in a space with men. Why? As women, we simply have a special bond and we have similar experiences. After the service, one woman I didn't know assured me that I would find him soon (it still took a couple of years to find him). I felt very uplifted, as the search had begun to feel never-ending at times. I have also been on the other side, where a co-worshiper asked me to daven for them. Praying next to her, for her, made my prayer even stronger.

Women's tefilla is not a new phenomenon. The earliest recorded women's tefilla took place in New York City in 1969 (Read about the history, development and structure of halakic women's tefilla [here](#)). It's no wonder that women started praying together at the Kotel more than twenty-seven years ago.

Why has HaShem placed yet another barrier in our way to praying peacefully together at the Kotel with a *Sefer Torah*, tallit and tefillin? I have no idea. A few things I know: I won't go to Robinson's Arch to pray. Not because I'm mad, but because the new deal simply doesn't provide a space for me, a space for Orthodox (and non-Orthodox) women only to daven together.

Also, I want to pray where my grandparents prayed. My grandmother didn't weep at Robinson's Arch; she lamented at the Kotel with all of the other Jews. The deal itself is disappointing. I may cry when the construction is over and there are signs for Jews to make a decision about where to pray instead of praying together. The sign that says "pluralistic area" that will be hidden behind the huge Mughrabi bridge and that won't be visible from the current Kotel area might as well say "non-Jews" to the ultra-Orthodox.

No matter what happens, I won't stop davening at the Kotel with my tallit and tefillin (Please make donations when that happens to help bail me out of jail). Nor will I give up on our [lawsuit](#) against the government to let women use *Sifrei Torah* in the women's section.

Like most things in my life, I know this is part of a bigger plan that I simply cannot comprehend

right now. I pray that at the end, when HaShem resolves this, the plan will be more unifying than dividing, no one's rights will be given away, and no one will have to be hidden behind a bridge to be the kind of Jews they want to be, in order to pray at the Kotel.