

Rabbi Jonathan Magonet has a beautiful text regarding the nature of liturgy and prayer - it can be found in our Siddurim on page 15.

I'd like to read just the first part of the text, though I encourage you to take some time and study the whole passage at your leisure.

**“Liturgy defines the community that prays
Prayer is the offering of each individual**

**Liturgy affirms the values of that community
Prayer sets those values on our lips and in our hearts**

**Liturgy unites those who share a tradition
Prayer connects us to all who pray**

**Liturgy describes the boundaries of a community
Prayer locates us within creation as a whole”**

We're Jews, so we tend to have strong opinions about many things, but ask a person their feelings about prayer and they'll most likely give you a unique response.

In my first few months at FRS, I have been encouraging us, as a community, to think about how melody and text come together to help elevate our prayers, and I want to acknowledge that this can be challenging. It is no easy task to both pray and think simultaneously!

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel taught that “The role of religion is to comfort the afflicted, and afflict the comfortable”. With all due respect to Rabbi Heschel, I'd like to suggest that the same could be said of prayer. The role of prayer is to comfort the afflicted, and afflict the comfortable.

As you sit in this Shabbat shacharit service, I trust you will experience a mixture of comfort and affliction. I urge you to challenge yourselves - as one of my teachers, Liz Lerman, suggests - “to turn any discomfort into inquiry.”

As Rabbi Berger explained at the beginning of the service, we will experience various models of musical leadership this morning, and we will discuss some of these models later this afternoon. I hope you can find space to pray within our community, and that you will share your voice in song as we elevate our liturgy together. May our prayer this morning help to locate us within creation as a whole.

THANK YOU:

One of my favourite stories tells of a water bearer.

Now this water bearer would walk every day down to the well, fill up two pails with water, connect them with a long tube, which he would place over his broad shoulders in order to carry them back up the hill to the house where his family lived.

Every day, he would arrive with one full pail and one half full pail. This wasn't because he was careless when he walked; rather it was because one of his pails had a small hole in the bottom, through which water would leak on his way back up the hill.

The damaged pail felt bad for the man, and apologised to him:

"Every day you walk down to the well, but because of my imperfection, you lose water as you return home. I'm so sorry."

"Not at all!" said the water-bearer. "Next time we come back up the hill together, take a look at the side of road next to where we walk."

The next day, the water-bearer went down to the well, and on his return back to the house, the pail looked to the side of the road. Lo and behold, he noticed that on his side of the road, the path was filled with flowers!

"However did that happen?" exclaimed the pail!

"I knew that your base had a small hole, and so I deliberately planted seeds along your side of the path on my route home. Therefore every time we returned to the house, your base would leak, helping the seeds to grow, and creating beautiful flowers for my return journey, so in fact, it is I who should thank you.

This story reminds me of our community at FRS. No, I am not suggesting that I am equivalent to a broken bucket, but the potential seen by our water-bearer in this story connects to the dynamic, cutting-edge community of which we are all a part. FRS leadership does not follow the crowd. In fact, our council and leadership team see potential where none yet exists, and stick their necks out to help create change.

Our community has many factors which contribute to its unique place within Anglo-Jewry. As our leader, we have a Rabbi who is dynamic, thoughtful, supportive, and committed to leading us with vision. Rabbi Miriam Berger helps us bring much to fruition, and I feel very blessed to have the opportunity to work with her. In addition, we have a council who strive to think outside the box. So it is that we have created a dynamic new education program - kochavim - and even that we get to work with a Rabbi - Rabbi Howard Copper - who is dedicated to the spiritual life of the community.

I am so grateful to be joining this team, and to be able to return to the community which has given me so much. It is a rare opportunity to return to the community in which one has been nurtured.

We are a community who love music, and last night and this morning have been testament to the sound we can make we we raise our voices together. I look forward to the opportunity to sing and celebrate with you all well into our future. Shabbat Shalom.