

Miller Introduction to Judaism Program  
American Jewish University

CLASS #6

# When Do I Bow?

## And Other Questions about Jewish Prayer



“To pray is to take notice of the wonder, to regain a sense of the mystery that animates all beings, the divine margin in all attachments. Prayer is our humble answer to the inconceivable surprise of living.”

-Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel

# Keva

There is a story, told by Rabbi Israel Friedman, the Rizhiner Rebbe, about a small Jewish town, far off from the main roads of the land, But it had all the necessary municipal institutions: A bath-house, a cemetery, a hospital, and law court; as well as all sorts of craftsmen -- tailors, shoemakers, carpenters, and masons. One trade, however, was lacking: there was no watchmaker. In the course of years, many of the clocks became so annoyingly inaccurate that their owners just decided to let them run down, and ignore them altogether. There were others, however, who maintained that as long as the clocks ran, they should not be abandoned. So they wound their clocks day after day though they knew that they were not accurate. One day the news spread through the town that a watchmaker had arrived, and everyone rushed to him with their clocks. But the only ones he could repair were those that had been kept running -- the abandoned clocks had grown too rusty!

# Kavannah

There was a young shepherd who was unable to recite the Hebrew prayers. The only way in which he worshiped was "Lord of the world! It is well known to you that if you had cattle and gave them to me to tend, though I take wages for tending from all others, from you I would take nothing, because I love you."

One day a learned man passing by heard the shepherd pronounce his offer and shouted at him: "Fool, do not pray that way!" So the shepherd asked him: "How then should I pray?" So the learned man taught him all of the blessings in order, the recitation of the Shema and the Amidah, so that from that point forward the shepherd would not pray the way that he used to.

But after the learned man left, the shepherd forgot all that had been taught him, and did not pray. And he was even afraid to say what he had been accustomed to say, because the learned man had told him not to. One night the learned man had a dream, and in it he heard a voice: "If you do not tell the shepherd to say what he was accustomed to saying before you came to him, know that misfortune will overtake you, for you have robbed Me of one of My most precious blessings."

At once the learned man went to the shepherd and said to him: "What prayer are you now making?" The shepherd answered: "None, for I have forgotten what you taught me, and you forbade me to say 'If you had cattle...'"

Then the learned man told him what he had dreamed and said: "Please, say what you used to say." Behold, here is a person who had neither Torah nor words; he only had it in his heart to do good, and this was esteemed in heaven. "The Merciful One desires the Heart."

# Keva

## A Prayerful Day

Ma'ariv	Shacharit	<i>Musaf</i>	Mincha
Evening	Morning	<i>Shabbat Only</i>	Afternoon

## The Basic Service

Warm-Up	Sh'ma and Blessings	Amidah	Conclusion
Psalms		18 blessings (weekday) 7 blessings (Shabbat)	Aleinu Kaddish

## Sh'ma and Its Blessings

Barkhu	Maariv Aravim/ Yotzer Or	Ahavat Olam/ Ahavah Raba	Sh'ma	Mi Chamocha	Hashkeivenu
Call to prayer	Creation	Revelation		Redemption	Protection

# Some Key Jewish Prayers

Sh'ma

Amidah

Aleinu

Kaddish

# Kavanna

## Radical Amazement

“Wonder, or radical amazement, is the chief characteristic of the religious man’s attitude toward history and nature.

One attitude it totally alien to his spirit: taking things for granted, regarding events as “the natural course” of things. To find an approximate cause of a phenomenon is no answer for his ultimate wonder. He knows that there are laws that regulate natural processes, he is aware of the regularity and pattern of things. However, such knowledge doesn’t take away his sense of perpetual surprise. Looking at the world he would say: “This is the Lord’s doing, it is marvelous in our eyes.” (Psalms 118:23)

As civilization advances, the sense of wonder declines. Such a decline is an alarming symptom of our state of mind. Mankind will not perish for want of information, but only for want of appreciation. The beginning of our happiness lies in the understanding that life without wonder is not worth living. What we lack is not a will to believe but a will to wonder.

Awareness of the Divine begins with wonder. It is the result of what man does with his higher incomprehension. The greatest obstacle to such awareness is our adjustment to conventional notions and clichés. Wonder or radical amazement is thus a state of maladjustment.”

Abraham Joshua Heschel “God In Search of Man”

## Tefilah

From verb: *l’hitpallel*

Meaning: to examine oneself

# BRAKHOT (BLESSINGS)

The Brakha Formula:

Baruch Ata Adonai Eloheinu Melekh ha-Olam

*Before eating bread:*

Baruch Ata Adonai Eloheinu Melekh ha-Olam

Hamotzi lehem min ha-aretz

*Upon reaching a special moment:*

Baruch Ata Adonai Eloheinu Melekh ha-Olam

She'he'heyanu v'kiya'manu v'higiyanu l'zman ha'zeh.

*Upon seeing something beautiful in nature:*

Baruch Ata Adonai Eloheinu Melekh ha-Olam

Oseh ma'aseh v'reisheet

*For lighting Shabbat candles:*

Baruch Ata Adonai Eloheinu Melekh ha-Olam

*Asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu*

L'hadlik ner shel Shabbat

## DIY JUDAISM

### PRAY: 10 WAYS TO BUILD A SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

#### **Acknowledge moments of gratitude**

*Count your blessings. Pause and appreciate. Breathe. You are blessed.*

#### **Explore synagogues in your area**

*If you don't yet have a spiritual home, go visit several different congregations and see where you feel most comfortable. Sometimes it takes a few tries, but when it clicks it can change your life.*

#### **Recite the Bedtime Shema**

*Saying our six-word declaration of faith before closing your eyes for the night means that everyday ends on a good note, no matter what craziness came before.*

#### **Recite a blessing before each meal**

*Almost one billion people on Earth don't know for certain where their next meal will come from. If you are one of the lucky ones who has access to food, pause and express gratitude.*

#### **Recite *Modeh Ani* upon waking up**

*Modeh ani lefanekha, melekh chai v'kiyam, she'he'hezarta bi nishmati b'hemla raba emunatekha. This prayer, which thanks God for restoring our soul to us as we wake up, is a phenomenal way to start the day positively. Coffee is helpful as well.*

#### **Attend Friday evening services**

*From musical services with full bands, to small miyans relying on the power of the voice, there is really a Friday evening service for everybody. Find your niche and make it part of your ritual.*

#### **Start wearing a kippah during prayer, study, and eating**

*Physically differentiate the sanctity of these moments by wearing a head covering. Kippot are traditional, but there is no reason why you can't rock a fedora while studying a piece of Talmud.*

#### **Learn and begin to use the Sheheyanu blessing for new things**

*For the first cherries of the summer, the first time you wear great new shoes, or upon reaching a special birthday—this is the all-purpose blessing for new things: Barukh ata Adonai, Eloheinu melekh ha-olam, she'he'heyenu v'kiyemanu v'higiyanu laz'man ha-zeh*

#### **Attend Shabbat morning services**

*Singing together. Listening to your Rabbi's inspiring words. Schmoozing with your community. Sharing a meal together. Sounds like a good Saturday morning to me!*

#### **Begin putting on *tallit* and *tefilin* each morning**

*Get all wrapped up in your Judaism. Encircling yourself in a tallit and binding tefilin onto your arm are physical ways of feeling close to God.*

#### **Take 15 minutes to say *mincha* in the afternoon**

*Pausing for afternoon prayer is great way to overcome the two o'clock slump. Think about what your morning has held, and what your evening might become.*

*What questions remain for you about Jewish prayer?*