

## Pray Different 5772

### Rabbi Lizzi Heydemann, Mishkan Chicago

#### Initiative

Mishkan holds a fairly liturgically traditional Kabbalat Shabbat service, distinct from others I've seen in a few ways:

1. **Music** with beat, with soul, that has the potential to build and grow, that isn't too complex to learn in one sitting. When using nusah it will be a mix of Carlebach and standard Conservative movement nusach. We don't use nusah too much. For all but a few of the psalms pre-Ma'ariv we'll sing songs that tend to move with a slow-to-rise kind of rhythm, which we guide both with a djembe drummer and someone playing guitar. Neither is necessary to create enlivening prayer experiences. If we want to teach a new melody we'll teach it as a niggun before starting the service so that when we arrive at that place in the service it suddenly feels familiar to people.
2. **Talk to people as spiritual beings.** One of the service leaders will sometimes speak during the "mumble-mumble" part of the davening- not more than twice during Kab'Shab, usually once toward the beginning and once before L'kha Dodi, offering some kind of guidance in prayer. A kavanah, sometimes based on the parashah, sometimes just a reflection on what Shabbat is about. It always includes a personal invitation to guide your thoughts toward something specific- it gives us something concrete to attach our prayer to.
3. **Permission to be at whatever level you are.** We give people explicit permission to dance, close their eyes, hum along, just focus on a word on the page, whatever is a real expression of their heart. We frequently say there is no right way to do this, that it takes time to learn this stuff, and that we have to crawl and walk before we can run and then fly. But if you can find yourself within the music and sync into it, you can actually fly right away. One thing you can't do is disengage. Prayer is like exercise in this way: no one else can do it for you, and it's the job of each of us to determine what environments and sounds 'work'. Our job as prayer leaders is to create an environment that both holds and pushes everyone in the room, both encourages a feeling of safety to be who you are, where you are, as well as challenges people to grow into their next iteration as pray'ers.
4. Apropos to #3, **radical accessibility** while preserving traditional liturgy. We have transliteration guides that accompany the entire Friday night service. They walk away each week and we're constantly reprinting them.
5. **Physical set-up: Tzafuf is better than roomy.** Our prayer experience will be more intimate and intense if we're physically close to each other. Not saying we all need to be staring at one another (in fact, I prefer a wide horseshoe shape to complete concentric circles) but we need to be close enough to talk.
6. **Encourage talking during services.** Not while we're speaking and leading prayer, obviously, but before L'cha Dodi or during the d'var Torah by way of studying something together. It loosens everyone up.
7. **Study together.** Rather than giving a sermon, at Mishkan we study. So few people have time in their lives for Jewish study. We'll pick a piece of the parasha, design a