

## MORNING BLESSINGS

When the Israeli author, Shmuel Y. Agnon, was told that he had been awarded the Nobel Prize for literature, he recited the prayer for hearing good news. And, when he arrived in Stockholm to receive the Nobel Prize from the king of Sweden, Agnon recited the blessing for that occasion.

Throughout the centuries, Jews have developed and used Brachot (blessings). A bracha (blessing) to heighten our sensitivity to all experiences in life. A Jew sees G-d in every aspect of existence. G-d is a part of all our experiences.

Read the Morning Blessings in Hebrew and English.

### Optional Questions for Discussion:

1. Each participant may create a morning blessing.
2. There is a custom of attempting to say 100 blessings each day.  
Your group can attempt to name titles of things we can bless daily.
3. Which is your favorite morning blessing and why?

## ASHREI

The Talmud (Brachot 4b) wrote that "whoever recites this Psalm three times daily is assured a part in the world to come, because it contains the verse "You open Your hand, and satisfy every living thing with favor" "

This Psalm is in alphabetical order acrostic. The letter GIMEL is missing because it is the first letter in the word "fall" or "downfall".

Ashrei is an expression of the joy at being able to relate to G-d. It contains the concepts of rewarding the righteous and punishing evil doers. Ashrei discusses G-d's caring attitude toward the poor, oppressed, hungry and fallen on earth.

Ashrei is written in the present tense and communicates the sense of relationship between man and G-d being an ongoing and current occurrence.

## HALELUYA

Read in English and Hebrew.

How many play instruments?

How can music be used to praise Hashem?

How does it sound and feel when we use our voices as a community in prayer rather than in silent devotion?

## KADDISH

The Kaddish is the best known and most recited prayer. We are not sure who wrote the Kaddish or when it was written. It may have began as a one sentence prayer and gained lines as time went on. Some scholars believe that the original Kaddish is found in the book of Daniel or in Psalms.

### HA-TZI KADDISH - HALF KADDISH

The half Kaddish is the most frequently recited. It is made up of three paragraphs. It is recited by the reader and congregation at the end of each section of prayer, at the end of Psukay D'zimra and at the end of the Torah service.

### KADDISH SHALEM - FULL KADDISH

The reader and congregation recite the full Kaddish after the Amida. It is a petition for acceptance of our prayer.

### KADDISH YATOM - MOURNER'S KADDISH

Those who have lost a parent, brother, sister, son, daughter or spouse recite the mourner's Kaddish. Why did the Kaddish become a prayer for mourners? There are several answers: It was a custom during Talmudic times for mourners to devote time to the study of Torah during their time of mourning. At the conclusion of Torah study the Kaddish was recited. This may have been the beginning of the custom.

It is interesting to note that the Kaddish Yatom has no mention of death, immortality, Heaven or Hell (Gehennom).

Read the Kaddish in English and Hebrew and discuss why this prayer is a prayer for Mourners.

## BARCHU

The Barchu is the introduction to the main part of the service. The Barchu is the "call to prayer" or "an invitation to worship". The formula is very ancient and was used in Temple times. We are told that when the Jewish people returned from Babylonian exile, sometime around 421 BCE, their leaders, Ezra and Nehemiah, called them together to hear the Torah and to pledge themselves to uphold the Torah.

Notice that the emphasis of the Barchu is to call the congregation to pray TOGETHER. Jewish tradition emphasizes prayer in a community. The Rabbis of the Talmud teach that "he who prays with the congregation will have his prayers answered".

Congregation means "minyan". Ten men or women past the age of 13 form a "minyan". There are several reasons to prayer with a minyan.

Read the Barchu in Hebrew and English.

### Possible Questions for Discussion:

Discuss reasons for community Jewish prayer.

How do Jews show that they are members of a community?

## AHAVA RABA

This prayer takes its name from its first two Hebrew words. Its theme is LOVE. It speaks of G-d's love for the Jewish people and of the people's devotion to G-d. Ahava Raba was composed during the existence of the Temple.

Jewish tradition teaches that G-d, out of LOVE, chose to give the Torah to the Jewish people. The Jewish people chose to accept the Torah filled with G-d's laws.

Notice that the first and last words of this prayer are AHAVA – LOVE. Our relationship with G-d is based on LOVE. According to the prophet Isaiah, "being chosen by G-d" is a privilege, not a task.

The Ahava Raba prayer includes the words (ve-yached le-vaveynu) – unite our hearts. We know that in order for an artist or an athlete to perform with excellence, he must give total attention to his task. The same can be said about prayer or living as a Jew. It takes complete devotion (Kavanah).

Read Ahava Raba In Hebrew and English

### Possible Questions for Discussion:

How do we show our love for G-d?

Name some of G-d's commandments.

Discuss the ways in which Judaism is a privilege.

In what ways do we show Kavanah (complete devotion) during prayer?

## SHEMA

The Shema constitutes the most important Torah excerpt in our prayers. It consists of three sections from the books of Deuteronomy and Numbers. Shema is read because it mentions the unity of G-d, the command to love Him and His teachings.

The Shema has been considered the most important statement of a Jew's belief in G-d almost since the beginning of Jewish teaching.

The words of the Shema are placed into the mezuzah which is placed upon our door posts. The words of the Shema are also placed within Tefilin – used in daily morning services.

Read Shema in Hebrew & English

## V'AHAVTA

And you shall love.

Love is the highest expression of the human spirit and our highest expression of our feelings toward G-d.

Discuss how we love G-d with all our heart.

Discuss how we love G-d with all our soul.

Discuss how we love G-d with our might.

Discuss the possible differences between these three forms of love.

The V'ahavta says to teach the words of G-d to your children. Why is Jewish education an important part of Judaism?

The V'ahavta says to speak the words of G-d. How do we each do this during our daily secular lives?

Why does the V'ahavta say to inscribe the words of G-d on the door posts of your house? What does the mezuzah represent?

## AMIDAH

As human beings we have a variety of concerns, feelings, and problems. Some of them we like to share with those we love, others we prefer to keep private. Jewish prayer makes room for both our personal and private prayers. A combination of these prayers are found in the Amida.

Amida means standing and it describes the physical action of the prayer. In a traditional synagogue the congregation stands and reads the Amida in silence. Afterwards, the cantor or leader repeats the prayer. The original reason for the repetition was to account for those who could not read but wanted to be included.

The Amida is a combination of prayers by a number of authors. The tradition tells us that the Amida was written by the Rabbis of the Great Assembly and made an official part of our service by Rabban Gamliel in 100 C.E..

The Shabbat Amida is Tefilat Sheva -- a prayer of seven parts. This Amida contains the first three parts of the daily Amida, a special prayer for Shabbat and the last three prayers of the daily Amida. We are told that the Rabbis changed the daily Amida to suit the mood and meaning of Shabbat. Shabbat should be filled with joy and not the worries or problems of the weekdays.

### FOCUS ON THE SHABBAT PRAYER:

Kedushat Hayom -- Eloheyru V'elohay Avotaynu, Rtzay Vimnuchataynu.

On the Shabbat, one special prayer is highlighted in the Amida. This prayer is called Kidushat Hayom.

The sages who composed this prayer excluded all the mention of sorrow, suffering, repentance and sin so that we could focus on the joys of Shabbat. According to the Rabbis, nothing should be mentioned in Shabbat worship that would break our full enjoyment of this day. Rabbi Chanina, who lived in Israel in 350 C.E. taught "a joyous spirit should be a rule on the Shabbat".

Read the parts of the Amida that mention Shabbat and discuss.

## HAFTARAH

Haftarah means conclusion. It was custom in the ancient synagogues to follow the reading of the Torah with a reading from the books of Prophets and then conclude the service. That is why the reading from the Prophets became known as the Haftarah.

The Jewish leaders from long ago worried that the people might be influenced that only the Torah was the word of G-d. These leaders started the reading of Haftarah to show the Jews that the words of G-d are found in the books of Prophets as well.

The blessings for the Haftarah stress that the Prophets were chosen and inspired by G-d. The blessings thank G-d for honoring us by giving us the Torah, Shabbat, the chance to worship Him and for giving us the Prophets.

Read the blessings before and after the Torah and count the number of times Prophets are mentioned.

Discuss and create a list of topics that we thank G-d for during these blessings.

## ALEYNU

We are not sure of the author or date this prayer was composed. Most Jewish scholars agree that this prayer was written around the time of the Maccabees.

Aleynu is an early prayer that became a part of the concluding section of the service. It was not always considered the final prayer.

Aleynu expresses "Israel's sense of privilege at having been among the first of earth's people" to rid ourselves of idols and commit ourselves to G-d. The author sought to express the uniqueness of the Jewish people.

This prayer is meant to be a prayer of hope.

Read the Aleynu in Hebrew and English.

Discuss ways in which this is a prayer that expresses our uniqueness.  
Discuss ways in which this prayer expresses our hope as a nation.

## ADON OLAM

This prayer is one of the best loved and known Jewish prayers. Many melodies are selected for this prayer and some are to familiar tunes like "Yankee Doodle".

How many musical tunes do you know for Adon Olam?

This prayer has does not have an exact date of origin but we do know that it was composed by a Spanish Jewish poet, Solomon ibn Gabriol during the Eleventh century C.E.. This prayer has been included in our service during the last six centuries.

The theme of Adon Olam is the greatness and eternity of G-d. Its verses contain the definition of G-d.

Read the Adon Olam in Hebrew and English to find this definition.