

Birchot Hashachar - Waking the Body, Mind & Spirit

Goals: To explore the meaning and history of the birchot hashachar (blessing of the dawn)

To wake up our body, mind and spirit.

Audience: All ages

Duration: 5 - 15 minutes

Materials: Siddurim (prayer books) -

Birchot hashachar can be found in every siddur (Artscroll p19, Sim Shalom p10)

Background:

These Blessings were once said at home immediately upon arising (see Rambam, Mishneh Torah, Laws of Prayer), but were integrated into the regular morning prayer service out of concern that they were not being said at home.

The blessings move through the natural process of waking up, opening your eyes, standing up, getting dressed, etc., and thank God that our bodies are still working properly.

Procedure:

Instead of just reciting the Birchot hashachar, let's act out what we are thankful for. Go through the ritual of stretching out our bodies, getting ourselves ready for the day and thanking God that our bodies are working.

- 1) Stand as a group in a circle
- 2) Read the first blessing aloud yourself - " Baruch ata adonai..."
- 3) Lead the group in a stretch or movement that is thematically similar to the blessing uttered. Examples - Cover your eyes with your hands, then reach up and stretch towards the sun; Walk and crow like a rooster in the morning.
- 4) Direct the participant to read the next blessing and lead the group in a new appropriate stretch or movement
- 5) Repeat for all the blessings or until everyone has had a chance to lead one stretch.

Blessings you may want to skip:

...who made me a Jew/did not make me a gentile

...who made me according to your will / did not make me a woman

These blessings are not good ones for stretches and are challenging concepts for many. I recommend just skipping over them if you are in a setting that allows such things.

Examples of how the blessings are connected to our bodies:

...who gives sight to the blind- opening the eyes

Corresponds to: Opening your eyes first thing in the morning

Appreciation for: Sense of sight - ability to appreciate the amazing things in the world.

...who clothes the naked

Corresponds to: Putting on clothing

Appreciation for: The protection and warmth that clothes give us

...who releases the bound

Corresponds to: Getting out of bed and out from under the sheets; Leaving the partial paralysis our bodies experience while sleeping.

Appreciation for: Our bodies abilities, strength, etc.

...who straightens the bent

Corresponds to: Standing up for the first time, straightening out

Appreciation for: Our backs and the support our spine gives us.

...who spreads out the earth upon the waters

Corresponds to: Our first steps upon the land

Appreciation for: The planet that support life, land and Creation

...who provides for all my needs

Corresponds to: Putting on shoes (traditional); First glass of water or morning snack

Appreciation for: What you have; What God/the world has provided you

...who firms one's footsteps

Corresponds to: Taking first steps of the day

Appreciation for: Our feet; The journey that lies ahead

...who strengthens Israel with courage

Corresponds to: Putting on your belt

Appreciation for: Strength required to be yourself in this world

...who crowns Israel with glory

Corresponds to: Putting on hat / Kippah

Appreciation for: Being a Jew; Protection from rain and other elements

...who gives strength to the weary

Corresponds to: The strength we need to live for the day.

Appreciation for: Our lives; What is in store for the day