

קריאת שמע וברכותיה Shema and Its Blessings II: Love of God

1. Ahava Rabba, Blessings Before Shema, Siddur

אֱהָבָה רַבָּה אֲהַבְתֵּנוּ יְקוּק אֱלֹהֵינוּ חֲמֵלָה גְדוּלָה וַיִּתְּרָה חֲמֵלָתְ עָלֵינוּ: אָבִינוּ מְלַכְנוּ בְּעֵבֹר אַבּוֹתֵינוּ שִׁבְטֵיחֹו בָּהּ וְהַלְמָדִים חֲקֵי חַיִּים כֵּן תִּחַנְנוּ וְתִלְוְדֵנוּ: אָבִינוּ הָאֵב הַרְחֵמֵן הַמְּרַחֵם רַחֵם עָלֵינוּ וְתֵן בְּלַבְנוּ לְהַבִּין וְלְהַשְׁכִּיל לְשִׁמְעַ לְלַמֵּד וְלִלְמַד לְשָׁמֵר וְלַעֲשׂוֹת וְלִקְנִים אֶת־כָּל־דְּבָרֵי תִלְמוּד תּוֹרָתְךָ בְּאֱהָבָה: וְהָאֵר עֵינֵינוּ בְּתוֹרָתְךָ וְדַבֵּק לַבְּנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתֶיךָ וַיַּחַד לְבַבְנוּ לְאֱהָבָה וְלִירְאָה אֶת־שְׁמֶךָ: וְלֹא גִבוּשׁ לְעוֹלָם וְעַד כִּי בָשִׁם קִדְשֶׁךָ הַגָּדוֹל וְהַנּוֹרָא בְּטַחְנוּ נִגְיָלָה וְנִשְׁמָחָה בִּישׁוּעָתְךָ: וְהִבִּיאֵנוּ לְשָׁלוֹם מֵאַרְבַּע כַּנְפוֹת הָאָרֶץ וְתוֹלִיכְנוּ קוֹמָמִיּוֹת לְאַרְצֵנוּ: כִּי אֵל פּוֹעֵל יִשׁוּעוֹת אֲתָה וּבְנוּ בְּחַרְתָּ מִכָּל־עַם וְלִשׁוֹן. וְקִרְבָּתְנוּ לְשִׁמְךָ הַגָּדוֹל סְלָה בְּאַמַּת לְהוֹדוֹת לָךְ וְלִיחֻדְךָ בְּאֱהָבָה: בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְקוּק הַבּוֹחֵר בְּעַמּוֹ יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּאֱהָבָה:

[With] unbounded love You have loved us Hashem, our God; [With] great and abundant pity have You pitied us. Our Father, our King! for the sake of our forefathers who trusted in You, and whom You taught statutes of life, so too, be gracious to us and teach us. Our Father, merciful Father, Who acts with compassion have compassion on us and put into our hearts to comprehend, and to be intellectually creative, to listen, to learn, and to teach, to preserve, to practice, and to fulfill all the words of instruction in Your Torah with love. And enlighten our eyes in Your Torah, and cause our hearts to hold fast to Your commandments, and unify our hearts to love and fear Your Name; and may we never be put to shame, for in Your holy, great, and awesome Name— have we trusted; may we exult and rejoice in Your deliverance. And bring us to peace from the four corners of the earth and lead us upright to our land. Because, You are the Almighty, Who performs acts of deliverance, and You have chosen us from among all peoples and tongues, and You have brought us close to Your great Name, forever in truth; that we may give thanks to You, and proclaim Your Oneness, with love. Blessed are You, Hashem, Who chooses His people Yisrael with love.

2. Chiddushei ha-Ramban, [Berachot 11b](#)

הדבר ידוע שאהבת עולם ברכת המצוה היא לקריאת שמע. שכל המצות כולן טעונות הן ברכה עובר לעשייתן. וכן בהלל וכן במגלה וכן בקריאת התורה... זהו שאמרנו [ברכות יא:]בהשכים אחר שקרא א"צ לברך שכבר נפטר באהבה רבה. דברכת שנון תורה היא...

The matter is known that Ahavat Olam is a blessing on the *mitzvah* of the Shema. For all *mitzvot* require a blessing before they are done. And so too is the case with Megilla and Torah reading... And this is what we said ([Berachot 11b](#)): If you rose early and recited [Shema and its blessings], you no longer need to recite *birkot ha-Torah* (the blessings over learning Torah) because you have fulfilled your obligation [of *birkot ha-Torah*] with Ahava Rabba. Because it is considered a blessing on [intense] Torah learning.

3. Responsa of the Rashba, Volume 1, Siman 319

הקורא קריאת שמע בלא ברכותיה יצא... ומיהו מסתברא שחוזר ואומר ברכות ובפני עצמן בלא קריאת שמע שכבר יצא.

ואף על פי שברכות לפני קריאתה נתקנו לאו ברכות של ק"ש כדי שתאמר היאך יברך שלא על הקריאה... שהרי אינו מברך אשר קדשנו וצונו לקרא את שמע... ולפיכך אף על פי שיצא ידי קריאה ידי ברכות לא יצא. וחוזר הוא וקורא ברכות בפני עצמן.

4. Birkot Kriat Shema - Yotzer Or: Renewal of Creation

Birkot Kriat Shema - Yotzer Or: Renewal of Creation

One who recites the Shema without its attendant blessings has fulfilled their obligation because "the blessings do not stand in the way [of the Shema]"... Nevertheless, it makes sense that [after having recited the Shema without blessings] you should go back and say the blessings by themselves, without the Shema that you have already fulfilled.

And even though these blessings have been established before the reading of the Shema, they are not blessings of the Shema, such that you might ask how can you recite these blessings without saying the Shema... For behold we do not say a blessing "that we have been made holy and commanded to read the Shema." And therefore, even though you may have fulfilled your obligation to read [the Shema] you have not fulfilled the obligation to recite the blessings. And you must go back and recite the blessings on their own.

4. R. Ezra Bick, Ahava Rabba: Love through Torah

Ahava Rabba: Love through Torah

God is king over nature, as expressed in natural law, and God is king over Israel, as expressed in Torah law. Once again, however, this is not referring to some historical fact – the giving of the Torah at Sinai four thousand years ago – nor to the *mitzvah* to learn Torah, but to the ongoing dynamic experience of God's presence and relationship with us in the Torah. In other words, it refers to the relationship of chosenness and love with God, a relationship that we experience "every day always" through the experience of Torah. The relationship with Torah **is** the love of God, experienced daily... This explains the fact that the blessing does not dwell on the giving of the Torah, but on our obligation and willingness to learn Torah...

Understanding this, we should immediately be struck by how close this blessing is woven into the fabric of the *shema*. The *shema* opens with the declaration of the kingdom of God and follows directly with the command to "love God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your might." That is followed by the commands of learning Torah and placing the words of Torah as signs on our bodies and doors. The blessing is based exactly on these elements. God is king, and we are chosen to be His people. We are commanded to love Him, and He expresses His love for us eternally. The Torah is to be with us at all times, and we are given the Torah by God and yearn to learn and fulfill it. The blessing is the Divine parallel to the human commands of the *shema*.

5. Shema, Siddur

וְאֶהְבֶּתָּ אֶת יְיָ אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכָל-לְבָבְךָ וּבְכָל-נַפְשְׁךָ וּבְכָל-מְאֹדְךָ: וְהָיוּ הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי מְצַוְּךָ הַיּוֹם עַל-לְבָבְךָ: וְשָׁנַנְתָּם לְבְנֶיךָ וְדַבַּרְתָּ בָם בְּשִׁבְתְּךָ בְּבֵיתְךָ וּבְלֶקְתְּךָ בְּדַרְךָ וּבְשֹׁכְבְּךָ וּבְקוּמְךָ: וְקִשְׂרָתָם לְאוֹת עַל-יְדֶיךָ וְהָיוּ לְטֹטְפֹת בֵּין עֵינֶיךָ: וְכַתַּבְתָּם עַל-מְזוּזֹת בֵּיתְךָ וּבְשַׁעְרֶיךָ: וְהָיָה אִם-שָׁמַעַתְּ שְׁמֵעוּ אֶל-מִצְוֹתַי אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי מְצַוֶּה אֶתְכֶם הַיּוֹם לְאֵהָבָה אֶת-יְיָ אֱלֹהֵיכֶם וּלְעַבְדוֹ בְּכָל-לְבַבְכֶם וּבְכָל-נַפְשְׁכֶם:

And you shall love Hashem your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words which I command you today, shall be upon your heart. And you shall teach them diligently to your children. And you shall discuss them when you sit in your house, and when you travel on the road, and when you lie down and when you rise. And you shall bind them for a sign upon your hand, and they shall be for *totafot* (bands) between your eyes. And you shall write them upon the doorposts of your house and upon your gateways.

And it will be— if you vigilantly obey My commandments which I command you this day, to love Hashem your God, and serve Him with your entire hearts and with your entire souls...

6. Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, *Likutei Amarim, Tanya, Chapter 46*

“As in water, face to face, so is the heart of man to man” (Proverbs 27:19). The same identical face which a person presents to the water is reflected back to him from the water. So indeed the love of a person for another is reflected back to him. For this love awakens a loving response in the heart of another, cementing their mutual love and loyalty for each other, especially as each sees his friend’s love for him.

7. R. Aryeh Ben David, *The Godfile, p.53-54*

This approach to prayer invites you to discover and express the love that you are capable of giving. It provides you with an opportunity to focus on the love that God bestows upon everyone, and, like a face looking into water, this should naturally evoke a similar response of love from within.

As you learn to tap into the source of love inside you, and express love and gratitude to God, the wellspring of love within you will slowly reveal itself and will spill over onto all of your relationships...

Just as you verbally express your feelings of love in the context of prayer, you should also articulate to your spouse, friend, or family member the love you have in your heart... Articulating your love in this way will have a positive effect on both you and the person who is the recipient of the love, the lover and the beloved. People are often quick to verbalize what is going wrong in a relationship, but are slow to focus on its positive elements. Affirming the relationship, through ongoing verbal expressions of love and caring, will remind you of the broader context of your relationship, and will prevent “the bad stuff” from obscuring its positive aspects.

What is the result of tapping into your deep capacity to love and then conveying this love to others? A natural spiral of love ensues. The more love that you display to others, the more they will display to you. “So indeed the love of a person for another is reflected back.”

8. Sifrei Deuteronomy 33

והיו הדברים האלה אשר אנכי מצוך היום על לבבך, רבי אומר למה נאמר, לפי שנאמר ואהבת את ה' אלקיך בכל לבבך, איני יודע כיצד אוהבים את המקום תלמוד לומר והיו הדברים האלה אשר אנכי מצוך היום על לבבך, תן הדברים האלה על לבך שמתוך כך אתה מכיר את מי שאמר והיה העולם ומדבק בדרכיו.

"And these things that I command you this day shall be upon your heart:" Rabbi said: Why is it said? From "And you shall love Hashem your G-d with all your heart," I do not know how to love the Holy One Blessed be He; it is, therefore written "And these things that I command you this day shall be upon your heart." For in this way you come to recognize the Holy One Blessed be He and to cleave to His ways.

9. R. Lisa Schlaff, *How to Love God: Shema as a User's Manual*

Interestingly, this is the first time the notion of loving God appears in the Torah. To the desert Jew who knew of God through the splitting of the sea, the thunder and lightning of matan Torah, mass plague, and bread falling from the sky, this was a shocking statement. "You must fear God" — yes. "You must be in awe of God" — certainly. "You must love God" would have been an incomprehensible command.

And so, as Bible professor Jeffrey Tigay suggests, the first paragraph of shema makes it clear that loving God is not an abstract emotion, but is grounded in the concrete observance of mitzvot. The commandment to take the mitzvot to heart — והיו הדברים האלה אשר אנכי מצווך היום על לבבך — can be read as a direct explication of what it means to love God. Building upon this idea, it is possible to read the entire first paragraph of shema as a user's manual for how to love God...

The command to love God is no longer amorphous or jarring; it is grounded in very concrete action items. We express love to our children not only by saying "I love you" but by sitting on the floor and playing puzzles with them. We express love to our parents not only by saying "I love you" but by doing the food shopping when needed. And to God, we might not say "I love you" at all, but we fill our lives with daily ritual — everywhere and all the time — that is a powerful expression of love... may we find comfort in our own constant and repetitive expression of this love.

10. R. Avi Weiss, *Holistic Prayer*, p.20

וּלְעַבְדוֹ בְּכָל-לִבְבְּכֶם – *le-ovdo bekbhol levavkhem* (Deuteronomy 11:13). *Le* is the prefix "to." *Ovdo* is associated with *avoda*, work. And while *le-ovdo* is commonly viewed as a compound of *la-avod Oto*, "to serve Him," it can also mean *la'avod Ito*, "to work with Him." This does not undercut the standard translation of *le-ovdo bekbhol levavkhem* — "to serve Him with all your heart." Rather, it indicates that if prayer is deeply sincere, serving God can be transformed into a prayerful commitment to work with Him (*la-avod Oto* meshes with *la-avod Ito*). We do this in prayer by committing ourselves wholeheartedly (*bekbhol levavkhem*) to establishing a world that follows "the way of the Lord, by doing what is just and right" (Genesis 18:19).

11. Hosea 2:18

וְהָיָה בְיוֹם-הַהוּא נְאֻם-יְקֹנֶה תִקְרָא אִישׁי וְלֹא-תִקְרָאֵי לִי עוֹד בְּעָלַי:

And in that day
—declares GOD —

You will call [Me] Ishi (spouse/partner),
And no more will you call Me Ba'ali (husband/master).

12. Go'el Yisrael, Blessing After Shema, Siddur

אַמֶּת אַתָּה הוּא רִאשׁוֹן וְאַתָּה הוּא אַחֲרוֹן וּמְבַלְעֵדֶיךָ אֵין לָנוּ מֶלֶךְ גּוֹאֵל וּמוֹשִׁיעַ: מִמִּצְרַיִם גְּאֻלְתָּנוּ
יְקוּם אֱלֹהֵינוּ וּמִבֵּית עֲבָדִים פְּדִיתָנוּ: כָּל־בְּכוֹרֵיהֶם הִרְגָתָּ וּבְכוֹרְךָ גְּאֻלְתָּ וַיִּמְסוּךָ בְּקַעֲתָ וְזָדִים טִבַּעְתָּ
וַיִּדְיִם הִעֲבַרְתָּ וַיִּכְסוּ־מַיִם צָרִיְהֶם אַחַד מֵהֶם לֹא נוֹתַר: עַל־זֹאת שִׁבְחוּ אֱהוּבִים וְרוֹמְמוּ קֹל וְנִתְּנוּ
יְדִידִים זְמִירוֹת שִׁירוֹת וְתִשְׁבַּחֹת בְּרִכּוֹת וְהוֹדָאוֹת לְמֶלֶךְ קֹל חַי וְקַיִם: רָם וְנִשְׂא גְדוֹל וְנוֹרָא מְשֻׁפֵּיל
גֵּאִים וּמְגַבִּיָּה שְׁפֵלִים מוֹצִיא אֲסִירִים וּפּוֹדֶה עֲנָוִים וְעוֹזֵר דְּלִים וְעוֹנֶה לְעַמּוֹ בְּעֵת שִׁוְעֵם אֱלֹהֵינוּ:

Truly, You are First and You are Last, and we have no king, redeemer, or deliverer besides You. You redeemed us from Egypt. Hashem, our God, You liberated us from the house of bondage. You slew all their firstborn, and You redeemed Your firstborn, You split the Sea of Reeds, and You drowned the wicked. You caused the beloved ones to pass through, while the waters covered their enemies; not one of them remained. Because of this, the beloved ones praised and exalted the Almighty; and the beloved ones offered hymns, songs, and praises, blessings and thanksgiving to the King, the Almighty, [Who is] living and enduring. (He is) exalted and uplifted, great and awesome; He humbles the haughty and raises the lowly. He frees the captives and redeems the humble, helps the impoverished, and He answers His people when they cry out to Him.

13. R. Ezra Bick, Geula: Response to God's Majesty

<https://etzion.org.il/en/halakha/orach-chaim/prayer-and-blessings/geula-response-gods-majesty>

I can experience the presence of God in creation through the dynamic flux of ever-changing nature. I can experience the love of the giving of the Torah through my own daily Torah learning. But how do I experience the power of the redemption of Egypt in these times, a period of exile and *hester panim* [God hiding His face]? In fact, is it at all true to say that God redeems us now in the present as He did four thousand years ago?

...*Geula* [redemption], unlike creation and Torah, cannot serve as a precursor to the acceptance of the yoke of heaven. Our normal experience of *geula* in this world of exile is not clear enough nor strong enough to lead one to accept upon himself the kingdom of God. On the contrary, it is the acceptance and recognition of the kingdom of heaven that leads to the experience of *geula*...

Because we have accepted You as King, as God, and as truth, and hence it must be true even though it is indeed hard to see it with our natural eyes. Looking through the spectacles of faith (*emuna*), through the prism of fealty to the King, we indeed experience the redeeming power of God...

14. Go'el Yisrael, Blessing After Shema, Siddur

צוּר יִשְׂרָאֵל קוֹמָה בְּעֶזְרַת יִשְׂרָאֵל וּפְדָה כְּנַאֲמָךְ יְהוּדָה וְיִשְׂרָאֵל, גְּאֻלְנוּ יְקוּם צְבָאוֹת שְׁמוֹ קְדוֹשׁ
יִשְׂרָאֵל: בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְקוּם גּוֹאֵל יִשְׂרָאֵל:

Rock of Israel, arise to the aid of Israel, and liberate Judah and Israel as You promised. Our Redeemer— ‘Hashem of hosts’ is His Name, the Holy One of Israel Blessed are You, Hashem, Who redeemed Israel.

15. R. Avi Weiss, *Holistic Prayer*, p.22 and p.31

Redemption can be achieved only through a joint effort between God and humankind. In creating the world, God intentionally left it incomplete. One can give different rationales for this. Had God created a world of only good, there would be no good, as good is a relative term. Had God created a perfect world, we would be left with no challenges to overcome. Had God created a world where we could only do the right thing, we would be bereft of our freedom of choice, and hence, not be human. Thus, the last word of the creation story in Genesis is *la'asot* – “to do” (Genesis 2:3). God is, in effect, telling us, “I have created the world imperfectly, and I leave it to you to finish what I have started. In partnership, we will redeem the world.”

... As much as we seek God in prayer, God, through prayer, seeks us, encouraging us to partner with Him in redeeming Israel and the world.

16. Babylonian Talmud, Berakhot 9b

העיד רבי יוסי בן אלקימם משום קהלא קדישא דבירושלים: כל הסומך גאולה לתפלה אינו נזוק כל היום כולו.

Rabbi Yosei ben Elyakim testified in the name of the holy community in Jerusalem that one who juxtaposes redemption and prayer will incur no harm for the entire day.

17. Jerusalem Talmud, Berakhot 1:1

אמר רבי אמי פלמי שאינו תוקף לגאולה תפילה למה הוא דומה. לאזהבו של מלך שפא והרחיק על פתחו של מלך. יצא לידע מה הוא מבקש ומצאו שהפליג עוד הוא הפליג.

Rebbi Immi said: Anyone who does not immediately pray after mentioning redemption, whom is he to be likened to? To a lover of the king who comes from afar to the king's door. When the king comes to see what he wants, he finds that the person left. Hence, the king also leaves.

18. Song of Songs, 5:2-6

אני ישנה ולבי ער קול | דודי דופק פתחי-לי אחתי רעיתי יונתי תמתי שראשי נמלא-טל קנצותי רסיסי לילה: פשטתי את-כתנתי איככה אלבשנה רחצתי את-רגלי איככה אטנפם: דודי שלח ידו מן-החור ומעי המו עליו: קמתי אני לפתח לדודי ונתי גטפוי-מור ואצבעתי מור עבר על כפות המנעול: פתחתי אני לדודי ודודי חמק עבר נפשי יצאה בדברו בקשתיהו ולא מצאתיהו קראתיו ולא ענני:

I was asleep,
But my heart was wakeful.
Hark, my beloved knocks!
“Let me in, my own,
My darling, my faultless dove!
For my head is drenched with dew,
My locks with the damp of night.”

I had taken off my robe—
Was I to don it again?
I had bathed my feet—
Was I to soil them again?
My beloved took his hand off the latch,
And my heart was stirred for him.
I rose to let in my beloved;
My hands dripped myrrh—
My fingers, flowing myrrh—
Upon the handles of the bolt.
I opened the door for my beloved,
But my beloved had turned and gone.
I was faint because of what he said.
I sought, but found him not;
I called, but he did not answer.

19. R. Jeff Fox, Introduction to Shema and its Berachot (4)

I believe that we are living in a generation that wants the lover-beloved imagery but still needs the king-servant reminder...

Halakha rests on the foundation of a divine Commander and human beings who are commanded.