

# SOUL FULL

GATEWAYS TO JEWISH PRAYER

A Momentum Publication

Written and Edited by  
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With contributions from  
Momentum Trip Leaders, Community Leaders,  
Lay Leaders, Staff, and Participants



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Dedicated with love to our daughters –  
Daniella, Arianna, and Sophia.

May you lead joyous and meaningful lives.  
May your souls be filled with Jewish wisdom.  
And may your prayers be answered for the good.

Love,  
Your parents  
Helen and David Zalik

.....  
*"This book is just beautiful. The translation is true to the original yet speaks to the heart and mind of the mature, contemporary Jew irrespective of background. It is profound and poetic, and opens the world of prayer to all. I see this work as a magnificent resource for connecting with The Creator. I have reviewed every page, offered guidance throughout its development, and enthusiastically endorse it."*

— Rabbi Yitzchak Berkovits, Rosh Kollel, Jerusalem Kollel and Rosh HaYeshiva,  
Yeshivat Aish HaTorah

.....  
*"This is the best book on Jewish prayer I have ever seen! It is an entire pedagogic approach. In the hands of a gifted teacher, this book is gold. The prayer for the first day of school stands as a mission statement for Jewish education. This book can preserve the Jewish soul and vision for the Jewish people, and especially for the lives and souls of our children. It should rest in every synagogue next to the siddur and chumash. I can only imagine its impact."*

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*"This book presents profound value for Jewish parenting. It will enrich the values and wisdom you pass on to your children and bring the joy and spirit of Jewishness!"*

— Dorit Golender, Vice President of Community Relations for the Genesis Philanthropy Group and former Ambassador of the State of Israel to the Russian Federation

.....  
*"I'm glad that the ancient debate between 'fixed prayer' and 'personal prayer' was never resolved. Together, we need the unifying power of fixed liturgy, but individuals need to plead from their own heart. Yet, the cry of the heart often goes unexpressed. Each prayer I read in this extraordinary book opened a latch in my soul, helping me unlock my own heartfelt words."*

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— Alan Morinis, Ph.D., founder, the Mussar Institute; author,  
*Everyday Holiness: The Jewish Spiritual Path of Mussar*

.....  
*“Our ancestors understood the strength of prayer to open the gates of heaven. This collection includes personal prayers and the prayers of our sages, which were passed from parent to child and from grandparent to grandchild. This book is a guide to your inner self and to finding your place as a link in the chain of Jewish generations.”*

— Aliza Lavie, Ph.D., former member of the Knesset and author of  
*A Jewish Woman's Prayer Book*

.....  
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— Miriam Peretz, educator and recipient of the Israel Prize for lifetime achievement

.....  
*“Get ready for a spiritual blockbuster! This book is packed with practical tools that unlock the timeless wisdom of our heritage, all while inviting you to forge your own unique connection with the Creator, the Jewish people and yourself. It's your ultimate, inspiring companion on the journey of spiritual growth and self-discovery!”*

— Saul Blinkoff, Hollywood Director/Animator (DISNEY/DREAMWORKS/NETFLIX,) &  
host of the podcast *Life of Awesome!*

.....  
*“This book has taken my breath away! What a creation of love, dedication, and soulfulness.”*

— Hedy Schleifer, founder, Encounter- Centered Couples Therapy

.....  
*“This book is a beautiful guide to living our best lives, offering pathways to spiritual growth, gratitude, meaning, compassion, and hope. Inspired by the words of these prayers, we can create the space to flourish.”*

— Dr Sue Morris, Senior Lecturer in Psychology, UNSW Sydney and author of *The Rubber Brain: A Toolkit for Optimising your Study, Work and Life!*

.....  
*“The Talmud defines prayer, paradoxically, as “the labor of the heart” (Taanit 2a). On the one hand, labor, discipline, habit; on the other, emotion, spontaneity, heart. This extraordinary collection brings together the discipline of daily worship with the spontaneity of personal supplication. It is a call to prayer, a beautiful manual for the labor of the heart.”*

— Gila Fine, lecturer of rabbinic literature, author of *The Madwoman in the Rabbi's Attic: Rereading the Women of the Talmud*



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# Foreword

After I returned from Momentum's very first trip to Israel in 2009, I started to sing the *Shema* each night to my daughters, Daniella (then three years old) and Arianna (then one and a half; Sophia was not even born yet). It felt foreign, uncomfortable, and even slightly disingenuous. After all, having grown up in the former Soviet Union, where practicing Judaism (or any religion, for that matter) was illegal, I had learned that there was no God.

Yet, night after night, as I sang and reaffirmed to my daughters that God was listening, I started to consider that maybe God was. That led to questions. The questions led to learning and the learning to decisions.

With that first utterance of the *Shema*, I chose to raise my daughters in a world in which human life has purpose and actions have meaning. I chose to raise my daughters in a world with God.

Our lives are a series of small, uncomfortable actions we call "growth" in the context of a greater reality.

I hope the chapters that follow will lead you to wonder, question, learn, and touch this greater reality in ways that are a blessing to you and others.

Helen Zalik  
President of the Board, Momentum



I remember my first prayer. I was a little girl in Toronto, and my bubby, of blessed memory, took me to a bingo game. The sights and sounds were thrilling, and my heart was beating out of my chest because I needed only one more number to win. I looked up and prayed to God: "B-17, B-17.... I'll never ask for anything else ever again." They did not call B-17.

It took years of "Simon Says" prayer on the High Holidays ("The congregation will please rise...") before I was able to tiptoe back to prayer in my mid-twenties. Many years later, in 2008, I gathered with seven other women in the mountains of Utah to dream, to envision a "home-run" idea that just might strengthen an ever-weakening Jewish people. We were very different as people but had similar upbringings and experiences with prayer – uninspired



standing and sitting in synagogue, slowly drifting away from Judaism along with our spouses and children.

Perhaps, we realized, it was time to understand why we stand...and what we stand for.

We came up with many ideas, but one took off like a rocket: Focus on the Jewish mother. Influence the influencer. The vision that took root all those years ago is now an organization called Momentum. Our flagship program has brought tens of thousands of Jewish mothers (and now fathers) from all over the world to Israel for an eight-day transformational experience. The Israel journey is part of a life-changing year of learning and growth that takes place in home communities in partnership with hundreds of organizations worldwide.

Each day of the Israel experience unpacks a Jewish value that unites us, and one of those values is *emunah*, faithfulness and trust. The highlight of that day is visiting the Kotel, the Western Wall in the Old City of Jerusalem. Just before walking arm in arm to touch its ancient stones, we share many of the ideas that you will find here in *Soul Full* – that prayer is a deep, personal conversation with God, a connection between you and your Creator in any language, at any time, that spills out from the depths of your heart and soul.

Many tears are shed as we pray for those we love most. We ask for health, success, and a clear path to our true potential. We call out for Israel and the Jewish people, for unity, for protection. We pray for healing on behalf of the world, for peace, harmony, and loving fellowship.

It is a transformational moment. We invite you to be part of it. Turn these pages now and get a personal taste of what it means to connect and elevate.

May your soul, indeed, become full.

Lori Palatnik  
Founding Director, Momentum

## Notes on Translation

Because the Almighty is not limited by any language, we can pray in our mother tongue. But in addition to the prayers of the heart, there is a boundless landscape of Jewish liturgy layered with meaning. Each phrase, each word, leads us to ever-deeper terrain. Even among native Hebrew speakers, fluency in the lexicon of our prayers – which draws from Biblical Hebrew, Rabbinic Hebrew, and Aramaic – is rare.<sup>1</sup> So, while we can pray in any language, accessing the depth of ancient prayers, our shared heritage, calls for translation and explanation.

Reflecting on the challenge of translation, Canadian Jewish author Anne Michaels wrote that translators must make a choice – some sacrifice detail to meaning, others sacrifice meaning to exactitude. While the writer moves from life to language, the translator moves from language to life. Both are immigrants.

Embarking on the journey from sacred language to life as your translator, with trepidation, I've felt the tension Michaels so aptly describes. In many cases, a literal translation of prayer causes the words to lose the essential meaning and poetic flow. But to move too far afield from literal meaning can render prayer unrecognizable, a violation of integrity and reverence. I have sought balance, a commitment to both essence and precision.

Much care and prayer went into the decision regarding translating the well-known formula that opens most blessings, *Baruch Atah Adonai Eloheinu Melech ha'olam*. We hope the result, “Blessed are You, *Adonai*, our God, Majesty of the world,” moves you from language to life, honoring the essence of the Hebrew and the magnitude of its meaning in a vibrant, authentic, and accessible way.

God's most intimate name, the four-letter Name of God (יהוה), is not pronounced. Our sages' guidance states that in prayer, we say *Adonai* when this name appears, which is how it is translated in this book. You can learn more about this intimate Name of God and about the meaning of the word *Adonai* on pages 434–436.

1 *Nefesh HaChaim* (2:13) says that even with good translation and explanation we access only “a drop in the ocean” of the depths of meaning encoded by our sages.

But how to translate references to God using pronouns? God is neither female nor male, but Hebrew is a gendered language that renders God most often as a masculine noun and sometimes as a feminine noun. When you encounter pronouns for God in this translation, you will find three options. Depending on context, rhythm, and grammar, we use the Name itself in lieu of a pronoun, the neutral pronoun You or Your, or a masculine or feminine pronoun, following the Hebrew.

The second part of the well-known formula of blessings, *asher kideshanu bemitzvotav*, is rendered “who has made us holy with Your commandments.” This choice was made following careful consultation with rabbinic authorities, since the Hebrew is gendered and strict precision would have it translated as “His commandments.”

When an English word serves as a placeholder for God or the Name of God – for example, the Almighty – the words are capitalized to designate them as honorific names and to give clarity to the reference. However, when those same words are used to describe God or God’s Presence, they are not capitalized; for example: God is almighty.

German Jewish philosopher Walter Benjamin compared the work of translation to an archaeologist painstakingly reconstructing an ancient vessel. Just as shards of pottery must be recognizable as pieces of a larger vessel, both the original and the translation must be recognizable as part of a greater narrative.

We invite you to explore the greater language of prayer as you make your way through this book. Some of the translation choices may stand out to you; others you won’t even notice. The great writer Hayim Nahman Bialik, often referred to as Israel’s national poet, famously wrote that reading in translation is like kissing through a veil. It is our hope that *Soul Full* offers you opportunities not only to peek through the veil but, at times, even to lift it; we would be honored to be a part of the relationship that ensues.

## Notes on Transliteration

This book was designed with many different entry points to access the power of Jewish prayer. We hope these gateways open you up to an authentic connection with your own soul and a deeper relationship with the Soul of souls.

You may notice that not every blessing and prayer in this collection is transliterated. Transliteration, the art of rendering Hebrew into another language, can be helpful in many cases. Yet transliteration often results in the recitation of words without understanding their meaning, which is unlikely to engender a spiritual experience. Because we intend this book to be a resource to elevate your soul, elicit reflection, and inspire growth – all of which benefit from understanding what you are saying – we often bypass transliteration and instead encourage you to pray in your native language. God understands you.<sup>2</sup>

When we do include transliteration, take note: we do so with intention. Morning gratitude, *Shema*, and exploring Shabbat blessings with your family are all touchpoints for venturing into Hebrew, the shared language of the Jewish people.

2 Babylonian Talmud, tractate Sotah 33a.

An abstract graphic consisting of concentric, hand-painted blue circles. The outermost ring is the most prominent, with a textured, brushstroke-like appearance. Inside it are two more rings, each progressively smaller and lighter in color, creating a sense of depth and movement. The overall shape is roughly circular but with irregular, organic edges.

# **INTRODUCTION**



# Introduction

## WELCOME TO SOUL FULL

How do you connect to yourself, to others, to God, through prayer? It is the central question that animates this book, but it is not a new question. It has been asked for centuries by sages and scholars, parents and children, longtime practitioners and newcomers alike. As with so many of the formative questions in Judaism, there is no single answer. The answers are found in the exploration. It is by seeking that your soul emerges – your inner self, your core, that most enduring essence that transcends the everyday, outlives the corporeal, and makes you who you are.

To connect with Jewish prayer is to connect with your soul. This book is your invitation to embark upon this timeless and often challenging mission. It is an invitation to nourish your core by exploring the words of our people, words that have been crafted with care and intention in the shared Jewish language of possibility and potential. That is why we call it *Soul Full*.

These pages offer a rich collection of prayers, blessings, and reflections. Whatever your relationship with a Power greater than yourself, we hope you can find yourself here. Like any relationship, developing and sustaining a closeness with God is work, dynamic and complex. Even the word “God” is challenging – an English placeholder for a myriad of Hebrew designations, none of which can hold that which is beyond language to express. We encourage you to learn more about the name of God along your journey, leaning on the resources in this book (see p. 434) for support. There are times when you might feel distance and times when the existence of God feels abundantly clear. We each have our own journey – and we are on the fast track when we show up, seek, and engage.

### **MOMENTUM'S APPROACH**

Momentum's<sup>1</sup> approach is woven throughout this book – inspiring you to explore Jewish values, to bring new insights into your life to strengthen your family and community, and to embrace unity without uniformity. Embedded in prayer are the Jewish values of learning and growth, courage, faithfulness and trust, generosity and gratitude, and human dignity. These values help you chip away at the shell of indifference that can all too easily begin encasing your heart.

Beyond facilitating an exploration of values, prayer ties you to your community around the world, offering you a unique opportunity to connect to Israel as you join with other members of the global Jewish family to turn toward Jerusalem with a shared yearning for a better world for all. In this book, we've gathered prayers from around the world to focus on that which unites us rather than divides us, with a hope that we all connect through its blessings and poetry to a fuller spectrum of people with love, empathy, and a calmer and more receptive heart.

### **USING THIS BOOK**

Each chapter of this book is a gateway crafted with *you* in mind. Most chapters feature a selection from structured prayer on the left side, and personal prayer on the right. The structured words on the left are texts used the world over for generations. They are full of tried-and-true wisdom. They are a central component of the shared vocabulary of the Jewish people. They offer a language that will allow you to worship with any Jewish community around the world. These verses are a daily reminder that regardless of where you are on your Jewish journey, you are a part of something bigger

1 For more about Momentum, see p. 452 and [momentumunlimited.org](http://momentumunlimited.org).

than yourself – a global Jewish family, past, present, and future. On the right side of each page, you will find opportunities for reflection and connection – explanations, stories, and questions designed to help elucidate structured prayer. There are also personal prayers born of the yearning, experience, and expression of our global community. We inherit this legacy of improvisation and personalization of prayer from our ancestors. Take, for example, the prayers of Hannah or the poetry of King David's psalms; such prayers have been part of the Jewish liturgy throughout the ages.

A book of this nature can be daunting, regardless of how familiar you may be with Jewish prayer. Prayer is a process – it's not all or nothing. If you have five minutes, open your heart with one of the morning blessings on pages 1–50 and elevate your mood with gratitude. If you have time at the end of the day, keep *Soul Full* on your nightstand and spend a few minutes with the Bedtime *Shema* on pages 192–198 before you fall asleep. Follow your heart and start with the content that speaks to you. It is our hope that you encounter the presence of the Divine on every page, in each word, and in the spaces in between.

*Soul Full* is a resource for individuals around the world, for anyone who seeks a path to the soul, to the love, creativity, and joy within us, to anyone who is curious about the path of Jewish prayer. The book can also be a springboard for group learning with your loved ones or in partnership with one or more friends. Many of the chapters conclude with “Soul Full Together,” a guide similar to a book club, designed to build confidence, connection, and community. It includes activities and conversation questions for small groups and families with children of all ages.

## WELCOMING THE SOUL

We are each born with an inner essence that is free and unencumbered. Whether we call this essence our core or our soul, it's where we feel peace and exuberance. It's where we express love. Connecting with it inspires us to act authentically and with open and innate curiosity. And yet, life can all too often tarnish or conceal this inner core. Uncovering your original center and living from it is what we mean when we say *Soul Full*.

There are those who access their core in soul-awakening moments while dancing, skiing, or hiking; others access it through poetry, art, meditation, or



intimacy; some access it through history, physics, or gardening. No matter the way, spiritual work and growth are about removing the tarnish and returning us to ourselves, to our original wonder. Inner success is about discovering your true self and expressing it in your thoughts, feelings, actions, and words.

### PRAYER AS A REFLEXIVE VERB

Prayer has been called the quill of the heart. Indeed, words have a role in this work of discovery and rediscovery. God created the world with words! With words and the silence between them, we touch the immortal, transmitting something beyond place and time. Words and silence take us from occasional soul-awakening moments into spiritual practices that have the power to dissolve the barriers concealing our core. They offer pathways to reside more regularly in connection with our soul.

That is why the Hebrew word for praying, *lehitpallel*, is a *reflexive* verb – an action that we do unto ourselves. We intervene with ourselves. We self-reflect and self-assess. Our sages describe the practice of *lehitpallel* as the service and work of the heart. The famous humanistic psychologist Carl Rogers asserted that for people to grow, they need an environment that provides them with a space for open and genuine self-disclosure, acceptance of positive regard, and empathic listening. He wrote, “The curious paradox is that when I accept myself as I am, then I change.”<sup>2</sup> With a prayer practice, you can build this for yourself. With time, the presence you encounter is your own soul, the Oneness that is your essence, which is part of the One. That which is beyond the self provides this empathic acceptance and love. Further, the energy of your soul is infectious; when you activate it in yourself, it’s easier to draw it out in others, and those around you will get stirred as well.

### PERSONAL PRAYER

My grandmother Tzivia was a person whose soul was evident to all – the kind of person almost everyone befriends quickly. She was a warm and engaging listener who seemed to enter the world of anyone she was with. She spoke five languages fluently and learned them not in school but rather in conversation

2 Carl R. Rogers, *On Becoming a Person: A Therapist’s View of Psychotherapy* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1995), 17.

with her diverse neighbors in Jerusalem. Her speech was playful, peppered with colorful idioms and stories from an array of cultures.

But what stood out to me most about her words was how much they were in conversation with the Beyond. Throughout the day, she addressed God as a beloved friend, a coach, a confidant – whether she was cooking, shopping in the *shuk* (market), helping at an orphanage, resolving conflicts among neighbors, or just crossing the street.

My grandmother's prayers were conversational and deeply personal. They remind me of the prayers so abundant in Torah stories, the prayers of our ancestors who turned to God with the burdens of their hearts and minds. The Torah has a whopping 140 references to people praying, not to mention the entire book of Psalms. Of those 140 references, the rabbis elevate one as the model: Hannah's prayer.

So, in closing, we turn to this paradigmatic story of Hannah. Hannah is painfully barren. Her hope is to have a child. She goes on a pilgrimage of prayer to plead for that child.<sup>3</sup> She prays with deep intention and presence. She speaks from her heart, forming the words of her prayer with her lips, speaking softly so as not to be heard by others. Her unique manner of prayer captured the attention of the sages throughout history, so much so that they used her model as the basis upon which laws of Jewish prayer would be built.<sup>4</sup>

Many explanations have been offered for why Hannah was selected from all the possible biblical exemplars of how to pray. One compelling reason is that Hannah links her personal prayer with big, audacious dreams for a better world.<sup>5</sup> The Torah records a second prayer of Hannah's<sup>6</sup> in which she prays for a better world. She asks God to strengthen those who are faltering and weak so that the hungry will hunger no more. "God, raise the poor from the dust, lift up the needy from the dunghill, to seat them with nobles." She prays for the demise of oppressors who abuse their power.

3 1 Samuel 1.

4 Babylonian Talmud, tractate Brachot 31a.

5 I learned this from Rabbi David Silber, founder and dean of the Drisha Institute of Jewish Education in New York.

6 1 Samuel 2:1–10.

Hannah closes her prayer by asking for leadership that will follow God's values. Hannah's son becomes the prophet Samuel, who anoints King Saul and King David. Hannah captures something essential about prayer, not only in *how* she prays but also in asking for what she most yearns for and linking it to big, audacious dreams for elevating the world for the benefit of all.

This book is Momentum's prayer that we all dream big and pray audaciously.

From Hannah's timeless prayer to Grandma Tzivia's conversational murmurings to the traditional prayers of the *siddur* to the personal prayers whispered around the world today, all these forms of prayer hold a sanctity that can lift and illuminate our lives.

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks beautifully describes the siddur as "the choral symphony the covenantal people has sung to God across forty centuries, from the days of the patriarchs until the present day. In it, we hear the voices of Israel's prophets, priests and kings, its sages and scholars, poets and philosophers, rationalists and mystics singing in calibrated harmony."<sup>7</sup>

We hope you hear your own prayers within this calibrated harmony spanning the generations.

May this companion become *your* companion. May it serve you as you deepen your connection to a life lived with soul. May you be blessed to have your prayers answered in a way you can palpably feel, understand, and cherish. May these chapters be gateways to a world of words that belongs uniquely to you, in this journey we walk together.

Ronit Ziv-Kreger  
Director of Education, Momentum

7 Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, *The Koren Siddur: American Edition* (Jerusalem: Koren, 2009), xvii.





# RISE UP

## MORNING BLESSINGS

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## Introduction

Morning is the master key that unlocks the new day and its potential. When you elevate the first moments of your day, every hour after is imbued with deeper promise.

Jewish tradition provides a “morning outline” to usher us forward most powerfully. It is called *Birkot HaShachar*, literally “dawn blessings.” This ancient spiritual technology provides a template for your own dawn, allowing you to meet the day ahead focused, open, and inspired.

The Morning Blessings cultivate awareness, gratitude, grounding, and grace. Every blessing in the series moves you forward from passive sleep to enlivened awareness and action.

In Hebrew, the words “preparation” (*hachanah*) and “intention” (*kavanah*) share the same root. It is also the same root as the word for “yes” (*ken*). When you prepare for the day and clarify your intentions for the day, you access the natural positivity in your core. In that mix, possibilities unfold. *Birkot HaShachar* are an invitation to start with gratitude and to ask: What is my *yes* today? How can I step into my life with more of my potential?

In the Morning Blessings, each of the themes not only describes the physical, but also offers a vision of how the physical symbolizes our psychological as well as spiritual strivings. For example, the physical ability to stand and stretch our bodies can be used as a psycho-spiritual symbol of our personal freedom to stand up for what matters to us. This morning ritual reminds you that you need not be dragged down by yesterday. Today, new possibilities are open.

The Morning Blessings are a guide toward becoming a blessing yourself. As a practice, they help you connect with your soul and access your purpose. You have a unique contribution to share with the world. In honoring your uniqueness, you reflect God's call to Abraham: *Go forth...and you will be a blessing.*<sup>1</sup> These words can be as much of an inspiration for you today as they have been for our ancestors for generations.

May the Morning Blessings come to be (or continue to be) a reminder to be exactly who you are meant to be – to keep finding ways to connect to the One within and beyond, and to manifest that connection throughout your day, sharing your passion for life with others. May you meet each morning with an affirmative “yes” of preparation and intention, and may these ritual blessings transform the content and depth of your days.

1 Genesis 12:1–2.



## GRATITUDE

Upon waking, we give thanks for a new day and for the gift of life. We acknowledge God's presence, but without mentioning God's name, which we will do only after handwashing (see p. 6).

מוֹדֶה/מוֹדָה אֲנִי לְפָנֶיךָ מֶלֶךְ חַי וְקַיִם,

שֶׁהַחַיּוּת בִּי נִשְׁמָתִי בְּחֶמְלָה,

רַבָּה אֱמוּנָתְךָ.

Thankful am I in Your Presence,  
sustaining Master of all life,  
for restoring my soul within me  
with compassion;  
great is Your faithfulness and trust!

*Modeh/modah ani lefanecha, Melech chai vekayam,  
shehechezarta bi nishmati bechemlah,  
rabbah emunatecha.*



---

### THINK

It's easy to take for granted that we'll wake up to a new day each morning, but each day of life is a gift. Our first morning words affect our consciousness for the day. Toward what are you orienting yourself today? What gifts do you want to call to your attention to set your intention for the day?

---

### REFLECT

If we are so grateful, we might expect the prayer to end with affirming our faithfulness to and trust in God, to whom we are expressing our gratitude. But the prayer ends with God's faithfulness to and trust in us! What is one thing you can do to make this a good day? How can this action reflect God's trust in you?

---

### CONNECT

Jewish tradition invites us to assume an "attitude of gratitude" from the moment we open our eyes. Grammatically, it would be correct to say, "I am thankful." However, the order in the prayer is "Thankful am I." Our first word of the day is an expression of appreciation rather than a direct reference to ourselves. What might your family life be like if you and members of your family begin each morning taking stock of your gifts and blessings?

---

### PERSONAL PRAYER

I thank You for the nature that surrounds me, for the love and friendship in my life, for the ability to discover and enjoy this world.

Give me the strength to connect and be connected.

Grant me the spiritual courage to create, accepting and easing the burden of my loved ones.

— Shani Zadikario, Raanana, Israel



## HANDWASHING

Wash hands by taking a special cup with handles dedicated for this purpose and pouring water three times over your right hand, then three times over your left, and say the following blessing.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה	Blessed are You, <i>Adonai</i> ,
אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,	our God, Majesty of the world,
אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ	who has made us holy with
בְּמִצְוֹתָיו	Your commandments and
רָצָנוּ עַל נְטִילַת	instructed us regarding washing
יָדֵינוּ.	(elevating) the hands.

---

## THINK

Water symbolizes rebirth. The breaking of embryonic fluid ushers in a baby's birth. Passing through the Red Sea ushered in the birth of the Jewish nation. Each morning, after acknowledging that our soul is newly refreshed and restored, the ritual washing of hands orients us to feel reborn. Each day is a new beginning!

---

## CONNECT

The Hebrew word used for “washing” in this prayer also means “elevating.” With gratitude for sleep's rest and fresh perspective, we wash away its inactivity and prepare our hands for the sacred service of taking action to care for our family and community.

---

## REFLECT

What would you like to wash away this morning to approach the day with fresh strength and emotional clarity? Why do you think the washing ritual is directed at our hands rather than, say, our faces or another part of our body?

---

## PERSONAL PRAYER

As I do this ritual washing of the hands, I intend to purify myself and wash away what is extraneous from the night and the day that has passed.

As I raise my hands to my eyes, I intend to be as an extended hand of the Creator in my thoughts, words, and actions, a spark of the essence of the One whose entire Being is loving-kindness.

Please, God, bless my hands and actions so that I can serve as a faithful channel of divine abundance in the world.

— Orit Avivi-Cohen, Kfar Uria, Israel



## HEALTH OF THE BODY

This blessing of gratitude for the intricate wonders  
of our body is said upon exiting the restroom.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה  
אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,  
אֲשֶׁר יָצַר אֶת הָאָדָם בְּחָכְמָה,  
וּבְרָא בּוֹ  
נִקְבִּים וְנִקְבִּיּוֹת, חֲלָוִים וְחֲלָוִיּוֹת.  
גָּלוּי וְיָדוּעַ  
לִפְנֵי כִסֵּא כְבוֹדְךָ  
שֶׁאִם יִפְתָּח אֶחָד מֵהֶם,  
אוֹ יִסָּתֵם אֶחָד מֵהֶם,  
אִי אֶפְשָׁר לְהִתְקִים  
וְלַעֲמֹד לִפְנֶיךָ.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה,  
רוֹפֵא כָּל בָּשָׂר וּמַפְלִיא לַעֲשׂוֹת.

Blessed are You, *Adonai*,  
our God, Majesty of the world,  
who formed humans with wisdom  
and created within each  
openings and cavities.  
It is revealed and known  
before the throne of Your glory  
that if even one of them were  
to be ruptured or blocked,  
it would be impossible to survive  
and stand in Your Presence.

Blessed are You, *Adonai*,  
Healer of all flesh, who does wonders.

---

## THINK

This prayer expresses gratitude to God for the workings of the human body. It is recited after using the restroom. It's easy to take good health for granted until a challenge presents itself. The inner workings of our bodies are intricate, and their entire balance can be thrown off when one part does not work. This prayer serves as a daily reminder to express gratitude for our health and to do our part to preserve it.

---

## REFLECT

What is one thing you can do today to care for your physical or mental health?

---

## CONNECT

When a baby is born, the airway, which was closed in utero, opens so the baby can breathe.

Other passages in the circulatory and respiratory systems close for healthy heart functioning.

The Talmud puts it well: "Closed passages open and open passages close; otherwise the infant could not survive for even one hour."<sup>2</sup> Such hidden miracles take place in our bodies every single day!

---

## PERSONAL PRAYER:

Blessed are You for creating my beloved children within me, completely whole, faithful, and wise at their roots.

May they always go in their unique ways, accompanied by hope.

When I stand before You it is clear how fragile life is, how fleeting.

Keep my family safe, our bodies and minds healthy, so that we may do Your will.

— Roni Ezra Friedman, Jerusalem, Israel

2 Babylonian Talmud, tractate Niddah 30b.



## HEALTH OF THE SOUL

אֱלֹהִי, נִשְׁמָה שֶׁנָּתַתָּ בִּי טְהוֹרָה הִיא.	My God, the soul You placed in me is pure.
אַתָּה בְּרָאתָהּ, אַתָּה יָצַרְתָּהּ, אַתָּה נִפְחָתָהּ בִּי, וְאַתָּה מְשַׁמְרָהּ בְּקִרְבִּי.	You created it, You formed it, You breathed it into me, and You sustain it within me.
וְאַתָּה עֲתִיד לִטְלוֹת מִמֶּנִּי, וְלִהְיוֹתָּהּ בִּי לְעֲתִיד לָבוֹא.	Though one day You will take it from me, You will restore it to me in the time to come.
כָּל זְמַן שֶׁהַנִּשְׁמָה בְּקִרְבִּי, מוֹדָה/מוֹדָה אֲנִי לִפְנֵיךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתַי, רִבּוֹן כָּל הַמַּעֲשִׂים, אֲדוֹן כָּל הַנְּשָׁמוֹת.	As long as the soul is within me, I will thank You, <i>Adonai</i> , my God and God of my ancestors, Director of all events, Master of all souls.
בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה, הַמְחַיֵּר נִשְׁמוֹת לִפְגָּרִים מֵתִים.	Blessed are You, <i>Adonai</i> , who restores souls to lifeless bodies.

---

## THINK

Each person has a unique soul. This prayer reminds us that God breathed our soul into us and that no matter what our past actions, no matter how we feel, our soul is untainted. It is inherently pure, free from distortions of past experiences or moods. Jewish mystical tradition tells us that each soul is part of God. You have a divine soul! This endows you with awesome power to carry out its mission in this world.

---

## REFLECT

In Hebrew, the words for “soul” and “breath” come from the same root. Deep breathing can lower stress in the body.<sup>3</sup> How could bringing attention to your breath in the morning benefit you? What other times in the day might this be helpful to you?

---

## CONNECT

Our soul craves to reunite with its Source. Rabbi Abraham Isaac HaKohen Kook, the first chief rabbi of pre-state Israel, says that the soul is always praying.<sup>4</sup> When we make time to be prayerful and listen for our soul's prayer, we support the divine bonding for which the soul yearns.

---

## PERSONAL PRAYER

Creator of the universe  
my spark has extinguished,  
the husk around my soul has  
tightened.

My inner joy has faded,  
my soul is beating, searching,  
awakening anew each morning,  
asking: Where are You?

— Orna Ohayon, Shoham, Israel

3 <https://www.health.harvard.edu/mind-and-mood/relaxation-techniques-breath-control-helps-quell-errant-stress-response>.

4 *Olat Ra'aya*, introduction, vol. I, sec. 1.



## BLESSING FOR TORAH STUDY

Judaism teaches us that study is greater even than prayer. So before beginning to pray, we engage in a little Torah and Talmud learning (see the next two pages), preceded by these blessings.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ הוֹדוּ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,  
אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ לַעֲסֹק בְּדִבְרֵי  
תּוֹרָה.

*Baruch Ata Adonai Eloheinu Melech  
ha'olam, asher kideshanu bemitzvotav  
vetzivanu la'asok bedivrei Torah.*

וְהַעֲרַב נָא, יְיָ הוֹדוּ אֱלֹהֵינוּ,  
אֶת דְּבָרֵי תּוֹרָתְךָ בְּפִינוּ  
וּבְפִי עַמֶּךָ  
בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל, וְנִהְיָ אֲנַחְנוּ  
וְצִאֲצֵאֵינוּ,  
(וְצִאֲצֵאֵי צִאֲצֵאֵינוּ) וְצִאֲצֵאֵי  
עַמֶּךָ בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל, כְּלָנוּ יוֹדְעֵי שְׁמֶךָ,  
וְלִוְמֵי תּוֹרָתְךָ  
לְשִׁמָּה. בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה  
יְיָ הוֹדוּ, הַמְלַמֵּד תּוֹרָה  
לְעַמּוֹ יִשְׂרָאֵל.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ הוֹדוּ אֱלֹהֵינוּ  
מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר  
בָּחַר בָּנוּ מִכָּל  
הָעַמִּים וְנָתַן לָנוּ אֶת תּוֹרָתוֹ.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ הוֹדוּ,  
נוֹתֵן הַתּוֹרָה.

Blessed are You, *Adonai*,  
our God, Majesty of the world,  
who has made us holy with Your  
commandments and instructed us  
to engage in (studying and living)  
the words of Torah.

Please our God, make sweet  
the words of Torah in our mouths,  
and in the mouths of Your people,  
the house of Israel. Let us, and our  
children (and their children) and  
the children of Your people the  
house of Israel, all know Your name  
and be students of Your Torah  
for its own sake. Blessed are You,  
*Adonai*, who teaches Torah to the  
people of Israel.

Blessed are You, *Adonai*, our  
God, Master of the world, who  
chose us from among all the  
people and gave us His Torah.

Blessed are You, *Adonai*,  
Giver of the Torah.



---

## THINK

One way to understand what Torah is about is to consider other Hebrew words with the same root: pregnant (*harah*), instruction (*hora'ah*), parent (*horeh*), teacher (*morah*), and light (*ohr*). Torah is pregnant with instruction from the Ultimate Parent and Teacher about living a luminous life! So, while the Torah is vast, the blessing is about engaging in studying and living the words of Torah, and a little can have a great impact when it makes our behavior kinder.

---

## CONNECT

“The beginning of the Torah is loving-kindness, the middle of the Torah is loving-kindness, and the end of the Torah is loving-kindness.”<sup>5</sup> This teaching goes on to give the following three examples of God’s loving-kindness: clothing Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden in the beginning, paying a healing visit to Abraham when he was recovering from his circumcision in the middle, and burying Moses at the end. The teaching concludes by inviting us to follow God’s ways in order to build our character.

---

## REFLECT

We ask that the Torah be sweet in our mouths. A mouth can both taste and articulate; so, too, are we meant to taste and articulate Torah learning. What learning has been sweet for you? What Torah ideal has affected your behavior in a way that was kind, generous, or loving? How might you share a little Torah regularly with your children (or with other children), and what impact can you imagine this having on your children’s children?

---

## PERSONAL PRAYER

God, please bless me, and all parents, to dance Your Torah in delight, so its sweetness is not only in our mouths but in our bones, in ways that keep the sparkle in our children’s eyes as they grow.

Let Torah kindle in us new capacities as we face frontiers.

Let it nurture intimacy, open hearts, and uplift consciousness from generation to generation.

— Ronit Ziv-Kreger,  
Sharon, Massachusetts

5 Midrash Tanchuma, *VaYishlach* 10.



## PRIESTLY BLESSING

Numbers 6:24–26

יְבָרֶכֶךָ יְיָ וְיִשְׁמְרֶכָּהּ. | May God bless you and protect you.

*Yevarechecha Adonai veyishmerecha.*

יָאֵר יְהוָה פָּנָיו | May God's face shine  
אֵלֶיךָ וִיחַנֶּנָּהּ. | upon you and give you grace.

*Ya'er Adonai panav eilecha vichuneka.*

יִשָּׂא יְהוָה פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ | May God's face turn toward  
וְיִשֶּׂם לְךָ שְׁלוֹם. | you and grant you peace.

*Yisa Adonai panav eilecha veyasem lecha shalom.*

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## THINK

Each of the three phrases, which constitute the blessing that priests were instructed to offer the Israelites, bestows both a gift and a supplication for protection from potential pitfalls that would prevent the gift from being well used.

The first blessing is for material resources and protection from being corrupted by them.<sup>6</sup> The second is for the light of Torah and wisdom to be used graciously and to guard against becoming arrogant from one's Torah learning. The third is for spiritual closeness to God and protection of this gift so that it will be used to bring peace and not division.

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## CONNECT

The Jewish people are called a “nation of priests” by God.<sup>7</sup> From the first encounter Abraham has with God, he's told to be a blessing and promised that his descendants will confer blessing. On Friday night, many parents use the priestly blessing to bless their children. They place their hands on their child's head and recite it. Many parents also add a personalized blessing to the traditional one, sharing bright spots they observed in their child over the course of the week.

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## REFLECT

How do you confer blessing onto others? Consider your immediate and extended family as well as your community and colleagues.

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## PERSONAL PRAYER

The priestly benediction:

Simple and powerful, asking God for His blessing and protection, at every level and every moment.

May God's light shine on each of us, gently and lovingly, like a parent, grandparent, or adored teacher.

Please, God, turn toward me always, with love, attention, and opportunities for growth.

Grant me inner peace with Your loving nod, and acceptance and understanding that everything is done by Your hand.

— Nancee Gross,  
North Bethesda, Maryland

<sup>6</sup> This interpretation is inspired by Rabbi Ovadia ben Jacob Sforno and Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch.

<sup>7</sup> Exodus 19:6.



## FAMILY, LIFE, AND COMMUNITY

Babylonian Talmud, tractate Shabbat 127a

אלו דברים שאדם אוכל פרותיהם בעולם הזה והקרן קימת לו לעולם הבא ואלו הן:	These are the things whose fruit we enjoy in this world and whose full reward awaits us in the world that is coming:
כבוד אב ואם, וגמילות חסדים, והשכמת בית המדרש שחרית וערבית, והכנסת אורחים, ובקור חולים, והכנסת כלה, ולוית המת, ועיון תפלה, והבאת שלום בין אדם לחברו, ותלמוד תורה בנגד כלם.	Honoring of parents; doing acts of lovingkindness; arising early for learning, morning and evening; inviting guests; visiting the sick; helping a bride with what is needed for a wedding, celebrating joyfully; attending to the dead; focusing in prayer; and bringing peace between people –  and the study of Torah corresponds to all of these.

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## THINK

The sages of the Talmud describe in this passage what makes for a good family – honoring parents; what makes for a good life – doing acts of loving-kindness in all of our pursuits and engaging in learning; and what makes for a good community – attending to hosting and welcoming those on the outskirts, caring for those in need, celebrating joyful events, supporting people through loss, praying with intention, fostering forgiveness and peace among people. When have your experienced Torah study that corresponded or contributed to one or more of these?

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## CONNECT

The word *keneged*, rendered here as “corresponds to,” first appears in Torah referring to Adam: God states that it is not good for Adam to be alone, that the time has come to make Adam a corresponding helper.<sup>8</sup> What could our sages have meant by Torah being *keneged* all other behaviors listed? Perhaps they are telling us that this is also a checklist for the behaviors that studying Torah should foster. Maybe these behaviors can help hasten a transformation of a world that is coming.

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## REFLECT

What would you include on a checklist of what makes for a good family, a good life, and a good community?

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## PERSONAL PRAYER

Teach me to love and to make peace.

Let the sweetness of Your Torah remove the bitterness of my words.

Allow the light of Torah to expose the darkness in my secret places.

Give me the strength to live in Your image by honoring the needs of others, accepting their differences, and forgiving their shortcomings.

And as I advocate for the oppressed and abused and extend my heart and hand to the sick and hurting, let it be Torah, let it be You, the world sees.

— Dana Green Pina, Lake Worth, Florida

8 Genesis 2:18.