

LESSON



DO YOU MIND?

The Surprising Powers of Jewish Meditation

Often associated with other religions, meditation is an authentic Jewish practice that plays a key role in Jewish life and spirituality. This lesson delves into the foundational underpinnings of Jewish meditation to discover how it can be harnessed as a mindfulness practice to overcome negative feelings and produce positive ones. Taking this a step further, it promotes the power of positive meditation to shape reality.

THE TEN SEFIROT
Esther Guenassia, 2008, oil on canvas, Israel

I. COURSE INTRODUCTION

The term “meditation” has many meanings, but in this course it is defined in its broad sense of the deliberate focus of one’s mind to achieve a desired result. Specifically, this study explores the uniquely Jewish role of meditation in Jewish life and in the practice of Judaism.



EXERCISE 1.1

Record three things you hope to gain through this study:

1

2

3



EXERCISE 1.2

**In your mind’s eye, envision a person meditating.
Now sketch that image on paper.**

A large, empty rectangular area with a light green background, intended for the student to sketch their visualization of a person meditating.

II. JEWISH MEDITATION

Meditation is organic to Judaism, serving a sizeable role in Jewish life and practice. It can be traced back to the patriarchs of our people and religion, who spent most of their days in meditation, and it is ritualized in Judaism as part of the formal practice of daily prayer. In addition, meditation appears in multiple forms to fill a variety of roles in Jewish life.



TEXT 1

Career Meditators

Rabbi Eliyahu Hakohen Ha'Itamari, *Midrash Talpiyot*, entry *Avot*

טעם האַבֹּת שְׁהָיוּ רוּעִים, כִּדִּי לְהִתְבַּדֵּד עֲצָמָם בְּעִנְיָן אֱלוֹקוֹת,
שְׂאוֹר הַמְדַבְּרוֹת וְהַיְי נִפְרָשִׁים שֶׁם מִבְּנֵי אָדָם.

The patriarchs chose to be shepherds so that they could be alone in the wilderness—where the air is clean and pure and they would be far from other people—for the sake of secluding themselves in Divine meditation.



The North French Hebrew Miscellany is more a library than a book. Produced on parchment during the last quarter of the 13th century, it consists of 84 different groups of Hebrew texts, with many of its pages decorated with fine art. There are 36 full-page miniatures like this one depicting King David, a shepherd in his youth, playing an instrument. (British Museum [MS 11639], London)

**RABBI ELIYAHU
HAKOHEN HA'ITAMARI**
C. 1659-1729

Preacher and ethicist. Born in Izmir, Turkey, Rabbi Eliyahu Hakohen Ha'Itamari served as a judge on the local rabbinic court and was a popular preacher and author. He is best known for *Shevet Musar*, an ethical work divided into 52 chapters corresponding to the weeks of the year, which has been translated into a number of languages.



FIGURE 1.1

Prayer

תפילה—PRAYER	
אם יִחַטָּא אִישׁ לְאִישׁ וּפְלָלוּ אֱלֹקִים (שְׁמוּאֵל א ב, כה)	הַטּוֹפֵל כְּלֵי חָרָס (מִשְׁנֵה פְלִים ג, ה)
If one commits a crime against another, he will be judged by a judge.	One who glues an earthenware vessel
<i>An introspective exercise of self-judgment</i>	<i>A contemplative practice of cementing a relationship with the Divine</i>



The Forli Siddur (prayer book) for the entire year in the Italian rite was created in Central Italy in 1383 CE. The Hebrew script and illumination were done by Moses ben Jekutiel Hefetz of the Tzifroni family. Additional textual illustrations were later added in the 2nd or 3rd quarter of the 15th century. The page shown here marks the beginning of the Maariv evening prayer. (British Museum [MS 26968], London)



TEXT 2

Meditative Prayer

Mishnah, Berachot 5:1

אין עומדין להתפלל אלא מתוך כבוד ראש. חסידים הראשונים
היו שוהים שעה אחת ומתפללים, כְּדִי שִׁכְנוּנוּ אֶת לְבָבָם לְמַקּוּם.

We must approach prayer with reverence. The early pious sages would pause [in thought] for one hour—so that they could focus their hearts on G-d*—and [only then] pray.

THERE'S MORE...

An assortment of insights into the nature of the sages' meditation—corresponding to the three general meditation categories outlined further below—appears in Appendix A (p. 25).

MISHNAH

The first authoritative work of Jewish law that was codified in writing. The Mishnah contains the oral traditions that were passed down from teacher to student; it supplements, clarifies, and systematizes the commandments of the Torah. Due to the continual persecution of the Jewish people, it became increasingly difficult to guarantee that these traditions would not be forgotten. Rabbi Yehudah Hanasi therefore redacted the Mishnah at the end of the 2nd century. It serves as the foundation for the Talmud.



Rabbi Pinchas Taylor
discusses the history of
Jewish meditation:
myjli.com/meditation

*Throughout this book, “G-d” and “L-rd” are written with a hyphen instead of an “o” (both in our own translations and when quoting others). This is one way we accord reverence to the sacred Divine name. This also reminds us that, even as we seek G-d, He transcends any human effort to describe His reality.



QUESTION

Can you think of several ways in which meditation might advance Jewish goals?



FIGURE 1.2

Meditation

HEBREW TERM	TRANSLATION	MEDITATION PRACTICE
התבודדות <i>hitbodedut</i>	seclusion	transcendence meditation
התבוננות <i>hitbonenut</i>	contemplation	contemplative meditation
כוונה <i>kavanah</i>	focus	mindful awareness or intention meditation

III. THE JEWISH “RELAXATION RESPONSE”

Jewish meditation is primarily focused on providing religious depth, but it also offers the tools to healthier living. We all struggle with negative feelings and experiences, such as anxiety, anger, and self-doubt. Judaism insists that we can overcome these unwanted experiences, and it is eager to offer effective methods of achieving that goal.



EXERCISE 1.3

Record a negative experience that you had in the past month.

Describe the personal impact that resulted from the negative feelings this experience created.



TEXT 3

Conquering Fear

Deuteronomy 20:2-3

וְהָיָה כִּשְׂרָבְכֶם אֶל הַמִּלְחָמָה, וְנִגַּשׁ הַכֹּהֵן וְדִבֶּר אֶל הָעָם.
וְאָמַר אֲלֵהֶם שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל, אַתֶּם קִרְבִּים הַיּוֹם לַמִּלְחָמָה עַל אִיְבֵיכֶם,
אֶל יָדָךְ לְבַבְכֶם, אֶל תִּירְאוּ וְאֶל תִּחְפְּזוּ וְאֶל תִּעַרְצוּ מִפְּנֵיהֶם.

As you approach the battle, the *Kohen* shall come near and speak to the people. He shall say to them: “Hear, Israel! Today you are approaching the battle against your enemies. Do not be discouraged! Do not be afraid! Do not be alarmed or terrified because of them!”



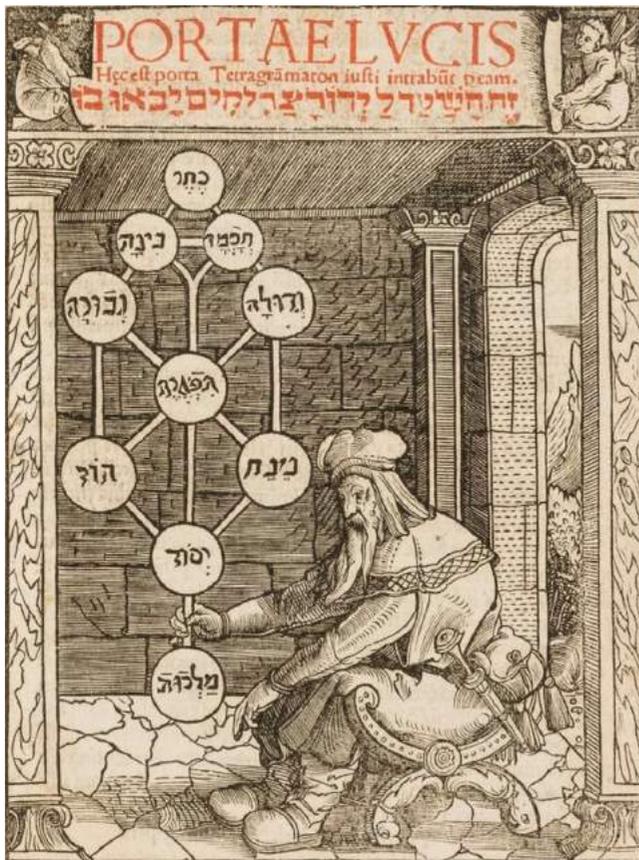
QUESTION

List some of the methods you personally employ to overcome negative feelings and emotions.

IV. THE KABBALAH OF CONSCIOUSNESS

Key to appreciating the mindfulness practice presented in this study is awareness of the spiritual technology that makes it tick. That mechanism can be discovered only by peeking beneath the hood of our souls:

Human souls are equipped with intellect first and emotion second. We therefore process experiences in that precise order. It is our cognitive judgment that triggers our emotions. This soul process operates on the platform of three soul garments, three distinct modes of active consciousness that the soul dons for the sake of processing and interacting with entities and experiences beyond itself in this world.

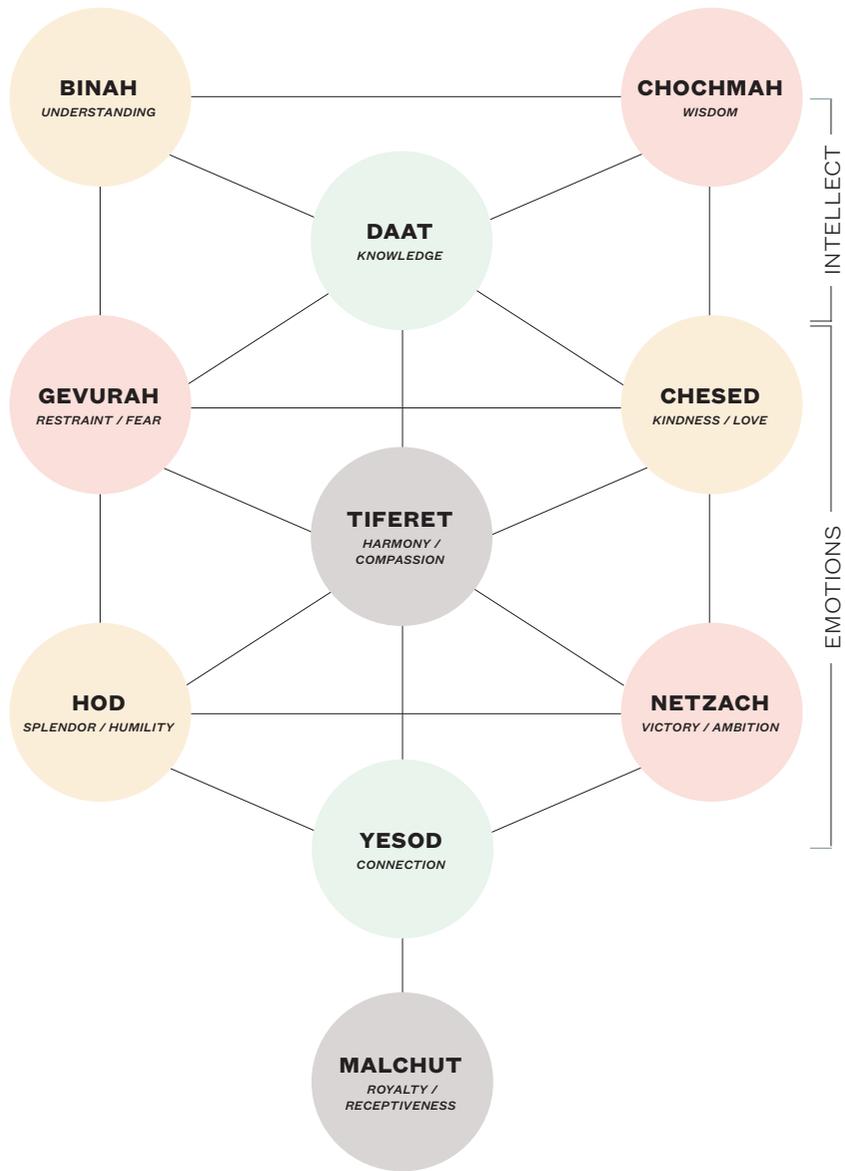


Cover of a copy of an influential kabbalistic work by Rabbi Yosef ben Avraham Gikatilla, a Spanish kabbalist who lived in the mid-13th century. The book is titled *Shaarei Orah—Gates of Light*. This Latin edition was printed in Augsburg in 1516.



FIGURE 1.3

Soul Map





TEXT 4

The Root of Emotion

Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, *Tanya, Likutei Amarim*, ch. 3

וְכָךְ בְּנֶפֶשׁ הָאָדָם, שֶׁנִּחְלָקֶת לְשֵׁתִים:
שֶׁכֶּל וּמְדוּת . . . וְחֻכְמָה בִּינָה דַעַת נִקְרְאוּ אֲמוּת וּמְקוּר
לְמְדוּת, כִּי הַמְדוּת הֵן תּוֹלְדוֹת חֻכְמָה בִּינָה דַעַת.

The human soul is divided into two categories: intelligence and emotion. . . . [The intellectual faculties, namely,] *chochmah* [wisdom], *binah* [understanding], and *daat* [knowledge] are referred to as the mothers and the source of the emotions, for the emotions are the offspring of the intelligence.

**RABBI SHNEUR
ZALMAN OF LIADI
(ALTER REBBE)
1745–1812**



Chasidic rebbe, halachic authority, and founder of the Chabad movement. The Alter Rebbe was born in Liozna, Belarus, and was among the principal students of the Magid of Mezeritch. His numerous works include the *Tanya*, an early classic containing the fundamentals of Chabad Chasidism; and *Shulchan Aruch Harav*, an expanded and reworked code of Jewish law.



FIGURE 1.4

Three Soul Garments

	<i>machshavah</i>	thinking	מַחְשְׁבָה
	<i>dibur</i>	speaking	דְּבוּר
	<i>maaseh</i>	doing	מַעֲשֵׂה



FIGURE 1.5

Regular Soul Process



A manuscript of the *Tanya* written in the late 18th century. This handwritten copy predates the first edition printed in Slavuta in 1796 CE. It contains a letter captioned "A letter from my master and teacher" that was eventually used as the introduction to the printed *Tanya*. (British Library [OR 10456], London)

V. INTENTIONAL THINKING

Being aware of the process that produced our negative feelings permits us to identify methods of taming them. Our simplest method is to pull out the rug from under these feelings by shifting our thoughts to something positive.

Firstly, depriving our intellectual attention of negativity prevents our swirling mental judgments from developing funnel clouds of negative emotion. Secondly, we can actively insert a positive focus in its place, feeding positivity to our intellectual palates, to produce offspring of pleasantly positive emotions.



TEXT 5

You Are in Control

Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, *Tanya, Likutei Amarim*, ch. 12

כִּי הַמוֹחַ שְׁלִיט עַל הַלֵּב בְּתוֹלְדוֹתוֹ וְטַבֵּעַ יְצִירָתוֹ, שֶׁכֶּן נּוֹצֵר הָאָדָם
בְּתוֹלְדוֹתוֹ, שֶׁכָּל אָדָם יְכוּל בְּרִצּוֹנוֹ שֶׁבְּמוֹחוֹ לְהִתְאַפֵּק וְלִמְשׁוֹל
בְּרוּחַ תְּאַנּוֹתוֹ שֶׁבְּלִבּוֹ, שֶׁלֹּא לְמִלֵּאת מְשֻׁאֲלוֹת לִבּוֹ בְּמַעֲשֵׂה דַבּוּר
וּמַחֲשָׁבָה, וּלְהַסִּיחַ דַּעְתּוֹ לְגַמְרֵי מִתְאַוֹת לִבּוֹ אֶל הַהֶפֶךְ לְגַמְרֵי.

The mind naturally controls the heart. Humans were created from birth with the ability to exercise willpower to control the drives of our hearts, so that they not be expressed in our behavior, speech, or thought. We are able to divert our attention completely from things our hearts crave to something entirely different.

THERE'S MORE...

A practical tool for becoming more consciously aware of our thoughts, using a breathing technique, is provided in Appendix B (p. 28).



TEXT 6

Dissolving Anxiety by Distraction

Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Lubavitch, *Igrot Kodesh*, p. 19

וְאִם אִם מִפְּחַד בְּלִבּוֹ, יוּכַל לְסַלֵּק הַמַּחְשְׁבָה דִּיבוּר וּמַעֲשֵׂהָ.
וְהַעֲיָקֵר שְׂלֵא לְחֻשׁוֹב וּלְדַבֵּר מִזֶּה כָּלֵל, אֲלֵא לְצַד הַהִיפּוּךְ...
וּמִיֵּד שְׂלֵא יְחֻשׁוֹב בְּזֶה כָּלֵל, מִמִּילָא יִתְבַּטֵּל גַּם הַפְּחַד שְׂבִלְבּוֹ. וְעַל
כָּל פְּנִימִים, מִיֵּד יִהְיֶה הַפְּחַד כְּאֵלוֹ הוּא יִשּׁוּן וְאִינוֹ נִרְגָּשׁ בְּגוּף, וּבְמַשְׁוֹךְ
יָמִים אַחֲדִים יִתְבַּטֵּל לְגַמְרֵי עַד שְׂלֵא יִפּוֹל בְּמוֹחוֹ כָּלֵל...
וְהַטַּעַם לָזֶה שֶׁעַל יְדֵי סִילּוּק הַמַּחְשְׁבָה יִתְבַּטֵּל הַפְּחַד
הוּא, לְפִי שֶׁכָּל הַמְדוּת קִיּוּמָן מִהַדְּעָת... עַל יְדֵי אֲמֻצָּעוֹת
הַמַּחְשְׁבָה. וְלָכֵן עַל יְדֵי סִילּוּק הַמַּחְשְׁבָה, הָרִי זֶה מִמִּילָא
הִסַּח הַדְּעָת מִהַמְדָּה, וְאִז אֵין הַמְדָּה מִתְעוֹרָרָת...
וְהִנֵּה רְאוּי לְמַעֲלָתוֹ לְלַמּוֹד אֶת עֲצָמוֹ מִכָּל מְרָה שְׁחוּרָה,
שִׁישׁ לְאָדָם לְסַלֵּק הַפְּחַד מִלִּבּוֹ אִם בְּמִקּוֹם שִׁישׁ מִמָּה לְפָחַד,
כְּמוֹ שֶׁכְּתֻבָּתִי. וְכָל שֶׁכֵּן בְּגִדּוֹן דְּמַעֲלָתוֹ, שֶׁבְּרוּךְ הַשֵּׁם אֵין לוֹ
מִמָּה לְפָחַד כָּלֵל וְכָלֵל, בֵּין בְּבְרִיאוֹת הַגּוּף וּבֵין בְּמַמוֹנוֹ.

Even if we are emotionally afraid, we are able to divorce our thought, speech, and action from that emotion. The essential thing is not to contemplate or discuss the fear at all, but to do the perfect opposite. . . .

Immediately upon letting go of the thought entirely, the fear will dissolve on its own. At the very least,

**RABBI MENACHEM
MENDEL OF LUBAVITCH
(TZEMACH TZEDEK)
1789-1866**



Chasidic rebbe and noted author. The *Tzemach Tzedek* was the third leader of the Chabad Chasidic movement and a noted authority on Jewish law. His numerous works include halachic responsa, Chasidic discourses, and kabbalistic writings. Active in the communal affairs of Russian Jewry, he worked to alleviate the plight of the cantonists, Jewish children kidnapped to serve in the Czar's army. He passed away in Lubavitch, leaving seven sons and two daughters.

it will become instantly dormant and not felt in the body. Then, over the course of several days, it will completely dissolve, to the point that it will not enter our mind at all. . . .

Removal of the thought leads to dissipation of the fear because emotions are entirely reliant upon intellectual focus (*daat*) for their existence . . . which requires active thought. Therefore, by removing our thought from the matter, the intellectual power (*daat*) is withdrawn from the emotion, with the result that the emotion ceases to be activated. . . .

It is worth training yourself to remove all negativity, for we must rid ourselves from all fear, including justifiable fear, as I wrote. This is certainly true in your case, where there is nothing to worry about whatsoever—thank G-d!—in terms of your health and financial situation.



REBBE IN FOREST
Zalman Kleinman (1933-1995)



TEXT 7

Positive Distraction

Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Lubavitch, Ibid., p. 21

אַךְ עֵיקַר הַיִּסָּח הַדַּעַת וְהַמְחַשְׁבָּה הוּא עַל יְדֵי שִׁישְׁמוֹר
מִחֲשַׁבְתּוֹ לְהַלְבִּישָׁה בְּעִנְיָנִים אַחֲרִים, דְּהֵינּוּ אִפִּילוּ בְּעִנְיָנִים
דְּהֵאִי עֲלָמָא הַנְּצָרְכִים וּמְשֻׁמְחִים, וּבִתְוֹרַת ה' הַמְשֻׁמְחִים לֵב
דְּבַר יוֹם בְּיוֹם בְּקִבְעוּת עֵתִים לְתוֹרָה, וּבְפֶרֶט עִם עוֹד אֶחָד.

The primary method of removing worrying thoughts from your mind is by redirecting your mind toward other matters. You can replace them with thoughts of necessary material matters that bring you joy, and you can contemplate G-d's Torah that delights the heart. The latter is best achieved through creating a fixed schedule of daily Torah study, which is particularly effective with a study partner.



FIGURE 1.6

Thought-Induced Soul Process

Thought ► Judgment/Understanding ► Emotion



Neuroscientist
Dr. Michael Merzenich
on the brain's amazing
ability to change:
myjli.com/meditation

VI. THE POWER OF POSITIVITY

Positive meditation is more than a psychological life hack. The mystics reveal that thinking positively actually shifts reality. Our thoughts place us into a mental space that allows us to align with a specific flow of Divine energy and channel it into our world. Meditating on something positive directs a positive flow of energy, which has a positive impact on reality.



TEXT 8

Real Impact

Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Lubavitch, *Ibid.*, p. 21

אֲדַרְבֵּה לְדַבֵּר וְלַעֲשׂוֹת כִּנְל, וְאִזּוּ יִקְבְּעוּ כֵּן הַמְדוֹת בְּנַפְשׁוֹ,
 וְכִכָּה יַעֲרָה עָלָיו רוּחַ מְמָרוֹם בְּשִׂמְחָה וּבְטוֹב לֵבָב. וְכֵן שְׂמֵעֵתִי
 מְאַאֲזֵמוֹר ז"ל, שֶׁכֶּף הָיָה הָרַב הַמְגִיד נ"ע אֹמֵר עַל פְּסוּק
 (יְחִזְקֵאל א, כו) "כִּמְרֹאֶה אָדָם עָלָיו מְלַמְעֵלָה", שֶׁכֶּפִי הַמְדָּה
 שֶׁהָאָדָם מְרֹאֶה מְלַמְטָה, כֶּף מְרֹאִין לוֹ מְלַמְעֵלָה. וְלָכֵן מְנַע אֹתִי
 מִלְשׁוֹרֵר נִגּוֹן שֵׁישׁ בּוֹ מְרָה שְׁחֹרָה בְּתַפְלַת עַרְבִית, וְהִמְתִּין לִי עַד
 שֶׁסִּמְתִּי אֶת תַּפְלַתִּי, וְאַחַר כֶּף אָמַר לִי בְּשֵׁם הָרַב הַמְגִיד ז"ל.

To the contrary, you should speak and act [in a manner that projects positivity,] as described above, so that these positive emotions will be established within you. In this way, a spirit of joy and good-heartedness will descend upon you from Above. I say this on the basis of a teaching I received from my holy grandfather, of blessed memory, who shared an insight—authored by Rabbi DovBer, the Magid of Mezeritch—into the verse, “Like a person’s appearance upon it—from above” (EZEKIEL 1:26).

The Magid would read the verse [this way]:
 According to the feelings a person displays down here in this world (“Like a person’s appearance”), so is the nature of that which rests upon the person from Above (“upon it from above”). In light of this teaching, my grandfather, Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, did not permit me to sing a melancholy tune during the evening prayer. After I had completed the prayer, he explained his reasoning [for objecting to my choice of melody], and shared the above insight in the name of the Magid, of blessed memory.



A page from the second volume of a Tanach copied and illuminated on parchment in Italy, in the last quarter of the 13th century. This decorated panel is the beginning of the Book of Ezekiel. (British Museum [Harley MS 5711], London)



TEXT 9

A Balanced World

Midrash, *Bereshit Rabah* 12 :15

לְמַלְךְ שֶׁהָיוּ לוֹ כּוֹסוֹת רִיקִים, אָמַר הַמֶּלֶךְ, אִם אֲנִי נוֹתֵן לְתוֹכָן חֲמִין, הֵם מִתְּבַקְעִין. צוֹנֵן, הֵם מִקְרִיסִין. וְכִּי עָשָׂה הַמֶּלֶךְ? עָרַב חֲמִין בְּצוֹנֵן וְנָתַן בֵּהֶם וְעָמְדוּ. כִּי אָמַר הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא, אִם בּוֹרֵא אֲנִי אֶת הָעוֹלָם בְּמִדַּת הַרְחָמִים, הָיוּ חֲטֻיָּהּ סְגִיאִין. בְּמִדַּת הַדִּין, הָאֵיךְ הָעוֹלָם יְכוּל לְעִמּוֹד?! אֶלֶּא הֲרִי אֲנִי בּוֹרֵא אוֹתוֹ בְּמִדַּת הַדִּין וּבְמִדַּת הַרְחָמִים, וְהָלוֹא יַעֲמֹד.

This is analogous to a king who had empty glasses. The king told himself, “If I pour hot water in them, they will burst. If I pour freezing water in them, they will crack.” What did the king do? He mixed hot water with frigid water and poured the blend into the glasses.

Similarly, G-d said: “If I create the world with the attribute of compassion [alone], people will be unconcerned with the consequences of their actions. If I use the attribute of judgment [alone], the world will not survive [the judgment of honest scrutiny]. Rather, I will create it with [a blend of] the attribute of judgment and the attribute of compassion, and I hope that it will endure.”

BERESHIT RABAH

An early rabbinic commentary on the Book of Genesis. This Midrash bears the name of Rabbi Oshiya Rabah (Rabbi Oshiya “the Great”), whose teaching opens this work. This Midrash provides textual exegeses and stories, expounds upon the biblical narrative, and develops and illustrates moral principles. Produced by the sages of the Talmud in the Land of Israel, its use of Aramaic closely resembles that of the Jerusalem Talmud. It was first printed in Constantinople in 1512 together with 4 other Midrashic works on the other 4 books of the Pentateuch.





TEXT 10

The World Is in Our Hands

Zohar, vol. 2, 179b

תא חזי: עלקמא תתנאה קימא לקבלא תדיר . . .
 ועלקמא עלאה לא יהיב ליה אלא קגונא דאיהו קימא, אי איהו
 קימא בנהירו דאנפין מתתא, כדין הכי נהרין ליה מעילא.
 ואי איהו קימא בעציבו, יתבין ליה דינא בקבליה.
 קגונא דא (תהלים ק, ב) "עבדו את ה' בשמחה", חדוה
 דבר נש משיך לגביה חדוה אחרא עלאה.

Come and observe! Our world is always
 ready to receive [the spiritual flow
 that emanates from Above]. . . .

The Upper World provides in accordance with
 the [emotional] state below [in this world]: if
 the state below is joyous, then, correspondingly,
 abundance flows from Above; but if the state
 below is one of sadness, then, correspondingly,
 the flow of blessing is constricted.

We are therefore directed, "Serve G-d with
 joy" (PSALMS 100:2), because mortal
 joy elicits corresponding supernal joy.

ZOHAR

The seminal work of kabbalah, Jewish mysticism. The *Zohar* is a mystical commentary on the Torah, written in Aramaic and Hebrew. According to the Arizal, the *Zohar* contains the teachings of Rabbi Shimon bar Yocha'i, who lived in the Land of Israel during the 2nd century. The *Zohar* has become one of the indispensable texts of traditional Judaism, alongside and nearly equal in stature to the Mishnah and Talmud.



Mrs. Sara Esther Crispe
 explores the power of our
 thoughts and the power we
 have over them:
myjli.com/meditation



TEXT 11

You Are What You Think

Rabbi Yisrael Baal Shem Tov, *Keter Shem Tov* 230

”הבוטח בה' חסד יסובבנו” (תהלים לב, י). ומי שהוא להפך ומתירא
תמיד מהענש, הוא מדבק עצמו בדינים, וחס ושלוש שלא תבוא
לו רעה, כמו שפיתוב ”ומגורתם הביא להם” (ישעיהו סו, ד).

כי בכל ענין שאדם חושב עליו, הוא נדבק בו, ואם
הוא חושב על הדין - הוא נדבק בדין, ואם הוא בוטח
בחסד - שם תדבק נשמתו, ”חסד יסובבנו”.

The psalmist states that “one who trusts in G-d will be enveloped in kindness” (PSALMS: 32:10). We can infer the reverse as well: one who is constantly anxious of punishment associates themselves with strict judgment that can lead to negative consequences (G-d forbid!), in line with the verse (ISAIAH 66:4), “Their fears I will bring to them.”

We become attached to whatever we contemplate. If we contemplate matters associated with severity, we become attached to judgment. If we trust in G-d’s kindness, our souls will become attached to that kindness, and we will indeed “be enveloped in kindness.”

**RABBI YISRAEL
BAAL SHEM TOV
(BESHT)
1698-1760**

Founder of the Chasidic movement. Born in Slutsk, Belarus, the Baal Shem Tov was orphaned as a child. He served as a teacher’s assistant and clay digger before founding the Chasidic movement and revolutionizing the Jewish world with his emphasis on prayer, joy, and love for every Jew, regardless of his or her level of Torah knowledge.





FIGURE 1.7

Mind over Matter: Contemporary Intervention Techniques

The mind possesses tremendous power, capable of controlling and regulating so much of our lives. Indeed, many therapies have been developed on this basic premise: your mind can regulate your emotions.

TABLE 1

Glossary of intervention techniques

Summary of mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) and main evidence-based targeted conditions.

MBI	Main conditions with evidence support for MBI
MBSR	Stress, burnout (health professions) Chronic pain (low-back pain, fibromyalgia) Cancer
MBCT	Manic depressive disorder (relapse prevention and acute treatment), bipolar disorder
MBRP	Substance use disorders (relapse prevention)
ACT	Chronic pain, anxiety, and depressive disorders
DBT	Borderline personality disorder, substance use disorder

MBSR

“MINDFULNESS-BASED STRESS REDUCTION”

An intensive training regimen focused on developing mindfulness techniques, originally developed in the late 1970s by Dr. Jon Kabat-Zinn. The training includes formal meditation techniques (such as sitting meditation) as well as informal meditation techniques (such as mindfulness while eating or conducting routine activities). The goal of this training is for participants to cultivate “a stable and nonreactive present-moment awareness.”¹

MBCT

“MINDFULNESS-BASED COGNITIVE THERAPY”

Developed in the 1990s by a group of research psychologists to target depression, this approach combines MBSR with cognitive behavioral therapy (a form of therapy that attempts to adjust maladaptive patterns of thought and behavior).² Like MBSR, this therapy usually consists of intensive training in formal and informal meditation techniques, but also includes training for identifying and diffusing negative patterns of thought.³

MBRP

“MINDFULNESS-BASED RELAPSE PREVENTION”

Designed to prevent relapse in patients recovering from addictive behaviors, this program was engineered by a group of addiction specialists in the early 2000s. Like MBCT, it combines mindfulness with cognitive behavioral therapy techniques, training participants in both. Together, these techniques help individuals identify their personal triggers for addictive behavior, notice when they have become triggered, and respond to addictive triggering in adaptive ways.⁴

ACT

“ACCEPTANCE AND COMMITMENT THERAPY”

This therapy uses a combination of mindfulness and psychotherapy techniques to help participants accept potentially painful psychological experiences. The aim is to thereby enhance the

patient’s “psychological flexibility”: the ability to fully engage the present moment and act on it in accordance with one’s chosen values.

DBT

“DIALECTICAL BEHAVIORAL THERAPY”

Originally developed in the early 1990s by Dr. Marsha Linehan for treating borderline personality disorder, this therapy has since been expanded to treat a wide range of psychopathologies, including eating disorders, mood disorders, substance abuse disorders, and post-traumatic stress disorder. The core of its therapy is mindfulness training, which is then used as a foundation for teaching skills in maintaining healthy relationships, effectively controlling one’s emotions, and coping with psychological distress. Therapy typically lasts for approximately six months.⁵

1. John J. Miller, et al., “Three-Year Follow-Up and Clinical Implications of a Mindfulness Meditation-Based Stress Reduction Intervention in the Treatment of Anxiety Disorders,” *General Hospital Psychiatry*, Volume 17, Issue 3, 1995, p. 193, ISSN 0163-8343, [https://doi.org/10.1016/0163-8343\(95\)00025-M](https://doi.org/10.1016/0163-8343(95)00025-M).

2. Segal, Z. V., et al. *Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Behavior Therapy for Depression: A New Approach to Preventing Relapse* (New York, N.Y.: Guilford Press, 2002).

3. Eisendrath, S. J., “Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy: Theory and Practice,” *The Canadian Journal of Psychiatry*, 57(2), 2012: pp. 63–69. doi:10.1177/070674371205700202.

4. Bowen, S., et al., *Mindfulness-Based Relapse Prevention for Addictive Behaviors: a Clinician’s Guide*. (New York, N.Y.: Guilford Press, 2010).

5. May, Jennifer M., et al., “Dialectical Behavior Therapy as Treatment for Borderline Personality Disorder,” *Mental Health Clinician*, 6 (2), 1 March 2016: pp. 62–67. <https://doi.org/10.9740/mhc.2016.03.62>.

KEY POINTS

- 1 Meditation is an authentic Jewish practice that plays a large role in Jewish life.
- 2 We have control over our feelings and have the capacity to overcome negative feelings and experiences.
- 3 We have the ability to be in control of our thoughts and can choose what we think about at any given moment.
- 4 Our thinking feeds our emotions. By getting rid of negative thoughts, we cut off negative feelings.
- 5 Meditating on positive thoughts develops a positive mindset and positive emotions.
- 6 Positive meditation actually impacts the world around us and elicits a positive response from G-d, which shapes reality for the good.

APPENDIX A

Earlier (in Text 2), we learned about a meditation that the rabbis would practice before prayer: “The early pious sages would pause [in thought] for one hour—so that they could focus their hearts on G-d—and [only then] pray” (Mishnah, Berachot 5:1). Here is an assortment of insights into the nature of their meditation.



TEXT 12

Focus Meditation

Maimonides, Berachot 5:1

וּפְרוּשׁ שׁוֹהֵיִן - מִתְעַכְבִּין. רוֹצֵה לִזְמַר שֶׁהוּן מִתְעַכְבִּין
 קִדְּם הַתְּפִלָּה שְׁעָה אַחַת כְּדִי לְיִשֵּׁב דַּעְתָּם
 וּלְהַשְׁקִיט מִחֲשִׁבוֹתָם, וְאַזּוּ יִתְחִילוּ בַתְּפִלָּה.

The meaning of *shobin* is “waiting.” They would pause for an hour before prayer in order to calm their minds and to quiet their thoughts. Only then would they begin to pray.



SHACHARIT
 Yehoshua Wiseman, Israel

**RABBI MOSHE
 BEN MAIMON
 (MAIMONIDES, RAMBAM)
 1135-1204**



Halachist, philosopher, author, and physician. Maimonides was born in Córdoba, Spain. After the conquest of Córdoba by the Almohads, he fled Spain and eventually settled in Cairo, Egypt. There, he became the leader of the Jewish community and served as court physician to the vizier of Egypt. He is most noted for authoring the *Mishneh Torah*, an encyclopedic arrangement of Jewish law; and for his philosophical work, *Guide for the Perplexed*. His rulings on Jewish law are integral to the formation of halachic consensus.



TEXT 13

Contemplative Meditation

Rabbi Yonah of Gerona, Berachot 5:1

יש מְפַרְשִׁים כְּדִי שְׂפִנּוּ טְרַדַת הַמַּחְשְׁבוֹת וַיִּכְנְנוּ בְּאַמִּירַת הַתְּפִלָּה.
וְאִין זֶה נִרְאֶה לְמוֹרֵי הָרַב נר"ו, דְּאִם כֵּן לֹא הָיָה לוֹ לומר לְמַקּוֹם,
אֶלָּא לְתַפְלָתָם . . . אֶלָּא וְדֹא כֵּן הוּא הַפְּרוּשׁ, כְּדִי שְׂיִכְנְנוּ שְׂיִהְיֶה
לְבָבָם שְׁלֵם בְּעִבּוּדַת הַמְּקוֹם, וַיִּבְטְלוּ מִלְּבָבָם תַּעֲנֹגֵי הָעוֹלָם הַזֶּה
וְהִנְאוּתֵיהֶם. כִּי פְּשִׁטְהֵרוּ לְבָבָם מִהַבְּלֵי הָעוֹלָם הַזֶּה, וַיְהִי כִּנְנָתָם
בְּרוֹמָמוֹת הַשָּׁמַיִם, תְּהִיָּה תְּפִלָּתָם רְצוּיָה וּמְקַבֶּלֶת לְפָנֵי הַמְּקוֹם.

Some explain that they would pause to remove mental distractions for the sake of concentrating on reciting their prayers, to the exclusion of all other concerns.

However, if that were the case, the Mishnah would have said, “focus their hearts on their prayers” instead of “focus their hearts on G-d.”

Rather, the meaning is that they intended for their hearts to be wholesome in their service of G-d by eradicating any vestige of corporeal or material desire from their hearts. By emptying their hearts from the fleeting pleasures and benefits of the material world and focusing on the greatness of G-d to the exclusion of material existence, their prayers would be worthy and accepted by G-d.

RABBI YONAH OF GERONA
C. 1210–C. 1263

Spanish talmudist and ethicist. A native of Gerona, Catalonia, Rabbi Yonah studied with leading figures of the Tosafist school in France, thus combining Ashkenazic and Sefardic scholarship. He wrote biblical and talmudic commentaries, and he is best known for his moralistic works on repentance and ethical conduct.





TEXT 14

Mystical Meditation

Rabbi Elazar Azikri, *Sefer Charedim* 65

וְזֶהוּ שְׁשָׁנֵינוּ, "חֲסִידִים הָרִאשׁוֹנִים הָיוּ שׁוֹהֵינן שְׁעָה אַחַת
וּמְתַפְּלִים, כְּדִי שְׂיִכְוְנוּ לְמָקוֹם." שֶׁהָיוּ בְּטָלִים מִלְמוּדָם
וּמִלְאַכְתָּם לְהִתְבּוֹדְדוּת וְהִדְבִּיקוּת, וּמִדְמִין אֹר שְׂכִינָה שְׁעַל
רְאשֵׁיהֶם כְּאִלוּ מְתַפְּשֵׁט סְבִיבָם, וְהֵם בְּתוֹךְ הָאֹר יוֹשְׁבִים.

We have been taught that “the early pious sages would pause [in thought] for one hour—so that they could focus their hearts on G-d—and [only then] pray.” They would cease studying and strive to meditate and cleave to G-d. They would picture the light of G-d’s presence [*Shechinah*] above their heads as if it were spreading all around them until they were sitting within that light.



KABBALIST
Tommaso Garzoni, 1641,
woodcut print on paper.
(Deutsche Fotothek of the
Saxon State Library/State
and University Library
Dresden [88967185])

**RABBI ELAZAR BEN
MOSHE AZIKRI**
1533–1600

Kabbalist, poet, and author, born in Safed to a Sefardic family that settled in the Holy Land after the Expulsion from Spain. Rabbi Elazar studied Torah under Rabbi Yosef Sagis and Rabbi Yaakov Berab and is counted with the greatest rabbis and intellectuals of his time. Rabbi Elazar authored the *Sefer Charedim*, a work focused on ethics, morals, and personality development. It was printed after his death in 1600. He composed the ode “Yedid Nefesh,” traditionally sung in many communities before Kabbalat Shabbat and/or at the third Shabbat meal.

APPENDIX B



TEXT 15

Accessing the Subconscious

Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan, *Jewish Meditation*
(New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2011), pp. 5–6

This explains why so many disciplines use breathing exercises as a meditative device. Breathing usually occurs automatically and is therefore normally under the control of the unconscious mind. Unless you are consciously controlling your breathing, it will mirror your unconscious mood. This is one reason why breathing is one of the indicators in a lie detector test.

Yet, if you wish, you can control your breath, and do so quite easily. Breathing therefore forms a link between the conscious mind and the unconscious. By learning how to concentrate on and control your breath you can go on to learn how to control the unconscious mind. . . .

One learns to use the conscious mind to control mental processes that are usually under the control of the unconscious. Gradually, more and more of the subconscious becomes accessible to the conscious mind, and one gains control of the entire thought process.

RABBI ARYEH KAPLAN 1934–1983



American rabbi, author, and physicist. Rabbi Kaplan authored more than 50 volumes on Torah, Talmud, Jewish mysticism, and philosophy, many of which have become modern-day classics. He is best known for his popular translation and elucidation of the Bible, *The Living Torah*; and his translation of the Ladino biblical commentary, *Me'am Lo'ez*.

Count Your Blessings

A series of blessings customarily recited each morning is collectively known as *Birchat Hashachar*—the Morning Blessings. Each of these calls attention to another element of the daily human experience that is otherwise taken for granted. These daily blessings provide an opportunity to pause and reflect on our good fortune for the basic underpinnings and purpose of life, and they encourage us to express gratitude to G-d for gifting us with the functions and roles described in the blessings.

Taking the time to enter a gratitude mindset each morning is a surefire method of channeling goodness and positivity into your day. All it takes is a little mindfulness and a couple of minutes.

Brief explanations have been added to the following excerpt from the first part of the Morning Blessings:

1 THE ROOSTER

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה', אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,
הַנוֹתֵן לְשִׁבּוֹי בִּינָה לְהַבְחִין בֵּין יוֹם וּבֵין לַיְלָה.

*Blessed are You, G-d, King of the universe,
Who grants the rooster the understanding
to distinguish between day and night.*

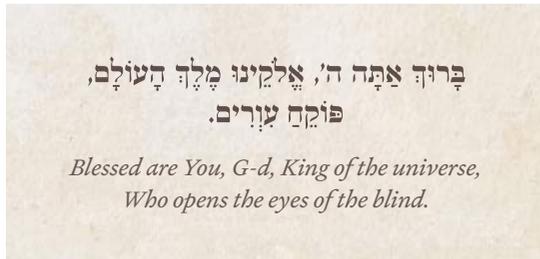
Before electrical alarm clocks, people relied on nature's alarm clock—the rooster—to awaken at dawn. This blessing was a way to thank G-d for providing a reliable method of timely arousal from sleep. As we recite the blessing today, we bear in mind (a) whichever of G-d's marvels we use to wake up each morning, and (b) the diverse wonders of nature found in the animal kingdom.

Each prayer offers multiple layers of significance. A deeper insight notes¹ that the text employs a rare Hebrew term for rooster, *sechvi*, which carries an alternate translation, “heart.” We thank G-d for granting us the mental and emotional capacity to distinguish between moral day and night—between that which is good, sacred, and worthy, and the opposite. This is a morning blessing, to remind us that throughout our day we will face choices that require a moral compass and an inner strength to embrace the good and distance ourselves from its opposite.

1. Rosh, Berachot 9:23.

Count Your Blessings *continued*

2 VISION



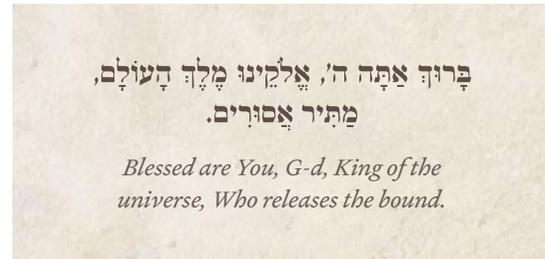
The human eye is an astonishing, complex organ. To avoid taking this major miracle for granted, we thank G-d each day for the blessing of sight.

Helen Keller (who was blind) famously said, “Recently I was visited by a very good friend who had just returned from a long walk in the woods, and I asked her what she had observed. ‘Nothing in particular,’ she replied. I might have been incredulous had I not been accustomed to such responses, for long ago I became convinced that the seeing see little.”

A Chasidic deeper insight² views this blessing as addressing the gift of being able to see the bigger picture. Poor decisions are often due to shortsightedness or a failure to see beneath the surface. Conversely, positive and Divine choices arrive upon exercising our mental ability to view the larger truth: a truly valuable gift.

2. Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Lubavitch, *Or HaTorah Maamarei Chazal*, p. 306.

3 STRETCHING THE LIMBS



Our limbs barely move or stretch as we sleep; we largely appear as if we were bound. Upon awakening we begin to move and stretch, and we thank G-d for the gift of movement.

A deeper insight³ sees this as a reference to the battle between the two souls within us. Our natural, impulsive soul holds a greater grip on our conscious character and daily choices. By contrast, our pristine, Divine soul is largely a prisoner of the former. The Divine soul longs to find joy in sacred endeavors but is shackled by our animalistic impulses and goals. There are moments, however, when our Divine soul succeeds in breaking free from captivity and it shines through our noble deeds. Our ability to tip the scales in favor of our Divine soul is a gift from G-d. Each morning, we thank G-d for the power to overcome our baser instincts and to act in accordance with our Divine core.

3. Rabbi DovBer of Lubavitch, *Torat Chayim*, Shemot 1, p. 74c.

4 SITTING UP

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה', אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,
זוֹקֵר כְּפוּפִים.

*Blessed are You, G-d, King of the universe,
Who straightens those who are stooped.*

After lying prone in a horizontal position for hours, we thank G-d for the ability to prop our bodies up.

Looking deeper,⁴ our head and the rest of our body are of similar altitude while we rest horizontally. We are similar to animals, whose heads are more or less on the same level as their bodies. A feature of human uniqueness is our ability to stand erect, with our head securely above and leading our body. This posture implies that our minds can control our impulses. As we thank G-d for our ability to sit up, we reflect on the Divine gift—the ability to use the mind to regulate emotions, thereby warding off pettiness, anger, and similar destructive emotional forces.

4. See Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Lubavitch, *Or HaTorah, Maamarei Chazal*, p. 306.

5 CLOTHING

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה', אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,
מְלַבֵּשׁ עֲרֻמִּים.

*Blessed are You, G-d, King of the universe,
Who clothes the naked.*

We thank G-d for the clothing we wear each day. At the dawn of time, G-d personally fashioned clothing for Adam and Eve, who realized their nakedness after committing the first sin. The Torah subsequently commanded us to follow G-d's example, including providing clothing for those in need.

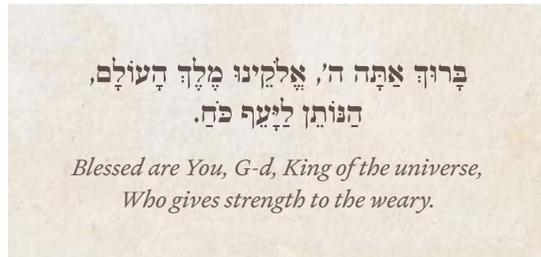
Included in this blessing is a reminder and appreciation for our inherent sense of modesty and decency that, among other things, instinctively compels us to don clothing.

A deeper reflection draws our attention to the clothing of our soul—namely, the *mitzvot*. As clothing and work gear enable us to operate, so do soul-garments allow the soul to function in this world. We thank G-d at the start of each day for the tremendous opportunity to connect with Him through the gift of *mitzvot*.⁵

5. See *Or HaTorah*, *Ibid*.

Count Your Blessings *continued*

6 STRENGTH TO THE WEARY

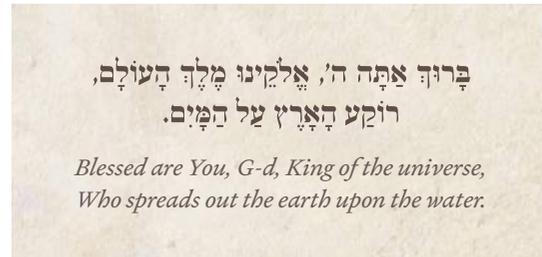


After awakening, moving, and getting dressed, we begin to internalize that refreshed morning feeling—and thank G-d for our new dose of energy.

Looking deeper, there are moments in our lifelong spiritual journey when fatigue sets in, inspiration runs dry, and we are left feeling lifeless in terms of zeal or motivation. Then, G-d reaches out and awakens us with a jolt—we are reenergized and eternally grateful.⁶

6. See *Or HaTorah*, *Ibid.*

7 HABITABLE LAND



As we move to take our first steps of a fresh day, we thank G-d for terra firma. The Torah relates that at the start of Creation, all the earth was covered by deep water, until on the third day of Creation, G-d divided the surface of the globe between oceans and dry land, although water may be present deeper within. We thank G-d for His kindness in providing us with habitable terrain and the ability to maneuver across it.

Digging deeper, the vast ocean symbolizes unlimited aspirations, big ideas. However, without demarcation to ensure a concrete start and end, it all remains a dream. Every vision requires a line in the sand to contain and channel it, like the earth contains and stems the tide of the endless ocean. We thank G-d for our internal oceans—aspirations and visions—and even more so for the land spread upon it: the ability for practical implementation.⁷

7. Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook, *Olat Rei'ayah*, Morning Blessings.

8 THE STEPS OF HUMANKIND

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה', אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,
הַמְכִיִן מִצְעָדֵי גֵבֶר.

*Blessed are You, G-d, King of the universe,
Who directs the steps of humanity.*

As parents cheer excitedly for a baby's first step, this blessing reminds us to reflect and experience wonder and gratitude for *each* step we take, each day of our lives. Repetition dulls our attention to the marvel of walking, but a moment of reflection restores it.

From a deeper perspective, we cannot take a single step in life—in the sense of implementing a decision—without Divine direction. Our logical and emotional motivations for making a move exist only because G-d previously ordained that precise move, to serve a purpose of which we may be entirely unaware. All the unique elements of our life story that shape our character and experience are steps guided by G-d, placing us into settings in which we are uniquely outfitted to accomplish in this world.⁸

8. See Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Lubavitch, *Or HaTorah, Maamarei Chazal*, p. 307.

9 PROVIDES ALL MY NEEDS

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה', אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,
שֶׁעָשָׂה לִי כָּל צְרָכָי.

*Blessed are You, G-d, King of the universe,
Who has provided me with all my needs.*

Our sages⁹ associate this blessing with tying shoes or securing footgear. The “steps of humanity” (previous blessing) are made easier with protected feet. Indeed, on the two dates in the Jewish calendar (Yom Kippur and the Ninth of Av) on which leather footwear is prohibited, we omit this blessing.

In a mystical sense, “all my needs” includes spiritual requirements. We thank G-d for a universe filled with material and also spiritual potential.¹⁰

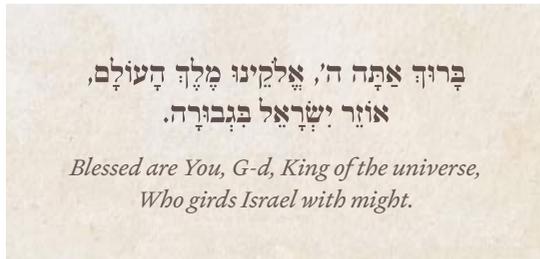
The blessing employs the past tense—“*Who has provided.*” G-d has already allocated our needs and has orchestrated methods of delivering those blessings. The work we do to earn a profit or paycheck is simply a tool to channel those blessings to us—a concept worth recalling before leaving for work, to exchange pressure and panic for positivity and trust.

9. Talmud, Berachot 60b.

10. Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook, *Olat Rei'yah, Morning Blessings*.

Count Your Blessings *continued*

10 BELT



The Talmud¹¹ associates this blessing with tying a belt around the waist, the common way of securing the loose robes of antiquity before leaving home. It also carried the connotation of strength—a tight belt supports the torso during strenuous activities—and also power and prestige, for the belt held money pouches and weapons. We thank G-d for our strength as well as any honor G-d provides us.

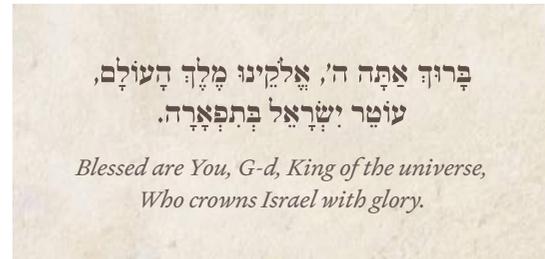
Looking deeper, the belt is a tool that binds two entities, holding them in a mighty embrace. For a Jew, it symbolizes our close attachment to G-d. We thank G-d for His incredible closeness to us, and we acknowledge that our unique Divine intimacy empowers us to overcome the hardships of our history and the challenges of daily life.

On a more personal note, we bless G-d for girding us with the moral strength to overcome our base impulses.¹²

11. Talmud, Berachot 60b.

12. Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Lubavitch, *Or HaTorah, Maamarei Chazal*, p. 307.

11 HAT



Our ancient sages¹³ associate this blessing with headgear—no Jew would leave home without it.

For millennia, headgear has been a hallmark feature of a Jewish individual. Males wear a *kipah* or another traditional head covering, and married females wear feminine hair coverings, according to the era and locale. A Jew is forever conscious of the One Above and walks constantly in the presence of the King of the universe. As we don our covering each morning, we thank G-d for the opportunity to maintain such an empowering and transformative consciousness throughout our day.

13. Talmud, Berachot 60b.