

In the most essential sense, prayer is direct speech, in which man confronts and addresses his Creator. Such speech may be of many kinds: request, supplication, thanksgiving, complaint, or even simple conversation.

—Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz



Prayer



Three Keys: Hannah's Prayer
What Causes Prayer to Work?
To Whom Does God Listen?
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Three Keys: Hannah's Prayer

Hannah's Prayer I Samuel 1:9–17

...And she was in bitterness of soul, and prayed to the Lord, and wept bitterly. And she vowed a vow, and said, "O Lord of hosts, if you will indeed look on the affliction of your maidservant, and remember me, and not forget your maidservant, but will give to your maidservant a male child, then I will give him to the Lord all the days of his life, and there shall no razor come upon his head." And it came to pass, as she continued praying before the Lord, that Eli observed her mouth. And Hannah spoke in her heart; only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard; therefore Eli thought that she was drunk. And Eli said to her, "How long will you be drunk? Put away your wine from you." And Hannah answered and said, "No, my lord, I am a woman of a sorrowful spirit; I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but have poured out my soul before the Lord. Take not your maidservant for a worthless woman; for out of my great complaint and grief have I been speaking." Then Eli answered and said, "Go in peace; and the God of Israel grant you the petition that you have asked of him."

Ta'anit 2a–b

Rabbi Yochanan said: "The Holy One had three keys in His hand that He had not turned over to a messenger, and these are they: The key for bringing rain, the key for fertility, and the key for reviving the dead. The key for bringing rain, as it is written: 'And God will open His good stores, His heavens, to bring rain to your land in due season' (Deuteronomy 28). The key for fertility, as it is written: 'And God remembered Rachel, and God heard her, and opened her womb' (Genesis 30). The key for reviving the dead, as it is written: 'And you will know that I the Lord have opened your graves' (Ezekiel 37:13). In the West, they said: 'Even the key for income, as it is written: 'You open up Your hand...' (Psalms 145). Why didn't Rabbi Yochanan consider this as valid? He would say to you that bringing rain and being responsible for income are the same thing.

Questions and Commentary

The Holy One had three keys in His hand that He had not turned over to a messenger: What do these three keys have in common, that only they are considered important enough to be provided directly by the Holy One Himself?

And God heard her: It is obvious from this statement that Rachel prayed, but the text doesn't tell us what she said. In fact, Rachel only complains to Jacob: Give me children or I shall die. The story of Hannah, however (opposite), gives a full rendering of her prayer, and insight into its effectiveness.

An Exercise

Take a blank piece of paper and make a list of rules using Hannah's prayer as your primary text. Given her interchange with Eli, and the description of how she prayed, create a code for what one should and shouldn't do when one prays to God.

Three Keys: Hannah's Prayer

Brachot 31a

Rabbi Hamnuna said: "How many magnificent rules have we learned from the story of Hannah!"

"Now Hannah was praying in her heart" (I Samuel 1:13). From this verse we know that a praying person must direct his heart [in prayer].

"...only her lips moved" (Ibid). From here we know that one who prays must cut each word with her lips.

"...her voice could not be heard" (Ibid). From here we learn that one should not raise one's voice when she prays.

"So, Eli thought she was drunk" (Ibid). From here we learn that a drunkard is not allowed to pray.

"And Eli said to her, 'How long will you make a drunken spectacle of yourself?'" (Ibid:14). From here we learn that when one sees someone behaving inappropriately, he is obliged to correct him.

"And Hannah answered saying, 'O no my lord...'" Ulla said and some say it was Rabbi Yossi Bar Hanina who said: "She said to him, 'You are not my lord in this matter and the Holy Spirit is not upon you because you unjustly suspect me of this.'"

There are those who say [that when Hannah said "No, my lord...", she meant:]

"You have not come with the Divine presence near you, nor do you have the Holy Spirit, for you have judged me harshly and not with favor. Do you not know, that, 'I am a very unhappy woman I have drunk no wine nor any other strong drink...'" (Ibid:15). From here we learn that a person who is innocent of someone's suspicion is obliged to tell him.

"Don't take your maidservant for the daughter of a scoundrel." Rabbi Elazar said, "From here we see that one who prays while intoxicated is considered to be an idolater, as it is written here, '...the daughter of a scoundrel' and it is written, 'and these sons of scoundrels left Your (God's) midst to serve other gods'" (Deuteronomy 13:14).

Just as idolatry is implied by the word "scoundrel" in this verse, so, too, when [Hannah tells Eli that she is not the daughter of scoundrels, she must be referring to] idolatry in this verse as well.

"And Eli answered, saying, 'Go in peace.'" Rabbi Elazar said, "From here we learn that when a person suspects another of something of which they are innocent, he is obliged to mollify him, and furthermore, he must bless him, as it is written: 'And may the God of Israel grant you what you have asked of Him.'"

"And Hannah made a vow, saying, 'O Lord of Hosts...'" Rabbi Elazar said, "From the day the world was created, no person ever called the Holy One, 'Lord of Hosts' until Hannah came and called Him so. Hannah said to the Holy One, 'Sovereign of the Universe, from all the multitudes and hosts that You created in the universe, is it so difficult to give me one child?' What is this situation like? Like a king of flesh and blood who made a meal for his servants. A poor person came to the door and asked for a slice of bread, and no one paid him any attention. He made his way to the king, and said, 'My lord the king, this huge meal that you have made, is it so difficult for you to offer me a slice of bread?...'"

"And Hannah spoke from her heart..." Rabbi Elazar said in the name of Rabbi Yossi Bar Zimra, "Hannah spoke of those things which engaged her heart. She said, 'Sovereign of the Universe, there was nothing extraneous in anything You created for a woman. Eyes to see, ears to hear a nose to smell, a mouth to speak, hands for work, legs to walk, breasts to nurse. These breasts which You placed upon my heart, should I not nurse with them? Give me a son and I will nurse with them...'"

Talmud Navigator

- How did the Sages of the Talmud read the Hannah story?
- How many of their rules matched yours?

What did you just accomplish?

The exercise on page two gave insight into how the Sages work with a Biblical text. In the case of Hannah, the Sages were taking a prayer that had succeeded as a model for the prayers they had created after hers. In the case of Hannah the Sages were taking a prayer that had succeeded as the standard for the prayers they had created after hers.

Three Keys: Hannah's Prayer

Hebrew Sources

וּתְקַם חֲנָה אַחֲרַי אֲכֹלָה בְּשִׁלְהָ וְאַחֲרַי שְׁתֵּה. וְעָלִי הִפְהִן יֵשֵׁב עַל הַכֶּסֶּא עַל מְזוֹזוֹת הַיֵּכָל ה'. וְהָיָא מִרְת נָפֶשׁ, וְתִתְפַּלֵּל עַל ה' וּבָכָה תִּבְכֶּה. וְתִדְר נְדָר וְתִאמֶר: ה' צָבָאוֹת! אִם רָאָה תִרְאָה בְּעֵינֵי אֲמִתְךָ, וּזְכַרְתָּנִי וְלֹא תִשְׁכַּח אֶת אֲמִתְךָ, וְנִתְתָּה לְאֲמִתְךָ זָרַע אֲנָשִׁים – וְנִתְתָּיו לָהּ כָּל יְמֵי חַיָּו וּמוֹרָה לֹא יַעֲלֶה עָלָהּ עַל רֵאשׁוֹ. וְהָיָה כִּי הִרְבֵּתָה לְהִתְפַּלֵּל לִפְנֵי ה', וְעָלִי שָׁמַר אֶת פִּיהָ. וְחֲנָה הִיא מְדַבֶּרֶת עַל לְבָהּ, רַק שְׁפָתֶיהָ נְעוּת וְקוֹלָהּ לֹא יִשְׁמַע, וְיִחְשְׁבֶהָ עָלֵי לְשִׁפְרָהּ. וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֶיהָ עָלֵי: עַד מָתַי תִּשְׁתַּכְּרִין?! הִסִּירִי אֶת יַיִגָּד מֵעֵלְיָךְ! וְתַעֲזֵן חֲנָה וְתִאמֶר: לֹא, אֲדַנִּי, אֲשֶׁה קֶשֶׁת רוּחַ אֲנֹכִי וַיִּזֵּן וְשָׁכַר לֹא שְׁתִּיתִי, וְאֲשַׁפֵּךְ אֶת נַפְשִׁי לִפְנֵי ה'. אֵל תִּתֵּן אֶת אֲמִתְךָ לִפְנֵי בֵּת בְּלִיעֵל, כִּי מָרַב שִׁיחֵי וְכַעֲסֵי דְבַרְתִּי עַד הַנָּה. וַיַּעַן עָלֵי וַיֹּאמֶר: לְכִי לְשָׁלוֹם, וְאַלְקֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל יִתֵּן אֶת שְׁלֹתְךָ אֲשֶׁר שָׁאַלְתָּ מֵעַמּוֹ.

שמואל א' א' ט-ז

אמר ר' יוחנן: שלשה מפתחות מצויים בידו של הקדוש ברוך הוא שלא נמסרו כרגיל ביד שליח, אלא הוא בעצמו דואג להם. ואלו הן: מפתח של גשמים, ומפתח של חיה (יולדת), ומפתח של תחיית המתים. וראיות לדבר: מפתח של גשמים, דכתיב [שנאמר]: "יפתח ה' לך את אוצרו הטוב את השמים לתת מטר ארצך בעתך" (דברים כח, יב), משמע שמפתח זה ביד ה' הוא. מפתח של חיה (יולדת) מנין? דכתיב [שנאמר]: "ויזכר אלקים את רחל וישמע אליה אלקים ויפתח את רחמה" (בראשית ל, כב). מפתח של תחיית המתים מנין? דכתיב [שנאמר]: "וידעתם כי אני ה' בפתחי את קברותיכם ובהעלותי אתכם מקברותיכם עמי" (יחזקאל לז, יג). במערבא (במערב, בארץ ישראל) אמרי [היו אומרים]: אף מפתח של פרנסה הוא בידי ה', דכתיב [שנאמר]: "פוחת את ירך ומשביע לכל חי רצון" (תהלים קמה, טז). ושואלים: ור' יוחנן מאי טעמא [מה טעם] לא קא חשיב להא [החשיב את זה]? ומשיבים: אמר לך [יכול היה לומר לך]: גשמים היינו פרנסה, שהרי גשמים הם ענין כולל, והם מפתח לכל ענייני הפרנסה בכללה.

תענית ב, א-ב מהדורת שטיינזלץ

אמר רב המנונא: כמה הלכתא גברותא איכא למשמע מהני קראי [הלכות גדולות יש לשמוע, ללמוד מאותם המקראות] של תפילת חנה. שכך נאמר בה: "וחנה היא מדברת על לבה רק שפתיה נעות וקולה לא ישמע ויחשבה עלי לשיכורה" (שמואל א, א, יג). ומפרטים: מן האמור "וחנה היא מדברת על לבה" מכאן הוראה למתפלל שצריך שיכוין לבו בתפילתו. ומן האמור "רק שפתיה נעות" מכאן הוראה למתפלל שצריך שיחתוך בשפתיו, כלומר, יבטא בשפתיו ולא רק בלבו את דברי התפילה. ומן הכתוב "וקולה לא ישמע" מכאן למתפלל שאסור להגביה קולו בתפלתו, אלא התפילה צריכה להיות בלחש. מהמשך הדברים "ויחשבה עלי לשכרה" יש ללמוד מכאן ששכור אסור להתפלל, ולכן גער בה.

ברכות לא, מהדורת שטיינזלץ



What Causes Prayer to Work?

INTRODUCTION

Prayer is a ubiquitous motif in the Tanakh in general, and the Torah in particular. The following two cases illustrate when prayers are answered and when they are rejected. The first instance is the infamous behavior of the spies who return from the Land, only to reveal their fear and contempt for the challenge of its conquest. God fumes in anger and Moshe rises to defend and pray for his people.

EXHIBIT A

(Numbers 14:11-20)

(במדבר יד, יא-כ)

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה: עַד אַנְהוּ יִנְאַצְנִי הָעָם הַזֶּה, וְעַד אַנְהוּ לֹא יֶאֱמִינוּ בִּי בְּכָל הָאֲתוֹת אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתִי בְּקִרְבּוֹ? אֲכַנּוּ בְּדַבָּר וְאוֹרְשָׁנוּ, וְאַעֲשֶׂה אֶתְךָ לְגוֹי גָּדוֹל וְעֶצוּם מִמֶּנּוּ.

And the Lord said to Moshe: “How long will this people despise me? And how long will they not believe in Me, for the signs I have wrought among them? I will smite them with the pestilence and I destroy them and will make of thee a nation greater and mightier than they.”

וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל ה': וְשָׁמְעוּ מִצְרַיִם, כִּי הִעֲלִיתָ בְּלִחָד אֶת הָעָם הַזֶּה מִקִּרְבּוֹ... וְהִמַּתָּה אֶת הָעָם הַזֶּה כְּאִישׁ אֶחָד, וְאָמְרוּ הַגּוֹיִם אֲשֶׁר שָׁמְעוּ אֶת שְׁמֶעֶךָ לֵאמֹר: מִבְּלַתִּי יִכְלַת ה' לְהַבִּיא אֶת הָעָם הַזֶּה אֶל הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע לָהֶם וַיִּשְׁחָטֵם בְּמִדְבָּר... סִלַּח נָא לְעוֹן הָעָם הַזֶּה כְּגֹדֶל חַסְדְּךָ וְכֹאֲשֶׁר נִשְׁאַתָּה לְעָם הַזֶּה מִמִּצְרַיִם וְעַד הַנּוֹה.

And Moshe said unto the Lord: “When the Egyptians shall hear—for You brought up the people in Your might from among them...now if You will kill this people as one man, then the nations which have heard the fame of You will speak, saying: Because the Lord was unable to bring this people into the land which He swore just for them, He has therefore slain them in the wilderness...Pardon, I pray You, the iniquity of this people according to the greatness of Your lovingkindness, and as You already have forgiven this people, from Egypt until now.”

וַיֹּאמֶר ה': סִלַּחְתִּי כְּדַבָּרְךָ.

And the Lord said: “I have pardoned them, as you have spoken.”

What Causes Prayer to Work?

In the following instance, Moshe, himself, has been denied entry into the Land, and prays to God that he will be allowed to enter Israel, even though he has already been denied entry for a previous transgression.

EXHIBIT B

(דברים ג, כג-כז)

וְאֶתְחַנֵּן אֶל ה' בְּעַת הַהוּא לֵאמֹר: אֲדַנִּי ה'! אֶתָּה הַחֲלוּת לְהִרְאוֹת אֶת עַבְדְּךָ אֶת גְּדֹלְךָ וְאֶת יָדְךָ הַחֲזָקָה, אֲשֶׁר מִי אֵל בַּשָּׁמַיִם וּבָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשֶׂה כְּמַעֲשֵׂיךָ וְכַגְבוּרֹתֶיךָ. אֶעֱבְרָה נָא וְאֶרְאֶה אֶת הָאָרֶץ הַטּוֹבָה אֲשֶׁר בְּעֵבֶר הַיַּרְדֵּן, הַהַר הַטּוֹב הַזֶּה וְהַלְבָּנוֹן.

וַיִּתְעַבֵּר ה' בִּי לְמַעַנְכֶם וְלֹא שָׁמַע אֵלַי. וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֵלַי: רַב לְךָ! אֵל תּוֹסֹף דַּבֵּר אֵלַי עוֹד בַּדְּבַר הַזֶּה. עֲלֵה רֹאשׁ הַפְּסָגָה וְשֵׂא עֵינֶיךָ יָמָה וְצַפְנָה וְתִימְנָה וּמִזְרְחָה וּרְאֵה בְּעֵינֶיךָ, כִּי לֹא תַעֲבֹר אֶת הַיַּרְדֵּן הַזֶּה.

(Deuteronomy 3:23-27)

And I pleaded to the Lord at this time saying: “O Master, our Lord! You have begun to show Your servant Your greatness and Your strong hand, for what god is there in heaven and earth that can imitate Your great works, and Your mighty acts?”

Let me go, I beg of you, and let me see this good land that is beyond the Jordan, that wonderful hill country, and Lebanon.”

And the Lord was short with me because of you and did not listen to me, and He said to me: “This is enough for you, and do not speak to Me about this again. Get up to the top of Pisgah and cast your eyes westward, northward, southward and eastward, and see with your eyes, for you will not cross the Jordan.”

Torah Navigator

- Compare the two scenarios. In each case describe whom Moshe is praying for.
- How does God's response differ in the respective prayers?
- In your opinion, what accounts for the different response?

What Causes Prayer to Work?

INTRODUCTION

Life in the land of Israel depends profoundly on the quantity of rainfall it receives.

A severe drought would cause acute agricultural damage and even famine.

The following two Talmudic stories deal with the then-common practice of praying for rain when it has not been forthcoming.

EXHIBIT A

(תלמוד בבלי, תענית יט,א)

מעשה שאמרו לו לחוני המעגל: התפלל שירדו גשמים! אמר להם: צאו והכניסו תנורי פסחים בשביל שלא ימוקו. התפלל ולא ירדו גשמים. מה עשה? עג עוגה ועמד בתוכה, ואמר לפניו: רבונו של עולם! בניך שמו פניהם עלי שאני כבן בית לפניך, נשבע אני בשמך הגדול שאיני זז מכאן עד שתרחם על בניך. התחילו גשמים מנטפין, אמר: לא כך שאלתי, אלא גשמי בורות שיחין ומערות. התחילו לירד בזעף, אמר: לא כך שאלתי, אלא גשמי רצון ברכה ונדבה. ירדו כתקנו, עד שיצאו ישראל מירושלים להר הבית מפני הגשמים... שלח לו שמעון בן שטח: אלמלא חוני אתה גוזרני עליך נידוי, אבל מה אעשה לך שאתה מתחטא לפני המקום ועושה לך רצונך, כבן שהוא מתחטא על אביו ועושה לו רצונו...

(Talmud, Ta'anit 19a)

Once, they came to Honi Hama'agel and said to him: "Pray so that the rains fall." He said: "Go out and bring the Passover ovens, so that they will not be spoiled." He prayed, and the rains didn't fall. What did he do? He drew a circle and stood inside it, and said: "Sovereign of the Universe, Your children have turned their faces toward me for I am like a son of Your household. I swear in Your great Name that I will not move from here until You have mercy on Your children."

The rains began to drizzle. He said: "Not rain like that but rains that will fill the cisterns, the caves and the trenches." The rains came down with fury. He said: "Not like that, but rains of favor, blessing and generosity." They came as he decreed, until all of Israel left Jerusalem for the Temple Mount because of the rains. They came and said to him, "Just as you prayed for them to fall, pray for them to go away!" He said: "Go and see if the boulder of the lost and found has washed away."

Shimon Ben Shetach sent Honi a message: "If you weren't Honi, I would excommunicate you, but what am I to do? You act frivolously before God, and He does your will, like a son who acts frivolously before his father and his father does what the son wants. And about you the verse is written: Let your father and mother be glad and rejoice in your birth" (Proverbs 23).

Talmud Navigator

- Is this the way you would approach God with a request? Why or why not?
- Why do you think that Honi chooses this strategy?
- What is it about Honi that causes God to listen to him?
- Why does the Talmud want us to know this story, and as a result, what do we learn about prayer and those whose prayers are answered?
- What was the purpose of God sending different kinds of rain to Honi?

What Causes Prayer to Work?

EXHIBIT B

(תלמוד בבלי, תענית כד,א)

רב איקלע לההוא אתרא, גזר תעניתא ולא אתא מיטרא. נחית קמיה שליחא דצבורא, אמר "משיב הרוח" – ונשב זיקא, אמר "מוריד הגשם" – ואתא מיטרא. אמר ליה: מאי עובדך? אמר ליה: מיקרי דרדקי אנא, ומקרינא לבני עניי כבני עתירי, וכל דלא אפשר ליה לא שקלינא מיניה מידי. ואית לי פירא דכוורי, וכל מאן דפשע – משחדינא ליה מינייהו, ומסדרין ליה, ומפייסין ליה, עד דאתי וקרי.

(Talmud, Ta'anit 24a)

Rav had traveled to a certain place. He decreed a fast, but the rains didn't come. A person came up to lead the prayers. When he recited the Amida, he said, "He who brings the winds," and the winds blew. He said, "He who brings forth the rain," and the rains came.

Rav asked him: "What is your occupation?"

He said: "I teach children to read, and I teach the poor children as if they were rich ones. If a person can't pay, I take no money from him. And I also have a fish pond. Whenever one of the children is rebellious, I bribe him with fish to entice and appease him, so that he comes and studies."

Talmud Navigator

- Tell us about a time when you felt that your prayers had been answered. Does it have anything in common with the stories we have just learned?
- What is exemplary about this teacher?
- In your opinion, why did his prayers work better than those of a great Sage?
- The one who leads the prayers was called a shaliach tzibur (a messenger for the community). According to this passage, what values are most important for this role?
- In this case, why did these prayers work better than a public fast?
- What do we know about this person that we didn't know about Honi Hama'agel?
- How does God's response differ in this instance from His response to Honi Hama'agel?
- How do you account for this difference?
- Is it significant that we do not know the person's name? Why, or why not?



To Whom Does God Listen

The Quality of Despair

EXHIBIT A: Rebuke

מעשה ברבי אליעזר שגזר שלש עשרה תעניות על הצבור ולא ירדו גשמים. באחרונה, התחילו הצבור לצאת. אמר להם: תקנתם קברים לעצמכם!? געו כל העם בבכיה – וירדו גשמים: (תענית כה, ב)

(Ta'anit 25b)

Once Rabbi Eliezer decreed thirteen fasts on the community, and the rains still didn't come. Finally, the community got up to leave. He said to them: "Have your graves been dug yet?!" All the community wailed and cried—and the rains came.

Talmud Navigator

- Why did the community begin to leave?
- Why was Rabbi Eliezer's rebuke effective?
- Why did the wailing and crying cause the rains to fall?

EXHIBIT B: Self-Deprecation

רבי יהודה נשיאה גזר תעניתא. בעי רחמי ולא אתא מיטרא. אמר: כמה איכא משמואל הרמתי ליהודה בן גמליאל! אוי לו לדור שכן נתקע, אוי לו למי שעלתה בימיו כך! חלש דעתיה ואתא מיטרא. (תענית כד, א)

(Ta'anit 24a)

Rabbi Yehuda Nessiah decreed a fast. He prayed for mercy and no rains came. He said: "There is such a gap between Samuel Haramati and Yehuda the son of Gamliel! Woe to the generation that is so handicapped. Woe to the one whose days are stuck with him." He became very upset, and the rains came.

Talmud Navigator

- How is this story similar to the previous story, and how it is different?
- Rabbi Yehuda Nessiah bemoans the fact that he is inadequate. How is this message different than the previous story of Rabbi Eliezer and the thirteen fasts?

To Whom Does God Listen

EXHIBIT C: A Broken heart

א"ר יהושע בן לוי: בא וראה כמה גדולים נמוכי הרוח לפני הקב"ה, שבשעה שבית המקדש קיים, אדם מקריב עולה – שכר עולה בידו, מנחה – שכר מנחה בידו, אבל מי שדעתו שפלה, מעלה עליו הכתוב כאילו הקריב כל הקרבנות כולם, שנאמר: (תהלים נא) זבחי אלהים רוח נשברה; ולא עוד, אלא שאין תפלתו נמאסת, שנאמר: (תהלים נא) לב נשבר ונדכה אלהים לא תבזה. (סוטה ה,א)

(Sotah 5a)

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levy said: "Come and see how powerful a contrite spirit is before the Holy One! When the Temple stood, a person would bring a particular sacrifice and he would be shown favor for only that sacrifice. But the person of a contrite spirit is considered as if he has performed all the sacrifices, as it is written: The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit (Psalms 51:19). Furthermore, his prayer cannot be disparaged, as it is written: ...A broken and despairing heart will not be disgraced (Ibid)."

Talmud Navigator

- What is the common denominator among all the exhibits?
- The difference between all three examples is very subtle. Examine what is distinctive about each of them and discuss why such prayers may be considered effective.
- Why do you think a truly contrite spirit is so powerful and necessary?

EXHIBIT D: Undeserved Gifts

"ואתחנן" – אין "חינון" בכל מקום אלא לשון מתנת חנינם; אף-על-פי שיש להם לצדיקים לתלות במעשיהם הטובים, אין מבקשים מאת המקום אלא מתנת חנינם. (פירוש רש"י לדברים ג,כג)

(Rashi, Deuteronomy 3:23)

"and I pleaded" When the word pleading (*CHiNun*) is used in the Torah it always means a gift that is undeserved (*CHiNun*). Even though the righteous could invoke their deeds [on their behalf], they only ask from God a gift that they do not deserve (Rashi, Deuteronomy 3:23).

Deuteronomy Navigator

- What is Rashi's message here?
- Why would God give us something that we don't deserve?
- How does this relate to the previous sources? What is the connection between profound contrition and seeing yourself as undeserving?

To Whom Does God Listen

EXHIBIT E: Obstacles to Prayers Being Answered

דבי נשיאה גזר תעניתא ולא אתא מיטרא. תנא להו אושעיא זעירא דמן חבריאי: "והיה אם מעיני העדה נעשתה לשגגה", משל לכלה שהיא בבית אביה; כל זמן שעיניה יפות – אין כל גופה צריכה בדיקה, עיניה טרוטות – כל גופה צריכה בדיקה. (תענית שם)

(Ta'anit 24a)

The House of the Nasi declared a fast, and the rains did not come. Oshiya, the youngest of the class taught them: "If this sin was committed from the unwitting eyes of the community" (Numbers 15:24). It is like a bride in her father's house; as long as her eyes are pretty—her body need not be examined, when she is bleary eyed—her entire body needs to be examined."

וכך הוא בדור כולו גם כן, שאם ראשי הדור פגומים – סימן הם לכל העם כולו. (פירוש הרב שטיינזלץ שם)

(Rabbi Steinsaltz Commentary, Ibid)

So it is with the entire generation. If the leaders are blemished—it is a sign for the entire people.

Talmud Navigator

- According to Oshiya, who is to blame?
- What do the eyes of the bride signify?
- What might be the outcome of examining the "entire body" of the community?



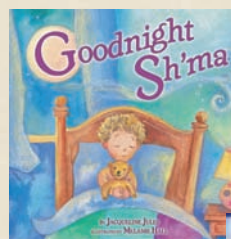
The Bedtime Sh'ma / Goodnight Sh'ma

The Bedtime Sh'ma
Adapted by Sarah Gershman

Goodnight Sh'ma
Jacqueline Jules

Age Appropriate:
Infants to 4 year olds

Class Length:
45 minutes–1 hour



Look Closely and Select a Book

WHY THESE BOOKS WERE SELECTED

- Offer guidance on how to add Jewish content to a family's nightly bedtime routine
- Illustrations and text are calming and soothing, promoting a calm transition from active days into sleep
- Familiarize young children and families with the *Sh'ma*—a fundamental prayer of Judaism.
- Introduce families to the concept that prayer represents a way of conversing with God.

Identify Big Ideas

VALUES TO HIGHLIGHT

1. *T'filah*: prayer
2. *Hoda'ah*: thankfulness and gratitude

GOALS OF PROGRAM

1. Highlight and connect the major themes of this book to daily life.
2. Provide families with a tool (a beautiful bedtime picture) which can be incorporated into their bedtime routine, adding Jewish context to this daily transition time.
3. Provide families with a space and time to reflect on their own bedtime rituals.
4. Familiarize families with the *Sh'ma* prayer
5. Teach several different tunes for the *Sh'ma* prayer.



This book-based Program curriculum was developed by The PJ Library.

The **L-I-S-T-E-N** rubric was initially developed by Ina S.G. Regosin, Director, Hebrew College, Early Childhood Institute, with input from Rachel Raz and Sherry Grossman.

Program submitted by Iris Koller, Syracuse, NY: iris@hgf.org and Vivian Newman, Western Massachusetts: vivian@hgf.org

The Bedtime Sh'ma / Goodnight Sh'ma

Set the Scene 10–15 minutes

SCHEDULING AND LOCATION THOUGHTS

Designing a Saturday evening *havdalah* program works well, with children coming in pajamas; late afternoon or before nap time on another day also works.



A “comfy” space is ideal, one with a soft floor that is conducive to cuddling. Children should be encouraged to bring a well-loved stuffed animal or doll.

{ Introductory Activity #1 }**Creating a Starry Night Mural**

Mural will be used to help set the scene for the storytelling session.

LEADER'S INTRODUCTION:

In a few minutes we are going to read a book about bedtime and going to sleep. When do you and your dolls and stuffed animals usually go to sleep? Do you go to sleep when it's dark outside or when it's light outside? What does your room usually look like when your mom or dad turns off your light and says goodnight? That's right, we usually go to sleep when it's dark outside. So to help set the mood for our story, we're going to make our own night sky. What do we see up in the sky at night? Can you help us add stars and moons to our sky?

{ Introductory Activity #1 }**Materials Needed:**

- A large sheet of black paper—cut from a roll of bulletin board paper, or created by stapling several pieces of black paper or craft foam or poster board together
- Gold and silver mini stars—either the type which needs to be licked in order to stick or the self-adhesive type

Advance Preparations:

- Tape the black paper to the floor or to several small, low tables which have been lined up in a row.
- Place small handfuls of stars in plastic containers or bowls so that each child will have his/her own supply of stars to work with.

Directions

1. Show children how to attach stars to the black paper.
2. When children have finished attaching their small supply of stars, encourage them to move on to Introductory Activity #2.

The Bedtime Sh'ma / Goodnight Sh'ma

{ Introductory Activity #2 }**Decorating a Frame**

For the "Bedtime Picture" which will be created in the second half of the program

LEADER'S INTRODUCTION

Later today, we are going to make a special bedtime signs which can be taken home and hung in your bedroom. We hope that these beautiful signs will help you feel even more relaxed and comfortable at bedtime. Before you paint your bedtime sign, however, we want you to first decorate the frame which will surround your sign.

Tell the Story 10–15 minutes**ADVANCE PREPARATIONS:**

- Be sure to have several extra dolls and stuffed animals available for those who may have forgotten to bring theirs with them.
- Try to enlarge the illustrations in the book of your choice. *(Make enlarged photo copies of the pages or scan the pictures into your computer, enlarge them, and display the book as a PowerPoint presentation.)*

{ Props }

- Completed night sky
- Stuffed animal for the group leader

READER'S INTRODUCTION**{ Transition }**

Invite all to come and join you, bringing their cuddle toys, leaving their art pieces at the table. Assure them that their work will be safe. As everyone settles in, welcome all; encourage little ones to snuggle with their parents. Have families briefly introduce themselves and their special cuddle toy.

(Pass out extra stuffed animals to those children who did not bring one from home.)

{ Introductory Activity #2 }**Materials Needed:**

- Frames cut from craft foam or construction paper (8.5 x 11 in.)
- Stickers (try to include star and moon stickers)
- Paper cutouts of stars and moons
- Cutouts of the Hebrew letters—*shin*, *mem*, and *ayin* (for those families who would like to display Hebrew letters on their frames. These families may also appreciate a handout which displays the word *Sh'ma*, written in Hebrew.)
- Glue sticks or white/school glue, bowls, and cotton swabs.
- Optional: sequins, jewels, foam shapes, etc.

Directions:

1. Encourage children to spread glue all around the edges of their frame
2. Ask children to select which shapes, sequins, etc. they would like to use on their frame
3. Ask children to place their chosen materials on top of the glue.
4. Have several copies of the word *Sh'ma* available, so that those who wish will be able to see how to arrange the letters on their frame.

The Bedtime Sh'ma / Goodnight Sh'ma

INTRODUCTORY SPEECH

(Comment on how busy everyone was today working on their projects.)

Uh oh, I'm seeing lots of dolls and stuffed animals who are yawning (*demonstrate a few yawns*) and looking very sleepy. I think that soon it's going to be time for us to put our toys to bed.

(Ask several parents to help you hold the completed starry night mural over the children's head.)

Look at what time it is. It's dark outside and the stars are out. That means it's time for the dolls and stuffed animals to go to sleep. How should we help them get ready for bed? What do you do before bedtime?

(Ask for suggestions and encourage the entire group to pantomime gestures for whatever actions are suggested—brushing teeth, taking a bath, etc.)

In a few minutes, we're going to read a book that shows a child getting ready for bed. The child in our book does something very special before she (In the book *Bedtime Sh'ma*) /he (in the book *Goodnight Sh'ma*) goes to sleep—he/she says a prayer. There are many different kinds of prayers that children and grown-ups can say at bedtime. Sometimes, people like to think of all of the special things that happened to them during the day and say thank you for those special things. Other people, before going to bed, like to think about something that they hope might happen tomorrow—for example, someone might say, "Tomorrow, I hope I have fun riding my bike."

The child in our book says a special Hebrew prayer before he/she goes to sleep. The prayer is called *Sh'ma* and its words are written and spoken in Hebrew. Can I teach you the words to this prayer?

(Ask the children to repeat the Sh'ma words after you.)

The words of the *Sh'ma* tell us that there is only one God. Does anyone know who or what God is? Many people have many different ideas and thoughts about God. I like to think of God as someone whom I can't see and whom I can't hear and whom I can't feel, but who is all around. Even though I can't see God, I think that God is very important. Many people believe that God helped to make the world, helped make everything that we see around us—the trees, the grass, the birds, the people.

Adaptations for Group Size and Age

Larger Groups

Stand if needed to show all the pictures in the story; move about the room slowly as you read if need be to share the illustrations.

Older Children

With the *Bedtime Sh'ma*—you may pause on the first page and encourage parents and children to quietly think about any "I'm sorry" moments that they may have had either today or during the past several days. Ask parents and children to quietly whisper these moments to one another.

Younger Children

If children are getting restless during the story reading, encourage them to hug and kiss their stuffed animals.

The Bedtime Sh'ma / Goodnight Sh'ma

(What else do you think that God helped to make?)

Sometimes, before going to bed, people like to talk to God and say, “Thank you, God, for all of the special things that you gave me today.” Saying *Sh'ma* is a way of talking to God and saying thank you.

Let's think about today. What would you like to say thank you for? Did anyone have any good food to eat today? Did anyone do something special today? Did anyone play with a brother or sister or a special friend today? The fun things that we did, the good food that we ate, and the special people whom we played with are all things that we can remember to say “thank you” for at the end of the day.

Are you ready to read our book and see what the child in our book does before going to bed?

ACTIVE PARTICIPATION

None (with the exception of the brief activity for older children described below)—just your gentle voice and smiles as you see the cuddling and nurturing around the room.

FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS

- What were some of the things that the child in this book did before going to bed?
- Who did the child take to bed with him/her?
- Do you take someone special to bed with you?
- What did the child say before going to bed?

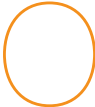
Enhance and Extend the Experience 20–30 minutes

{ Follow-up Activity #1 }

Putting Stuffed Animals and Dolls to Bed

LEADER INTRODUCTION:

(Again invite parents to help you stretch the night sky mural over the children's heads).

 hh.. , I see that it's getting dark out again. Look at how tired these dolls and stuffed animals are—their eyes keep closing. I think that it's time for us to put our special friends to bed.

(Pass out pieces of felt.)

Here are some blankets for our friends. Before we cover them up, let's help them wash their faces, brush their teeth, and read a book.

(Pantomime each of these activities.)

{ Follow-up Activity #1 }

Materials needed:

- Pieces of felt, 8.5 x 11 in a variety of colors
- Night sky mural (which was made during the introductory activities)

The Bedtime Sh'ma / Goodnight Sh'ma

Let's give them a hug and a kiss. Now, let's cover them with their blankets. There's one more thing that we need to do before putting them to bed. Do you know what it is? We need to help them say *Sh'ma*. Can you sing the words with me? Let's see if we can teach this prayer to our cuddly friends.

Pretend to let the stuffed animals sleep for a few seconds. Take down the night sky. Announce: "Morning time. Boker tov. Everybody up.

(Encourage children to throw back the covers and wake their dolls/ stuffed animals.)

Hmm...I wonder what our friends will do today. Maybe they'll dance or go on the swings or help cook

(Invite children to pantomime each of these actions.)

Ask parents to help (again) with putting up the black sky. Announce. "It's time for our friends to go to sleep again! What do they need to do? What's the last thing that they should do?"

{ Follow-up Activity #2 }

Make a Special Bedtime Snack

LEADER'S INTRODUCTION



Wow, you guys are experts at putting your special cuddly friends to bed. To celebrate your excellent skills at putting animals to sleep, we'd like you to make a special snack which involves making a comfy bed for a tasty little gingerbread boy or girl (or teddy bear) cracker.

{ Follow-up Activity #2 }

Materials Needed:

- Animal crackers or teddy bear crackers or gingerbread cookies.
- Jelly or cream cheese
- Brown whole wheat bread, each slice cut in half
- White bread or potato bread—cut in half and then cut into a $\frac{1}{3}$ and $\frac{2}{3}$ piece (these will be used as pillows and blankets for the cookie children or animals)

Advance Preparations: (Optional)

- Arrange small snack plates for each child—each plate should contain:
 - a heaping spoonful of jelly or cream cheese
 - plastic spoons or knives
 - both white and brown bread (cut into its proper size)
 - one gingerbread man or other animal-shaped crackers
 - raisins (optional)

Directions:

1. Demonstrate how to make an edible bed. Using a spoon, spread jelly or cream cheese onto a piece of brown wheat bread.
2. Place the smaller white piece of bread on top of the jelly/cream cheese (this white piece of bread will represent the cookie's pillow).
3. Lie the ginger bread boy/girl down on top of the jelly or cream cheese with its head resting on top of the white pillow.
4. Cover the gingerbread boy/girl with the remaining piece of white bread (this piece of bread will function as the cookie's blanket).
5. Optional: Use a raisin (torn into small pieces) to form facial features for the gingerbread boy/girl or for the teddy bear cracker.

The Bedtime Sh'ma / Goodnight Sh'ma

{ Follow Up Activity #3 }

Make A Bedtime Sign



LEADER INTRODUCTION

We are now going to paint a special bedtime sign which we hope you'll take home and hang in your room. Every night before you go to sleep, we hope that you'll take a look at your bedroom *Sh'ma* sign, and remember to say a prayer and/or a few words of thanks before you go to sleep. Parents, please note that while all of our *Sh'ma* signs contain the same picture, they each feature slightly different wording. Please take time to find the wording which best meets your family's beliefs and needs.

Nurture the Family

ENJOY A CLOSING SONG(S)

As a closing activity, invite families to once again cuddle. You can again ask if anyone remembered a moment in their day that was "special" that they didn't share earlier

Invite families to settle back and sing along with or listen quietly to several Jewish bedtime songs and finger plays. Some possibilities to share include:

- *Kobi's Lullaby* by Rick Recht (found on *Free to Be the Jew in Me* and *Oy Baby 2*, and as an mp3 recording on http://rickrecht.com/music/song-php?songs_id=135)
- *Y'varech'cha* and *Bedtime Sh'ma* by Sheldon Low (found on *It's All Challah to Me*)
- *The Angel's Blessing* by Debbie Friedman (found on *The World of Your Dreams*; *Songs of the Spirit: The Debbie Friedman Anthology*; *Renewal of Spirit*; and *Debbie Friedman at Carnegie Hall*)

Several different renditions of the *Sh'ma* which can be listened to as a mp3 recording on <http://www.totshabbat.com> (Specifically listen to recordings by Cantor Kenneth Cohen, and Judy Caplan Ginsburgh's *Amazing Songs for Amazing Jewish Kids*.)

{ Follow-up Activity #3 }

Advance Preparation:

- Create pages with the *Sh'ma* on them (in Hebrew and English) Prepare several different types of *Sh'ma* cards—some with Hebrew and some without, some which mention giving thanks to God, and some which avoid mentioning God.

Materials:

- Liquid watercolor or food coloring mixed with water (the paints need to be substantially watered down, so that the picture and words on the page will be able to peek through the paint, and will not be obscured by the paints)
- Bowls—for storing various colors of diluted watercolors
- Paint brushes
- *Sh'ma* cards—templates are available at the end of this program. (The *Sh'ma* cards should ideally be printed on card stock, although plain paper may be used if necessary.)
- Scotch tape

Directions:

1. Encourage children to use several different colors on their sign.
2. Demonstrate how to paint one color next to another, without overlapping colors. (We want to keep the various colors distinct from one another. If possible, try to avoid mixing all of the colors together. Mixing too many colors together will typically result in a murky, greenish-brown color.)
3. Families with more than one child might want to create one sign for each child.
4. If time permits (and the paints have sufficiently dried), encourage families to attach their completed picture to their corresponding frame. Use scotch tape or masking tape to attach the sign to the frame. (If the picture has not fully dried, ask families to attach the picture to the frame at home.)

The Bedtime Sh'ma / Goodnight Sh'ma

Conclude the program with hugs all around! Be sure everyone has their projects to take home

{ Try This at Home }

Web Sinks to Learn from and Share:

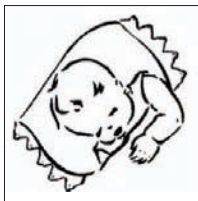
www.jewishfederations.org/page.aspx?ID=1073

www.templenashville.org/_content/4_beit_midrash/jewish_parents/pdfs/Bedtime%20Blessings%20Chanukah.pdf

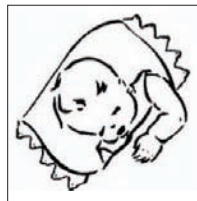
www.jewisheveryday.com/jed/jewish_bedtime.html

www.myjewishlearning.com/beliefs/Theology/God/About_God/Speaking_about_God/Speaking_to_Kids.shtml

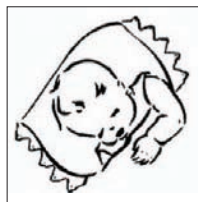
www.myjewishlearning.com/texts/Liturgy_and_Prayers/Siddur_Prayer_Book/Shema/Bedtime_Shema.shtml



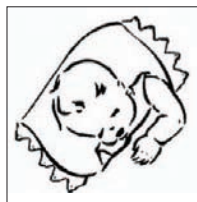
*Before I close my eyes at
night and sleep, before
I drift into my dreams,
I give thanks for
the blessings in my life,
for the people
who care for me...
(from Kobi's Lullabye by Rick Recht)*



*Sh'ma Yisrael
Adonai Eloheinu
Adonai Echad.*



*Sh'ma Yisrael Adonai Eloheinu
Adonoi Echad. Listen Israel.
God is our God. God is one.*



*Thank you, for this
special day
that is now ending...*