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Judaism at Home

WHEN THE ONLY PLACE
JUDAISM CAN THRIVE IS AT HOME



Hear O Israel

SUMMARY



I. WHAT IS PRAYER?

- Prayer has an outer objective and an inner objective:
 - Fulfillment of needs.
 - Relationship with G-d.
- Both objectives are important to both body and soul.
 - Physical needs are relevant to the soul.
 - A relationship with G-d is relevant to the body.
- That the spiritual aspect of prayer is relevant to both body and soul is represented by two teachings about the three daily prayers:
 - The three daily prayers originate with the three patriarchs (soul).
 - The three prayers take the place of the Temple sacrifices (body).

II. TODAY'S OPPORTUNITY

- During a pandemic, it is natural to be interested in the *first* element of prayer.
- Despite the need for the “outer” prayer, we still can have and need “inner” prayer.
- We cannot pray with a congregation, but there is a way to compensate—to gather all of our inner energies to explore prayer anew in a personal way.

III. PREPARATION

- Many *mitzvos* are performed during *Shacharis*:
 - *Tsedakah*
 - *Tefilin*
 - *Talis*

- o Love of our fellow Jew
- o Morning Shema.
- o Recounting the Exodus
- o Remembering an additional five items.
- o And, of course, turning to G-d in prayer.
- If one is unable to recite the entire Shacharis, one should at least accomplish the aforementioned *mitzvos*.
- *When?*
 - o As soon as possible after waking up.
 - o Grabbing a snack beforehand is encouraged if it will help you pray with more focus.
 - o It is ideal to pray before *sofzeman kerias shema*. To learn the proper time each day in your location, visit: www.chabad.org/zmanim.
- *How to prepare?*
 - o Proper and modest attire; head covering.
 - o Ritual washing of the hands.
 - o Donating to charity.
 - o Reflection.
 - o Use a prayer Book. (All page references below are to the Kehot Annotated *Siddur Tehilat Hashem*.)
- *Where?*
 - o Designate a permanent place.
 - o In front of a plain wall.
- *Getting started: P. 10* - Men don a *talis* (prayer shawl).
- *P. 11* - On weekdays, men also don *tefilin*.
- *P. 12* - We open our prayers with an important proclamation of love:
 - o To present ourselves in a most complete fashion.

- o Before making a request, we must grant our Father in Heaven *nachas*.
- o We specifically *recite* it.

IV. BIRCHOS KERI'AS SHEMA

- We recite two blessings prior to the Shema and one after the Shema.
- In the seated position.
- *P. 39 – Yotser Or*. The initial blessing preceding the Shema starts by mentioning the enormity and brilliance of G-d's creation.
- Some highlights:
 - o *P. 39* – “Who forms light and creates darkness, who makes peace and creates all things.”
 - o *P. 39* – “In His goodness, He renews each day, continuously, the work of creation.”
 - o *P. 39* - “King, who alone is elevated from aforesaid . . . G-d of the universe. . .”
- *P. 40* – The blessing moves on to describe the reverential prayers offered by angels:
 - o To negate angel autonomy.
 - o To become more aware of G-d's transcendence.
- Some highlights:
 - o *P. 40* - “*Kadosh, Kadosh, Kaodsh...*”
 - o *P. 40* – “Blessed be the glory of the L-rd from its place.”
 - o *P. 41* – “His kindness is eternal.”
- *P. 41 – Ahavas Olam*. The second preparatory blessing discusses G-d's relationship with us and reflects some of our spiritual aspirations.
 - o The G-d that is infinitely removed from even the loftiest of angels is most interested in us.
- Some highlights:

- o P. 41 – “L-rd our G-d, You have loved us with everlasting love.”
- o P. 41 – “Grant our heart understanding to discern, to perceive, to learn, to teach, to observe, to practice, and to fulfill all the teachings of Your Torah.”
- o P. 41 – “You have chosen us . . . and have, in love, brought us near.”
 - ▶ Remember the giving of the Torah at Sinai.
- o P. 42 – “To your great name.”
 - ▶ Remember what Amalek tried to do.
- o P. 42 – “That we may praise You.”
 - ▶ Remember the story of Miriam.
- o P. 42 – “Proclaim Your oneness and love Your name.”
 - ▶ Remember the Golden Calf.

V. SHEMA

A. INTRODUCTION

- A total of 248 words, which corresponds to the 248 limbs of the body.
- It is usual to sit during Shema. Symbolic meaning:
 - o We seek to transmit to the rest of the body the truths that we conceptually understand.
 - o Represents the divine descent that enables G-d to be the one G-d (*echad*) of the entire creation.

B. SHEMA – FIRST VERSE

- P. 42 - The opening verse, *Shema Yisrael*, occupies a central place in Judaism.
- *Simple meaning*: An affirmation of monotheism.
- *Deeper*: The Jewish concept of monotheism means that there is no *reality* outside of or separate from G-d.
- The role of the Jew is to *testify* to this.

- *Shema* = internalize.
- It is customary to recite the opening verse aloud.
- It is customary to close our eyes and to cover them with the right hand while reciting this verse.
 - Helps us concentrate.
 - We try to “see” with our minds and hearts instead of the eyes.
- The final word, *echad*—“one” —should be extended long enough to reflect on the idea that G-d is King over everything that exists in every direction—east, west, north, south, above, and below.

C. SHEMA – CONTINUATION

- *P. 42* - Before continuing with the biblical passage from Devarim ch. 6, we insert *Baruch Shem*, “Blessed be the name...”.
 - Story of Jacob and his sons.
 - *Baruch shem* is recited quietly.
- *P. 42* - We then recite the rest of the passage from Devarim ch. 6. We mention a number of important obligations, the first of which is to love G-d.
 - Love can’t be commanded; meditation can be.
 - The “*whole* heart.”
- *P. 42* - The second passage of Shema is from Devarim ch. 11:
 - Highlights the importance of observing *all* of G-d’s commandments.
 - Describes rewards and consequences.
 - Mentions Land of Israel.
- *P. 43* - The third paragraph of Shema recalls our Exodus from Egypt. It consists of verses from Bamidbar ch. 15.
 - The Hebrew name for Egypt—Mitsrayim—shares the same letters as *meitsarim*: confines. This explains why this paragraph is a part of the Shema.

- o This third paragraph also contains the biblical commandment of *tsitsis*.
- o When we recite the words (p. 43), “Remember all of the commandments of the L-rd,” we should think about Shabbos, about which our sages said: “It is the equivalent of all *mitzvos*.”
- o *P. 44* - When praying in private, before adding the word *emet* (“truth”), which we do immediately after completing the *Shema*, the last three words of the *Shema* are repeated. These are the words *Ani Hashem Elokeichem*, thereby bringing the total of the words of the *Shema* to 248.

D. FINAL BLESSING OF *BIRCHOS KERIAS SHEMA*

- *P. 44* - The *Shema* is followed by a blessing that opens with a string of expressions that endorse all that was read in *Shema*.
- This blessing includes mention of the wondrous miracles that G-d performed during the Exodus and at the Sea of Reeds (*pp. 44–45*).

V. AMIDAH

A. CUSTOMS

- Pinnacle of prayer ladder.
- A surrendering of self-awareness and a total focus on G-d.
- This helps explain the following laws:
 - o We stand upright with our feet together. (This is the part of prayer where it is important to face Jerusalem.)
 - o We imagine ourselves as standing before a king.
 - o Before beginning, it is customary to take three steps forward. When standing in front of a table or wall, take three steps back and then the required three steps forward.
 - o We pray silently.
 - o *P. 45* - We introduce the *Shemoneh Esreh* by asking G-d to open our lips.

- o We take several bows during the Amidah (outlined below).

B. THE BLESSINGS

- The *Shemoneh Esreh* is comprised of nineteen blessings, which are grouped into three categories:
 - o The first three blessings praise G-d.
 - o The next thirteen blessings are requests for our needs.
 - o The last three blessings are about gratitude to G-d.

<i>Name</i>	<i>Summary of Blessing</i>	<i>Notes on the Order</i>	<i>Customs</i>
<i>Avos</i> (p. 45)	We praise G-d as great, powerful, and awesome. We also describe His benevolence toward His children.	This blessing comes first because it describes G-d's benevolence, which is key to the granting of blessing.	At the very start of this blessing, we bend the knees at the word <i>baruch</i> ("blessed"), then bow forwards from the waist at the word <i>Atah</i> ("You"), and then stand erect once more before continuing. This procedure is repeated at the end of this blessing as well.
<i>Gevuros</i> (p. 46)	We praise G-d for rainfall, supporting the fallen, healing the ill, and reviving the dead.	G-d protects us because He loves us. It follows that after praising G-d for His benevolence and love, we praise G-d for His might and protection.	At the end of this blessing, we bend the knees at the word <i>baruch</i> ("blessed"), then bow forwards from the waist at the word <i>Atah</i> ("You"), and then stand erect once more before continuing.

<i>Atah Kadosh</i> (p. 47)	We praise G-d's transcendence.	Here we transition from talking about things G-d does in the world to talking about His transcendence.	
<i>Atah Chonen</i> (p. 47)	We ask G-d to grant us wisdom, knowledge, and understanding.	This is the first in a series of thirteen requests. We begin with a request for knowledge because the ability to distinguish between right and wrong, good and bad, is the most important value.	
<i>Hashiveinu</i> (p. 47)	We ask G-d to accept our repentance.	With wisdom we recognize our sins and wish to repent.	
<i>Selach Lanu</i> (p. 47)	We ask G-d to forgive our sins.	Having repented, we ask G-d to forgive our sins.	Gently strike the left side of the chest, in the area of the heart, when reciting the word " <i>chatanu</i> " and again when reciting " <i>fashanu</i> ."
<i>Go'el Yisrael</i> (p. 48)	We ask G-d to save us from our daily adversaries, troubles, and distresses.	Having been forgiven, we are worthy of being saved.	
<i>Refa'einu</i> (p. 48)	We ask G-d to heal us and our loved ones from illness.	Having been forgiven, we are worthy of healing.	Have in mind the name of individuals who require healing.
<i>Barech Aleinu</i> (p. 48)	We ask G-d to provide for us and sustain us.	Having been forgiven, we are worthy of sustenance.	
<i>Teka Beshofar</i> (p. 49)	We ask G-d to gather all Jews who are scattered across the globe and bring them to Israel.	Here we transition from personal requests to requests on behalf of the collective Jewish people.	

<i>Hashivah</i> (p. 49)	We ask G-d to restore the Jewish high court, which governed and taught Torah from the Temple Mount.	When Mashiach leads the Jews back to Israel, the High Court will be restored.	
<i>Velamalshinim</i> (p. 49)	We ask G-d to eradicate sectarians who cause suffering to the Jewish people.	When Moshiach comes and Jewish governance is re-established, we will no longer suffer at the hands of those who wish us harm.	
<i>Al Hatzadikim</i> (p. 49)	We ask G-d to reward and never disappoint those who place their trust in Him.	When wickedness will cease, the star of the righteous will shine properly.	
<i>Bonei Yerushalayim</i> (p. 49)	We ask G-d to rebuild Jerusalem and restore the seat of David's kingdom.	The righteous will shine most prominently in Jerusalem, which will be rebuilt in its full glory when Mashiach comes.	
<i>Es Tzemach</i> (p. 50)	We ask G-d to bring the Mashiach, whose coming we await every day.	After we pray for the restoration of the seat of David's kingdom, we ask G-d that Mashiach, a descendant of King David, not tarry.	
<i>Shema Koleinu</i> (p. 50)	We ask G-d to listen to and accept all our prayers.	This is a general prayer that wraps up the request portion of the Amidah. It asks G-d to grant all our requests.	Use this blessing to take a moment and think about any request relevant to you at the moment.
<i>Retsei</i> (p. 50)	We ask G-d to accept us, the people of Israel, and our prayers.	This blessing serves to introduce the following one. It is a summary of all our previous prayers.	

<p><i>Modim</i> (p. 51)</p>	<p>We acknowledge and thank G-d for the many miracles that He performs for us daily.</p>	<p>This is the blessing of gratitude. In order to highlight its importance, it is preceded and followed by blessings (that, themselves, are not on the theme of gratitude).</p>	<p>At the words <i>modim anachnu lach she'Atah hu</i> (“We thankfully acknowledge that You”), we bow from the waist.</p> <p>At the end of this blessing, we bend the knees at the word <i>baruch</i> (“blessed”), then bow forwards from the waist at the word <i>Atah</i> (“You”), and then stand erect once more before continuing.</p>
<p><i>Sim Shalom</i> (p. 52)</p>	<p>We ask G-d to bless us with peace.</p>	<p>We follow the prayer of gratitude with a plea for peace. It is a worthy ending, because peace is the vehicle for all other blessings.</p>	

- *P. 53.* At the second to last line, after the word קדושתך (“Your holiness”), we insert a biblical verse that begins and ends with the same Hebrew letters with which our Jewish names begin and end.
 - o If someone has two names, two separate verses are recited, and so forth.
 - o A comprehensive list of suggested verses can be found in the Siddur Tehilat Hashem – Annotated Edition, p. 582.
- To conclude Shemoneh Esreh, we take three steps backward (moving the left foot first as a symbol of reluctance to depart from G-d’s presence). We do so with the head bowed towards the chest, as if departing humbly from a king.

- *P. 54.* After taking the three backward steps, straighten your posture and recite *Oseh Shalom*. Bow the head to the left, to the right, and then forward as we recite this phrase.
- Recite *Yehi Ratson*, and then take three steps forward to our original position.

VI. CONCLUSION

- Prayer is to be approached, practiced, and perfected one step at a time. Add fresh insights and directions at a gradual pace.
- Every morning, we wake up feeling independent of G-d and distant from Him. Overcoming this requires work, every single day.
- *Reflection:* Was there one line or one theme that resonated more than others? Is there one paragraph of prayer that jumps out at you as something you'd like to further explore? What is it?