

The Dawn Blessings ברכות השחר

1. Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, Laws of Tefillah 1:1

מצות עשה להתפלל בכל יום שנאמר (שמות כג כה) "ועבדתם את ה' אלהיכם". מפי השמועה למדו שעבודה זו היא תפלה שנאמר (דברים יא יג) "וילעבדו בכל לבבכם" אמרו חכמים אי זו היא עבודה שבליב זו תפלה. ואין מנין התפלות מן התורה. ואין משנה התפלה הזאת מן התורה. ואין לתפלה זמן קבוע מן התורה...

אלא חיוב מצוה זו כף הוא שיהא אדם מתחנן ומתפלל בכל יום ומגיד שבחו של הקדוש ברוך הוא ואחר כך שואל צרכיו שהוא צריך להם בבקשה ובתחנון ואחר כך נותן שבח והודיה לה' על הטובה שהשפיע לו כל אחד לפי כחו:

It is a positive Torah commandment to pray every day, as [Exodus 23:25] states: "You shall serve God, your Lord." Tradition teaches us that this service is prayer, as [Deuteronomy 11:13] states: "And serve Him with all your heart" and our Sages said: Which is the service of the heart? This is prayer. The number of prayers is not prescribed in the Torah, nor does it prescribe a specific formula for prayer. Also, according to Torah law, there are no fixed times for prayers...

Rather, this commandment obligates each person to offer supplication and prayer every day and utter praises of the Holy One, blessed be He; then petition for all his needs with requests and supplications; and finally, give praise and thanks to God for the goodness that He has bestowed upon him; each one according to his own ability.

2. Siddur, Shacharit, Preparatory Prayers, Modeh Ani

מודה אני לפניך מלך חי וקים שהחזרת בי נשמתی בחמלה, רבה אמונתך:

I give thanks to You living and everlasting King for You have restored my soul with mercy. Great is Your faithfulness.

3. VaYikra Rabbah 9:7

רבי פנחס ורבי לוי ורבי יוחנן בשם רבי מנחם דגליא, לעתיד לבוא כל הקרבנות בטליו וקרבו תודה אינו בטל, כל התפלות בטלות, ההודאה אינה בטלה.

Rabbi Pinchas, Rabbi Levi and Rabbi Yochanan [said] in the name of Rabbi Menachem from Gallia: In the time to come, all sacrifices will be annulled - but the sacrifice of thanksgiving will not be annulled. All prayers will be annulled, but the prayer of gratitude will not be annulled.

4. R. Jonathan Sacks, *Letters to the Next Generation*, p.54

In *Birkot ha-shachar*, the Dawn Blessings, prayer opens our eyes to the wonders of the physical world. It trains us to give thanks for the sheer gift of being alive.

5. R. Jonathan Sacks, *Celebrating Life*, p.16

Making a blessing over life is the best way of turning life into a blessing.

6. E.E. Cummings, “i thank You God for most this amazing”

i thank You God for most this amazing
day: for the leaping greenly spirits of trees
and a blue true dream of sky; and for everything
which is natural which is infinite which is yes

(i who have died am alive again today,
and this is the sun's birthday; this is the birth
day of life and of love and wings: and of the gay
great happening illimitably earth)

how should tasting touching hearing seeing
breathing any—lifted from the no
of all nothing—human merely being
doubt unimaginable You?

(now the ears of my ears awake and
now the eyes of my eyes are opened)

This poem was originally published in [Xaipe](#)⁴ (New York: Oxford University Press, 1950), reissued in 2004 by Liveright, an imprint of W.W. Norton & Company.

7. R. Dov Zinger, *Prepare My Prayer: Recipes to Awaken the Soul*

We think that one who receives says thank you, but really the opposite is true: The one who says thank you is the true recipient. This person knows how to receive. When I say thank you, I first of all receive. I accept my reality. All that is happening to me. I know that I am all that I am, And I deserve nothing more. I accept the love, the plenty - Happy with what is. Everything that was up 'til now, everything that is right now – Nothing is to be taken for granted. And when, nevertheless, something is given to me, anything – I accept, I expand, I am filled, I give thanks Not only for what I've received, but also for the simple ability to give thanks.

8. Babylonian Talmud, Berakhot 60b

כִּי שָׁמַע קוֹל תְּרִנְגוּלָא, לֵימָא: "בְּרוּךְ ... אֲשֶׁר נָתַן לְשִׁכּוּי בִּינָה לְהַבְחִין בֵּין יוֹם וּבֵין לַיְלָה". כִּי פָתַח עֵינָיו, לֵימָא: "בְּרוּךְ ... פּוֹקֵחַ עֲוֹנִים". כִּי תָרִיץ וְנִתִּיב, לֵימָא: "בְּרוּךְ ... מַתִּיר אֲסוּרִים". כִּי לָבִישׁ, לֵימָא: "בְּרוּךְ ... מְלַבִּישׁ עַרְוֵמִים". כִּי זָקַף, לֵימָא: "בְּרוּךְ ... זוֹקֵף כְּפוּפִים". כִּי נָחִית לְאַרְעָא, לֵימָא: "בְּרוּךְ ... רוֹקֵעַ הָאָרֶץ עַל הַמַּיִם". כִּי מְסַגֵּי, לֵימָא: "בְּרוּךְ ... הַמְכִּין מְצַעְדֵי גְבֵר". כִּי סִיִּים מְסַאֲנִיה, לֵימָא: "בְּרוּךְ ... שֹׁעֵשֶׂה לִּי כָּל צָרָכִי". כִּי אָסַר הַמַּיִנִּיה, לֵימָא: "בְּרוּךְ ... אוֹזֵר יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּגִבּוֹרָה". כִּי פָרִיס סוּדְרָא עַל רִישֵׁיה, לֵימָא: "בְּרוּךְ ... עוֹטֵר יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּתַפְאָרָה".

Upon hearing the sound of the rooster, one should recite: Blessed...Who gave the heart (*sekhvi*) understanding to distinguish between day and night.

Upon opening his eyes, one should recite: Blessed...Who gives sight to the blind.

Upon sitting up straight, one should recite: Blessed...Who sets captives free.

Upon dressing, one should recite: Blessed...Who clothes the naked [as they would sleep unclothed.]

Upon standing up straight, one should recite: Blessed...Who raises those bowed down.

Upon descending [from one's bed] to the ground, one should recite: Blessed...Who spreads the earth above the waters [in thanksgiving for the creation of solid ground upon which to walk.]

Upon walking, one should recite: Blessed...Who makes firm the steps of man.

Upon putting on his shoes, one should recite: Blessed...Who has provided me with all I need [as shoes are a basic necessity.]

Upon putting on his belt, one should recite: Blessed...Who girds Israel with strength.

Upon spreading a shawl upon his head, one should recite: Blessed...Who crowns Israel with glory.

9. Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, Prayer and the Priestly Blessing, 7:7-9

שְׁמוֹנֵה עֶשְׂרֵה בְּרָכוֹת אֵלוּ אֵין לָהֶם סֵדֵר אֶלָּא מְבָרֵךְ כָּל אַחַת מֵהֶן עַל דְּבַר שֶׁהַבְּרָכָה
בְּשִׁבְלוֹ בְּשַׁעֲתוֹ. כִּי־צַד. הֵרִי שֶׁחָגַר חֲגוּרוֹ וְהוּא עַל מִטְתּוֹ מְבָרֵךְ אוֹזֵר יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּגָבוּרָה. שָׁמַע
קוֹל הַתְּרַנְגוֹל מְבָרֵךְ הַנּוֹתֵן לְשִׁכְוֵי בִינָה. וְכָל בְּרָכָה מֵהֶן שְׁלֵא נִתְחַיֵּב בָּהּ אֵינוֹ מְבָרֵךְ אוֹתָהּ:
כִּי־צַד. לֵן בְּכִסּוּתוֹ אֵינוֹ מְבָרֵךְ כְּשֶׁעוֹמֵד מִלְּבִישׁ עֲרוּמִים. הֵלֵךְ יַחֲף אֵינוֹ מְבָרֵךְ שֶׁשְׁשִׁית לִי כָּל
צְרָכֵי...
נְהַגוּ הָעָם בְּרַב עֲרִינוֹ לְבָרֵךְ בְּרָכוֹת אֵלוּ זוֹ אַחַר זוֹ בְּבֵית הַכְּנֶסֶת בֵּין נִתְחַיְבוּ בָּהֶן בֵּין לֹא
נִתְחַיְבוּ בָּהֶן. וְטַעוּת הוּא וְאֵין רְאוּי לַעֲשׂוֹת כֵּן וְלֹא יְבָרֵךְ בְּרָכָה אֶלָּא אִם כֵּן נִתְחַיֵּב בָּהּ:

These eighteen blessings do not have a particular order. Rather, one recites each of them in response to the condition for which the blessing was instituted, at the appropriate time. What is implied? One who fastens his belt while still in his bed recites [the blessing] "who girds Israel with strength." One who hears the voice of the rooster recites [the blessing] "who gives understanding to the rooster." Any blessing in which one is not obligated should not be recited. What is implied? One who sleeps in his outer garment should not recite the blessing "who clothes the naked" upon rising. One who walks barefoot does not recite the blessing, "for You have provided me with all my needs"...

It is the custom of the people in the majority of our cities to recite these blessings one after another in the synagogue, whether or not they are obligated in them. This is a mistake and it is not proper to follow this practice. One should not recite a blessing unless he is obligated to.

10. R. Yosef Karo, Shulchan Arukh, Orach Chayim 46:8

כָּל הַבְּרָכוֹת הָאֵלוּ אִם לֹא נִתְחַיֵּב בְּאַחַת מֵהֶן כְּגוֹן שֶׁלֹּא שָׁמַע קוֹל הַתְּרַנְגוֹל אוֹ שֶׁלֹּא הֵלֵךְ
אוֹ לֹא לָבַשׁ אוֹ לֹא חָגַר אוֹמֵר אוֹת' בְּרָכָה בְּלֹא הַזְכָּרַת הַשֵּׁם: הִגֵּה וּ"א דַּאֲפִי' לֹא נִתְחַיֵּב
בְּהֵן מְבָרֵךְ אוֹתֵן דַּאֲפִי הַבְּרָכָה דּוֹקָא עַל עֲצָמוֹ אֶלָּא מְבָרֵכִין שֶׁהַקָּב"ה בְּרַא צְרָכֵי הָעוֹלָם. וְכֵן
הַמְנַהֵג וְאֵין לְשַׁנּוֹת.

All of these blessings, if one is not obligated in one of them - for example that one did not hear the sound of the rooster or that one did not go out or he did not get dressed or did not put on a belt - one says that blessing, but does not mention the Name. *Gloss (Rema): and there are those who say that even though one is not obligated in them, one blesses them [all], in that the blessing is not just about oneself, but rather we bless that the Holy One Blessed be He created [for] the needs of the world, and so is the practice, and we do not change [it].*

11. Eli Taragin and Michael Rubenstein, *Tefillah Ke-Mifgash* (Prayer as Encounter)

נִצִּיעַ בִּיטוּי טַבְעִי לִיְסוּד זֶה; בְּזִמְנֵן אֲמִירַת כָּל בְּרָכָה וּבְרָכָה בְּבֵית הַכְּנֶסֶת, נִשְׁחַזֵּר אֶת
תְּהִלַּת הַקִּיָּמָה בְּבוֹקֵר, כִּי שְׁבִאֲמִירַת הַשְּׁבַח הַכִּלְלִי שֶׁל "פּוֹקַח עִיּוּרִים" עַל הָעוֹלָם כּוֹלוֹ,

ניזכר בפתיחת עינינו בבוקר ונודה על כך להקב"ה -- כך תשחזר ההודאה על הנאותינו
ההשבח על העולם כולו יקבל משמעות מלאה בחיים.

We suggest a natural expression of this idea: When the person says each of these blessings in the synagogue, the person should remember the process of waking up the morning, such that when he says the general words of praise: "Who gives sight to the blind" regarding the entire world, we are reminded of opening our eyes in the morning and thank God for this. In this way, you should recreate giving thanks for what we enjoyed, and the words of praise regarding the entire world will be filled with life.

12. R. Yeshayahu Leibowitz, *Of Prayer*

Prayer as shaped in the prayerbook, is an entirely different matter. It is obligatory and fixed. Consider what these two properties imply. As obligatory, it is not what a person desires but what is demanded of him; not prayer initiated by him, but one imposed on him. As fixed, it does not vary with the changing circumstances or states, objective or subjective, in which the praying individual finds himself. Hence it does not reflect the state of mind or situation of the praying person. Such a prayer is not intended to satisfy a need...

The grandeur and power of prayer, prayer that is mandatory and fixed by Halakha, lie precisely in setting aside all of man's interests and motives out of awareness of man's position before God, a position which is always the same regardless of any personal circumstances. Man relinquishes his own will in the recognition of the duty of worship. The same set of eighteen benedictions is required of the bridegroom as of the widower returning from his wife's funeral. *The same series of psalms is recited by one enjoying the world and one whose world has collapsed.* The identical supplications are required of those who feel the need for them and those who do not.

13. R. Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *Raayonot al HaTefillah*, p. 244

Prayer is a vital need for the religious individual. He cannot stop the thoughts and emotions, deliberations and troubles which surge through the depths of his soul, his hopes and aspirations, his despair and bitterness – in short: the great wealth that is concealed in his religious consciousness. It is impossible to halt the liturgical outpouring [of these feelings]. Prayer is essential. Fresh, vibrant religious feeling cannot exist without it. In other words, prayer is justified by virtue of the fact that it is impossible to exist without it.

14. Babylonian Talmud, Yoma 69b

למה נקרא שְׁמֵן אֲנָשֵׁי כְּנֶסֶת הַגְּדוּלָה — שֶׁחֲזָרוּ עֲטָרָה לְיוֹשְׁנָה. אֶתָּא מִשָּׁה, אָמַר: "הָאֵל הַגְּדוֹל הַגָּבוֹר וְהַנּוֹרָא". אֶתָּא יְרֵמְיָה וְאָמַר: גּוֹיִם מְקַרְקְרִין בְּהִיכְלוֹ, אֵינָה נּוֹרְאוֹתָיו? לֹא אָמַר "נוֹרָא". אֶתָּא דְנִינְאֵל אָמַר: גּוֹיִם מְשַׁתְּעָבְדִים בְּכַנּוּי, אֵינָה גְבוּרוֹתָיו? לֹא אָמַר "גָּבוֹר". אֶתּוֹ אֵינְהוּ וְאָמְרוּ: אֶדְרָבָה, זֶה הוּא (גְבוּרָת) גְבוּרָתוֹ: שְׁכוּבֵשׁ אֶת יָצְרוֹ — שְׁנוֹתָן אַרְבָּע אַפְּסִים לְרַשָּׁעִים. וְאֵלוֹ הֵן נּוֹרְאוֹתָיו — שְׁאֵלְמָלֵא מוֹרְאוֹ שֶׁל הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא הֵיאֵד אֹמְרָה אַחַת יְכוּלָה לְהַתְקַיֵּים בֵּין הָאוֹמוֹת? וְרַבְּנָן: הֵיכִי עֲבָדֵי הַכִּי וְעִקְרֵי תַקְנֵי מִשָּׁה? אָמַר רַבִּי אֶלְעָזָר: מִתּוֹךְ שִׁידוּעֵין בְּהַקְדוּשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא שְׁאֵמְתֵי הוּא, לְפִיכָךְ לֹא כִיָּזְבוּ בּוֹ.

Rebbi Yehoshua ben Levi said, "Why were they called the Men of the great assembly? Because they restored The Crown to its original greatness. Moshe came and said, the Lord who is great, mighty, and awesome... ([Devarim 10:17](#)) Jeremiah came and said, 'Non-Jews are dancing in the Temple, where is God's awe?' He did not say awesome. ([Jeremiah 32:18](#)). Daniel came and said,

‘Non-Jews are persecuting His children, where is God’s might?’ He did not say mighty. ([Daniel 9:4](#)) They (the men of the great assembly) came and said, ‘You should view it from the opposite direction. This is the might-of-God’s-might, for He conquers his desire by granting forgiveness to the evil-ones. And this is the source of God’s awe, were it not for the awesome nature of the Holy Blessed One how could the one tiny nation survive among all the nations?’ And these Rabbis (Jeremiah and Daniel) how could they have done this and uprooted an enactment of Moshe? Rebbi Elazar said, “Because they know that the Holy Blessed One is a God of truth, they could not falsely flatter Him.”