Dvar Tefillah Guidelines

Thank you for agreeing to give a Dvar Tefillah, or a 'Tefillah Explanation', at DC Minyan! We look forward to hearing your insights. This page is meant to give you some guidelines and tips on how to effectively prepare and deliver a Dvar Tefillah. Do not hesitate to contact the Dvar Tefillah coordinator (dvartefilliah@dcminyan.org) if you have any questions.

1. What tefillah to pick? Generally, a Dvar Tefillah should be given about a tefillah that the minyan will be reciting that day (i.e., Friday evening, Saturday morning, or a holiday). Divrei Tefillah givers have been most successful when selecting a prayer that intrigues them personally or connects with a broader Judaic theme.
2. There are many kinds of Divrei Tefillah, but generally they fall into the following categories (which are by no means exclusive):
    a. *History*. What is the background and development of this prayer? How did it enter the liturgy? Who wrote it, and what sources does it include?
    b. *Mechanics*. Many of the prayers we say have associated "gymnastics," i.e., bowing, stepping forward, stepping backward, swaying etc. What is the significance of these body movements, and why are they part of these specific prayers?
    c. *Ties to Jewish texts/themes*. A number of the prayers we do are taken right out of the Tanach or other texts. Why did the liturgists seek to incorporate these texts into our daily prayers? Or, do you see connections between the prayers and primary source texts that indicate or emphasize broader religious themes? Can you tie this prayer to other Jewish texts?
    d. *Personal Connection*. Is there a specific prayer that resonates with you? If so, please tell DC Minyan why.
3. One way to write a Dvar Tefillah (and a Dvar Torah) is to look closely at the text you've chosen and ask a good question about it – about its word choice, its style, its mechanics, etc. The question doesn't have to be complex or difficult. Sometimes the best questions just identify a word or a phrase that sticks out or doesn't seem to belong.
    a. Try to answer your question, using texts and/or your own analysis. A solid, concise answer does not have to be complex or layered in ancient text, but it should get the community thinking and answer your question as best you can.
    b. If you cannot answer your question satisfactorily, that's OK. Once you've presented your "best shot," you can leave it open to the community to consider their own answers, and stimulate conversation.

4. On the DC Minyan website (www.dcminyan.org) there is a list of sources that can assist you in researching your Dvar Tefillah. There are also experienced Dvar Tefillah presenters who are happy to help guide you through the process – just ask the Dvar Tefillah coordinator to help get you started.
5. A Dvar Tefillah is meant to be accessible to all, not a pulpit for political views. If you have questions about the content of your talk, please speak with the Dvar Tefillah coordinator.
6. Please speak no more than five minutes.

Good Luck!