

Pop Up T'fillot – Staff Week T'fillot 2016

מה טובו

Ma Tovu – These are the only words in the siddur attributed to a non-Jew: Bilam, who was hired by the prophet Balak to curse the Israelites. Instead, he offered words of praise.

ברכות השחר

Birchot Hashachar – Originally these brachot were intended to be recited upon awakening, and were only later incorporated into the shacharit service (to ensure that people didn't forget to say them.) Each b'rachah was originally intended to be said while performing a certain action, or at a specific time, such as:

Pokeach Ivrim – when you open your eyes

Malbish Arumin – when you get dressed

Matir Asurim – when sitting up and stretching

Ozer Yisrael Bigvurah – when putting on a belt

(Why? A belt is a symbol of strength – you fasten your sword to it)

ברוך שאמר

Baruch Sheamar – This poetic formulation is not actually a b'racha, though it is an invitation to begin Pseukei D'zimra.

What is the purpose of Pseukei D'Zimra? To warm us up, to make sure we're awake and ready
For t'fillot!

Perhaps a volunteer leads everyone in a quick silly stretch here?

Be careful to use the correct weekday Nusach here, as many people incorrectly use Nusach for Shabbat at this point.

Demonstrate the difference.

אשרי

Ashrei – This is the text Jews are supposed to know best, as it is one of the few t'fillot recited at all three daily services!

Ashrei is an assemblage of four different Psalms. The first line is from Psalm 84. The second line is from Psalm 144. The rest (from Tehillah L'David onward) is from the entirety of Psalm 145. The last line is from Psalm 115.

Ashrei was probably assembled into this form during the Second Temple Period, when the Temple was still standing. The text of the Ashrei appears in the Dead Sea Scrolls, where it includes the Congregational response of Baruch Hu o'varuch shemo after each verse.

Ashrei is an alphabetic acrostic missing the letter Nun. The Rabbinic explanation for this missing verse is that when the Mashiach came he would tell us the missing verse. However, a kink was thrown into this explanation by the fact that in the Dead Sea Scrolls, as well as the Greek Septuagint, the Ashrei contains a verse starting with the letter Nun!

הללויה

Halleluyah (Psalm 150) – This t'fillah is Psalm 150, the final Psalm in the book of Psalms. The Psalm describes the instruments used in the Temple to praise G-d. But while we have modern Hebrew

translations of these words, we do not really know exactly what the instruments played in the Temple looked like, except for the Shofar.

אז ישיר

Az Yashir – The melody we use for this is a Sephardi melody that dates to around the 10th century CE. We know that it is that old, because that is the point when the Ashkenazi and Sephardi communities split, and developed many of their own traditions and melodies. Yet both Ashkenazi and Sephardi Jews sing Az Yashir to this same tune (with some minor melodic differences).

ישתבח

Yishtabach – This is the formal conclusion of Pseukei D’Zimra. It is a long series of adjectives describing G-d.

ברכו

Barchu – The barchu itself is not a b’racha – it is the formal call to prayer. The Barchu is followed by the first blessing of the three that surround the sh’ma (two before, and one after). These three brachot echo the themes of the three paragraphs of the Sh’ma: Creation, Revelation, and Redemption.

This b’racha: “yotzer or oo’voreh hoshech” focuses on the theme of creation – G-d created light and dark.

אל ברוך

El Baruch – Here is yet another alphabetic acrostic! The letter Nun has not mysteriously vanished from this one, though. Note that on Shabbat, this location in our t’fillot is occupied by El Adon, a longer alphabetic acrostic.

אור חדש

Or Hadash – We’re still on the theme of creation here, as we end by blessing G-d, yotzer ha’meo’rot, the creator of lights.

אהבה רבה

Ahavah Rabbah – The theme of this second b’racha before the Sh’ma is Revelation -- the giving of the Torah at Mt. Sinai. The first word of this paragraph is Ahavah (love.) To the ancient rabbis, Ahavah was equivalent with Torah. G-d showed his love for the Jewish people by giving us the Torah.

שמע

Sh’ma – At the center of every section of our t’fillot is a piece of Torah/Tanakh for us to read and study. In the Pseukei D’zimra, it’s Psalms. Here now at the center of Shacharit, we have the Sh’ma, which was assembled from different sections of Torah.

The three paragraphs of the Sh’ma were all taken from different sections of the Torah. Together, they encapsulate the theological basis of Judaism.

The first paragraph of the Sh’ma is about internal faith, about accepting G-d: “The Lord your G-d, the Lord is One...and you shall LOVE the Lord your G-d.”

The second paragraph is about our ACTIONS – about obeying the Mitzvot.

The third paragraph describes the tzitzit, which are symbols of our redemption. “...I am the Lord your G-d, who took you out of the land of Egypt to be your G-d...”

The brachot we’re about to begin (between the Sh’ma and the Amidah) focus on the theme of Redemption. G-d is described as Go-el Yisrael, the Redeemer of Israel. In a moment we will get to Mi Chamochah, which is taken from Moses’ song after the Israelites crossed through the Red Sea.

עמידה

Amidah – The first three br’achot of the Amidah, and the last three, are always said for any Amidah, whether it’s a weekday, Shabbat, or a Hag. The middle 13 b’rachot are petitions -- we ask God for things (good health, etc.). We do not say those b’rachot on Shabbat or Holidays because we don’t make petitions then. On those days, we usually replace these middle 13 b’rachot with a single b’racha called kidushat hayom, which is all about the specialness of that day.

The last paragraph of the Amidah, Elohai Netzor, is just a suggested text. You don’t have to say those exact words. This is a spot in the Amidah for you to add in your own personal prayers.

קדיש שלם

Kadish Shalem – The various forms of the Kadish are the punctuation in the “sentence” of our t’fillot. We use them to distinguish one section of our t’fillot from another. The Hatzi Kadish is generally thought of as a comma, while the Kaddish Shalem is a period. Every service traditionally concludes when Kaddish Yatom is said. (For that reason, some have the tradition that Kadish Yatom should always be said, even if there are no mourners present.)

There are five different forms of the Kadish:

Hatzi Kadish

Kadish Yatom – Mourner’s Kadish

Kadish Shalem

Kadish D’Rabbanan – Scholar’s Kadish

Kadish L’itdchadeta – said at a graveside, and also when you finish studying a tractate of Talmud.

עלינו

Aleinu – One of the most ancient of our t’fillot, Aleinu is thought to have originated during the Maccabean period, during the 2nd century BCE. There was a major conflict during that time between Judaism and Hellenism. Many Jews were becoming assimilated by Roman culture. That is why Aleinu focuses on the superiority of Judaism to Paganism. Aleinu was originally composed for Rosh Hashanah. Only later did it become adopted into every-day usage.

אדון עולם

Adom Olam – Adon Olam is a Piyut – a Medieval liturgical poem. It describes G-d as the eternal master of the world – G-d existed before time, and G-d will reign forever.

It’s a poem in 4:4 meter, which makes the words work with almost every melody. (However, given that Adon Olam is focused on G-d and G-d’s greatness, we should take care to avoid inappropriate melodies that can diminish the power of these words!)