

Morning and Night

Modeh Ani

Traditionally, Jews begin each day with Modeh Ani, a short, two-line prayer which opens by referring to God as the eternal and living king. The prayer speaks of sleeping as a minor type of death in which the soul leaves the body to spend the night with God. The prayer thanks God for returning the soul to the body, enabling the individual to live another day. Because of its simplicity, *Modeh Ani* has become a favorite prayer for small children.

מוֹדָה (מוֹדָה) אֲנִי לְפָנֶיךָ מֶלֶךְ חַי וְקַיִם. שְׁהֶחֱזַרְתָּ בִּי נִשְׁמָתִי בְּחַמְלָה. רַבָּה אֱמוּנָתֶךָ

Modeh (modah) ani l'fanecha melech chai v'kayam. Shehechezarta bi nishmati b'chemla. Raba emunatecha

I offer thanks before you, living and eternal Ruler, for You have mercifully restored my soul within me; Your faithfulness is great.

Morning Blessings

Jewish law mandates that one pray three times a day, in the morning, afternoon, and at night. The morning service, Shacharit, formally begins with the Pesukei D'zimrah (verses of praise) section, but before that there are several preliminary prayers and blessings to thank God for providing us with our daily needs and for performing everyday miracles. Originally it was created as a personal meditation at home, but today it is part of the synagogue's service. The following are the main prayers in our siddur. In other siddurim you can find additional text like a few Torah readings.

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After washing, a blessing is traditionally made, followed by a recitation of verses praising God's name. Although modern denominations have adapted different sets of prayers, most versions start with a line from Psalms 111, "Fear (meaning reverential awe) of God is the beginning of wisdom" (111:10), reminding the newly-awakened Jew of the importance of God.

The blessings over Torah study constitute the next major section of the morning prayers. These blessings thank God for giving the Torah to the Jewish people. An additional blessing asks that God help all of Israel to study Torah for its own sake.

Next up is a Mishnah (Peah 1:1) that recounts a group of commandments that are perennial and limitless, namely charity, acts of kindness, and Torah study. This section of prayer ends with a quote from the Talmud (Shabbat 127a) that lists commandments for which one is rewarded both in this world and the world to come. These include honoring parents, acts of kindness, spending time in Jewish institutions, and again, studying Torah.

At this point in the service, many traditional congregations begin praying together, starting with Birkhot Hashachar, a list of blessings thanking God for fulfilling our basic needs. These blessings praise God for giving intelligence and understanding and providing a world in which to live. We thank God for creating us as human beings and as Jews, and for the simple things in life, such as our senses, our bodies, and our freedom. Furthermore, we testify that God looks over the Jewish people, "provides Israel with strength," and "crowns Israel with glory."

The last passage in this section is a talmudic source that explains the 13 interpretive principles that Rabbi Ishmael used to explain the verses of the Bible. Traditional congregations end with a short prayer for the rebuilding of the Temple, and with that, the first major part of Shacharit, the Pesukei D'zimrah, is ready to begin.

The Bed-Time Shema

We say Shema twice each day. First as part of Shacharit and last we say the Shema before going to bed. It is recited as a protection and so that we go to sleep with words of Torah on our lips. Night was considered a time of vulnerability, when one's soul returned to God. In attempting to understand the motivation for saying the Shema at this time, Rav Yitzchak asserts, "If one recites the Shema before bed, demons are kept away from him" (Berakhot 5a). The bedtime prayers are structured around the *Shema* which many Jews believe will protect them for the afterlife if they unexpectedly die while sleeping. Other prayers include Psalm 91 and Psalm 3. The final piece of the bedtime Shema contains a series of biblical verses that plead for God's blessing and protection. Most notable is Jacob's blessing to his grandsons Ephraim and Menasheh, "May the angel who has redeemed me from harm, bless these boys. May they carry on my name and thus name of my ancestors, Abraham and Isaac. May they spread far and wide upon the earth" (Genesis 48:16).

שְׁמַעִי שְׂרָאֵל יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְיָ אֶחָד.

וְאֶהְבֶּתָּ אֹת יְיָ אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכָל לִבְבְּךָ וּבְכָל נַפְשְׁךָ וּבְכָל מְאֹדְךָ. וְהָיוּ הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי
מְצַוְךָ הַיּוֹם עַל לִבְבְּךָ. וְשָׁנַנְתָּם לְבָנֶיךָ וְדַבַּרְתָּ בָם בְּשִׁבְתְּךָ בְּבֵיתְךָ וּבְלִכְתְּךָ בַּדֶּרֶךְ וּבְשֹׁכְבְּךָ
וּבְקוּמְךָ. וְקִשְׂרָתָם לְאוֹת עַל יָדְךָ וְהָיוּ לְטֹטְפֹת בֵּין עֵינֶיךָ. וְכִתְבָתָם עַל מְזוֹזֹת בֵּיתְךָ וּבְשַׁעְרֶיךָ.

Sh'ma Yis-ra-eil, A-do-nai E-lo-hei-nu, A-do-nai E-chad.

V'ahavta eit Adonai Elohecha, b'choll'vav'cha, uv'cholnafsh'cha, uv'cholm'odecha. V'hayu had'varim haeileh, Asher anochi m'tsav'cha hayom, all'vavecha. V'shinantam l'vanecha, v'dibarta bam b'shivt'cha b'veitecha, uvlecht'cha vaderech, uv'shochb'cha uvkumecha. Ukshartam l'ot alyadecha, v'hayu l'totafot bein einecha. Uchtavtam, alm'zuzot beitecha, uvisharecha.

Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. Take to heart these instructions with which I charge you this day. Impress them upon your children. Recite them when you stay at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you get up. Bind them as a sign on your hand and let them serve as a symbol on your forehead; inscribe them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.