

# Prayer

## Discovering the Siddur

*“Rabbi Shimon would say: Be meticulous with the reading of the Shema and with prayer. When you pray, do not make your prayers routine, but [an entreatment of] mercy and a supplication before the Almighty, as is stated “For He is benevolent and merciful, slow to anger and abundant in loving kindness, and relenting of the evil decree.” And do not be wicked in your own eyes.”*

*—Pirkei Avot, Chapter 2, Mishnah 18—*

## Preface

I do not claim to be an authority on prayer or the siddur. I am merely sharing what I have learned thus far regarding the subjects in hopes to help someone else along the way. Please forgive any oversights or incorrect information that may be contained herein.

## Overview

The word “siddur” means “order,” and comes from the same Hebrew word as “seder” used in the Passover tradition. The Siddur is an arranged “order” of prayers, written down for common use among a group of people. It is thoroughly Jewish in its content and arrangement.

The range of prayers contained within the Siddur touches every facet of life, from awaking in the morning, performing the functions of nature, studying Torah, experiencing something inspirational to performing a mitzvah or losing a loved one. As the rabbi expressed on *Fiddler On The Roof*, there truly is a blessing for everything, whether its specific bracha is contained within the pages of the Siddur or not.

Unlike the Bible and the Talmudic texts, whose canon are closed, the Siddur has never been a closed book. It has always been very much organic in its nature, changing to the specific needs of the communities in which it rests. Each Siddur follows a specified tradition called either a *nusach* or *minhag*. This basically means that the prayers and structure of the Siddur are taken from those of a specific community (e.i. Ashkenazi, Sephardi, Poland, Italy, etc.). Recently, there have been more attempts to combine the various prayer traditions into a more homogenous work without stifling the living nature of the volume.

Fixed prayers are often thought of as lifeless and originating from the product of man’s efforts, rather than divine inspiration. However, the Biblical text attests to the inaccuracy of this argument with fixed prayers existing during the time of Moses. His Song at the Sea is among the first written, communal prayers in the Bible. The book of Psalms is another, more extensive example and in all likelihood was the prototype of the Siddur, the common order of prayers among worshippers. We must not be apprehensive of this wonderful aid to prayer.

## Navigation

The Siddur is not arranged so much according to *types* of prayer, as it is according to *times* of prayer. Once we learn the basic order of prayer, the Siddur quickly becomes much more navigable. Although this is not all inclusive, it will give us a basic understanding of its arrangement.

## Times of Prayer

The set times of prayer are as follows:

- **Shacharit**
- **Mincha**
- **Ma'ariv**

Shacharit, Mincha and Ma'ariv roughly correspond to the three divisions of the day, respectively: Morning, Afternoon and Evening. Shacharit is considered daylight to midday. Mincha prayers should be prayed in the afternoon (with a time-gap between Shacharit and Mincha), but before dark. Ma'ariv prayers are said any time after dark.

Let's examine the basic components of each of these times of prayer. The basic obligation of these set times of prayer are as follows:

<b>Shacharit:</b>	Shema and Amidah
<b>Mincha:</b>	Amidah
<b>Ma'ariv:</b>	Shema and Amidah

Side Note: Some of the prayers (such as the Kaddish) are intended to only be recited in the presence of a minyan<sup>1</sup>, and should not be recited in private prayers.

### Shacharit

The Shacharit begins by praising Hashem for the obvious—that we were given another day on this earth. It continues with the various blessings associated with preparing for the “actual” prayers of the morning. Blessings for such as the donning of tzit-tzit/tallit and tefillin begin, followed by the Morning Blessings. The Morning Blessings the contain following:

- Modeh Ani - Prayer Upon Rising
- Ma Tovu - A prayer said upon entering the Temple or synagogue. There are some beautiful melodies traditionally associate with this prayer.
- Adon Olam - Acknowledgment of God as Creator and Sovereign of the Universe

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<sup>1</sup> A gathering of at least ten men above the age of thirteen.

- Yigdal - Summary of the 13 Principles of Faith, which were initially set forth by Rambam
- Al Nattilat Yadayim - Blessing for the washing of hands, obligatory mitzvah preceding prayer
- Asher Yatzar - Blessing for being able to relieve oneself
- Brachot HaTorah - Blessings for the study of Torah
- Birchot Hashachar - Fifteen blessings acknowledging God's Sovereignty over the day —Blessing Him for who He has created us to be, for giving sight to the blind, clothing the naked, releasing the bound, straightening the bent, etc.), followed by a blessing to start the day appropriately (waking fully, leading us not into error or sin, deliverance from those who would oppress us, etc.
- The Akeidah - Recollection of the binding of Isaac, reminding us to that our devotion to the Almighty should be more precious than our very lives
- The Abbreviated Shema (Deut 6:4-9 only)
- Atah - Prayer expressing God's immutability
- Offerings & Incense - Prayers that include various passages recalling the specifics of the sacrificial system, as well as a selections of the Mishnah regarding such, intending to replace the actual bringing of the offerings until such a time that sacrifices are resumed.
- The Rabbis' Kaddish - A marker for a new level of holiness. It is a prayer of blessing reminiscent of the Priestly Blessing, recited with a minyan, often after the recitation of specific passages or Mishnaic study, sometimes offered to mourners for recitation. This and the Half Kaddish, Full Kaddish & the Mourner's Kaddish overlap in wording, although they are said at slightly different times and for different reasons.
- Mizmor l'David - Psalm 30 - Introductory to the P'sukei D'zimrah
- Mourners' Kaddish (Similar to the Rabbis' Kaddish, recited by those who have lost a parent within the last eleven months)
- P'sukei D'zimrah (Verses of Praise - multiple blessings and Scriptures, mainly from the Psalms. This contains the Ashrei)
- The Full Shema (and its introductory and concluding blessings)
- Shmoneh Esrei / Amidah / Tephillah (The central prayer of each prayer service)
- Optional Prayers:

- Vidui (Prayer of confession of sins)
- Avinu Malkeinu (“Our Father, Our King” - Recited from Rosh Hashannah to Yom Kippur and during times of fasting)
- Tachanun (“Putting down the head.” Recalling and entreating the mercies of Hashem. Recited specific ways on specific days.)
- Torah Service
- Ashrei (The second recitation of Psalm 145)
- Lamna’ze’ach (Psalm 20)
- Uva L’tzion (Combination of praises from various angels in Scripture, and prayer that we would serve the Almighty in such a capacity)
- Full Kaddish (Extended Remix of the Rabbis’ Kaddish)
- Aleinu (A core statement of monotheism and refutation of idolatry)
- Mourner’s Kaddish (Second time)
- Song of the Day (Selected chapter of Psalms corresponding to the Psalm that was recited on the specific day within the Temple)

### **Mincha**

Mincha is a short time of prayer in the afternoon which consists of the following:

- Ashrei (Psalm 145)
- Shmoneh Esrei / Amidah / Tephillah (The central prayer of each prayer service)
- Tachanun (Different from the one previous.). Includes the following:
  - Psalm 6:2-11
  - Shomer Israel (Prayer proclaiming Hashem as Guardian of Israel)
  - Va’anachnu (Prayer recalling the kindness of Hashem)
  - Full Kaddish
  - Aleinu
  - Mourner’s Kaddish

**Ma'ariv**

Ma'ariv is a short prayer service which takes place after nightfall. It includes the following:

- The Full Shema (and its introductory and concluding blessings)
- Shmoneh Esrei / Amidah / Tephillah (The central prayer of each prayer service)
- Full Kaddish
- Aleinu
- Mourner's Kaddish