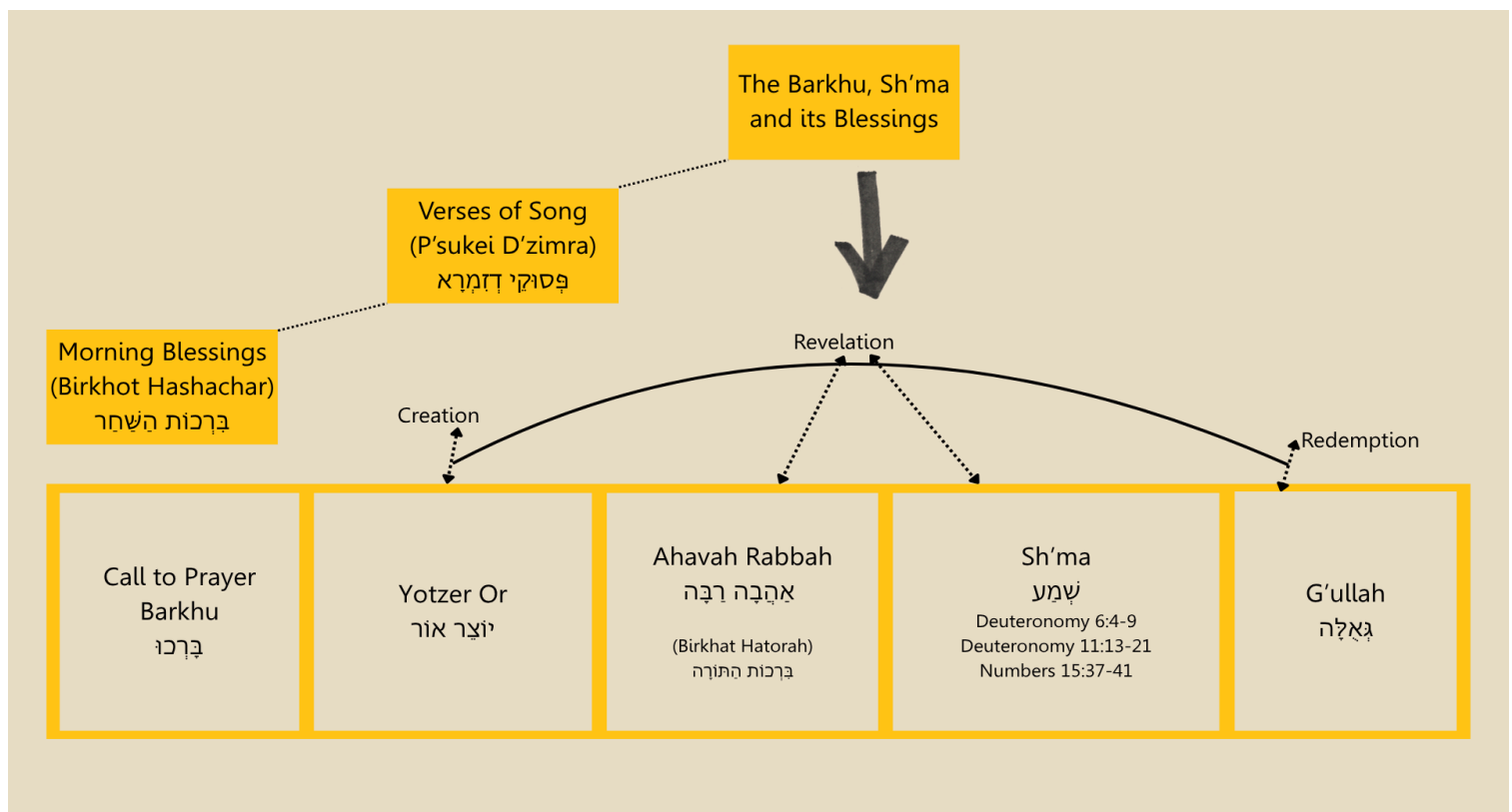


Barkhu, Shema and Surrounding Blessings

Chatimah חתימה: Sealing; the closing or conclusion of a prayer, blessing, or decree.	Petichah פתיחה: Opening; the introduction or beginning of a text, prayer, or discourse.	Rishonim ראשונים: "The First Ones"; the early leading medieval rabbinic authorities
Ophanim אופנים: a class of angels associated with the divine chariot in prophetic visions (associated with the wheels in Ezekial's vision of chariots).	Sepharim שפרים: "Burning ones"; a high order of angels who stand before God in praise and service.	Chochamim חכמים: Sages; the rabbinic scholars and authorities of Jewish tradition.

The Barkhu, Shema, and its surrounding blessings are said at the Shacharit and Maariv services (with some adjustments to various blessings depending on time of day). The blessings bracketing the Shema create an arc of creation, revelation, and redemption.



Barkhu - The Call to Prayer

Recitation of the Barkhu requires a minyan (a group of ten Jewish adults). It is customary to stand, based on [Nehemiah 9:5](#) (““Rise, bless the ETERNAL your God who is from eternity to eternity...””). The prayer leader begins the chant. They bend their knees on the word ‘Barkhu’, bow on ‘Et’, stand upright before ‘Adonai’

Praise Adonai to whom our praise is due forever!

בָּרְכוּ אֶת אֲדֹנָי הַמְבָרֵךְ!
Barkhu et Adonai ham'vorach!

The congregation responds with the second line. They bend their knees and bow on the word ‘barukh’, stand upright before ‘Adonai’. The prayer leader then repeats the second line.

Praised be Adonai to whom praise is due, now and forever!

בָּרוּךְ אֲדֹנָי הַמְבָרֵךְ לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד
Barukh Adonai ham'vorach l'olam va-ed!

The roots of this construction are likely in [Psalms 134.1](#) (“Now bless GOD, all you servants of GOD...”)

The framework here from the call and response structure to the particular tenses in use, specifically the plural imperative “barkhu” and the unusual “ham'vorach”, implies both the necessity of praising God while acknowledging the inability of humans to bless God by pointing out that God, the source of all blessings, is already blessed. This contradiction is sometimes dealt with by translating “baruch” as “praise” rather than the literal “bless”. There is speculation that this construct of “bless”, root b.r.kh rather than the typical h.l.l, may have originated from “berekh” (knee) as people would kneel before a sovereign figure.

Yotzer Or - Creator of Light

The Yotzer Or is the first of three blessings that bracket the Shema. This blessing is a liturgical composition constructed of indirect bible quotations and allusions. The petichah and chatimah mirror each other, referencing God as the creator of the physical light that sustains the world, whereas “light” in the sense of redemption is introduced immediately before the closing verse. However, there are a number of substantial juxtapositions attributing *everything* to God. The opening is a nearly direct quotation from [Isaiah 45:7](#), with the exception of the last word, which in the bible reads רָע (ra) meaning “evil”, as opposed to הָכֹל (hakol), “everything” as writing in the blessing. Attributing the creation of negative concepts (darkness, evil, etc.) to God is liturgically problematic, but a necessity of a monotheistic faith in which a singular entity must be responsible for everything. While this passage is in the Book of Isaiah, it was an appended work of Deutero-Isaiah, written during the Babylonian exile during which time Persian dualism was common. While editing “evil” to “everything” may have been an effort to not attribute

nuanced dualities to God so that a populace that may have been inclined to think that each force of nature was ruled by a separate God (a God of day, a God of night, etc) would remain monotheistic, the gemara ([Berakhot 11b:5](#)) negates this duality by insisting on the hand of God being a force in all creation rather than only the good.

¹*Blessed are You, Adonai our God, sovereign of the world, who forms light and creates darkness, makes peace and creates everything, illumining the earth and those who dwell there in mercy, in his goodness forever renewing daily the work of creation. [from [Isaiah 45:7](#)]*

²*How numerous are your works, Adonai!*

³*You made all of them in wisdom. [from [Psalms 104:24](#)]*

⁴*The earth was filled with your creatures.*

⁵*The exalted sovereign ever since, lauded, glorified and extolled for days immemorial, God immemorial, in your great mercy have mercy on us: lord, acting as our strength; rock, acting as our protector; defender, acting as our salvation; protector, acting on our behalf. [from]* ⁶*Almighty Blessed Great Diviner The sun's lights' maker and designer: The Good One made his name divine And 'round his might set lights to shine.*

⁷*In holiness his hosts ascend Exalting God, telling without end Of the holiness of God sublime.*

⁸*Be blessed, Adonai our God, for the excellent work of your hands, and for the glowing lights that You created, they will glorify You.*

⁹*Be blessed our rock, our sovereign and redeemer, creator of holy beings, your name be praised forever, our sovereign, who formed his servants, the servants who all stand high above the world, reverently and with one voice reciting the words of the living God, the eternal sovereign.*

¹⁰*They are all beloved; they are all pure; they are all mighty; and they all carry out their creator's will with awe and reverence.*

¹¹*They all open their mouths with holiness and purity, with poetry and song, and bless, praise, glorify and adore, sanctify and exalt the name of God, great mighty and awesome sovereign, the Holy One.*

¹²*And from each other they all take the rule of the kingdom of heaven upon themselves, and give permission to each other to sanctify their creator.*

¹³*With calm spirit, with pure speech and with holy melody, they all answer as one, reverently: Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts.*

¹⁴*The whole earth is full of his glory.*

¹⁵*The ofanim and the holy creatures rise dramatically toward the serafim.*

¹⁶*Before them they praise God: The glory of Adonai is blessed from his place.*

¹⁷*To the blessed God they shall render songs, to the sovereign, the living and eternal God, they shall sing hymns and proclaim praise, for He alone is a worker of wonder, a creator of innovation, a master of war, a sower of righteousness, a grower of salvation, a creator of healing, awesome in splendor, a lord of wonder, in his goodness forever renewing daily the work of creation.*

¹⁸*As it is said: "... to the maker of the great lights, whose mercy is everlasting."*

¹⁹*Shine a new light on Zion, that we all might soon merit its light.*

²⁰*Blessed are You, Adonai, creator of the lights.*

Maariv Aravim

The Maariv Aravim is the opening prayer to Maarive and the evening corollary to the Yotzer Or. In a similar fashion, it presents god as the creator of all dualities (...the light in the darkness and the darkness in the light).

*Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Sovereign of the universe,
who speaks the evening into being,
skillfully opens the gates,
thoughtfully alters the time and changes the seasons,
and arranges the stars in their heavenly courses according to plan.
You are Creator of day and night,
rolling light away from darkness and darkness from light,
transforming day into night and distinguishing one from the other.
Adonai Tz'vaot is Your Name.
Ever-living God, may You reign continually over us into eternity.
Blessed are You, Adonai, who brings on evening.*

Birkhat Hatorah: Revelation (Ahava Rabbah)

This blessing transitions us from a transcendent universalist perspective of an all-powerful creator to a personal, compassionate god equated to a father concerned with a particular child (Israel). This passage also forces us to acknowledge the “choseness” narrative that originates with Abraham’s family in Genesis and is reiterated several times with regard to Israel. Many movements and philosophies have reframed this as a matter of obligation and specificity rather than a prideful assertion of superiority. Similarly, “...lead us upright to our land”, which has been abused by nationalist movements, can be reframed as a matter of ritual holiness rather than a plea of nationalist fervor. In common halakhic fashion, the chatimah follows the theme of the petichah.

¹*You have loved us most lovingly, Adonai our God, cared for us greatly, even exceedingly caringly.*

²*Our father, our sovereign, for the sake of our ancestors who trusted in You and whom You therefore taught the laws of life, so be gracious to us and teach them to us.*

³*Our father, merciful father, show us mercy and inspire us to understand and to consider, to listen, learn and teach, to keep and do and perpetuate all the teachings of your Torah in love.*

⁴*Enlighten our eyes with your Torah and draw our minds near to You with your commandments and unite our hearts to love and revere your name, that we will never be shamed.*

⁵*Because we have trusted your great and awesome name, we will rejoice and celebrate with your salvation.*

⁶*Bring us to peace from the four corners of the earth and lead us upright to our land.*

⁷*It is You who are the God who effects salvation.*

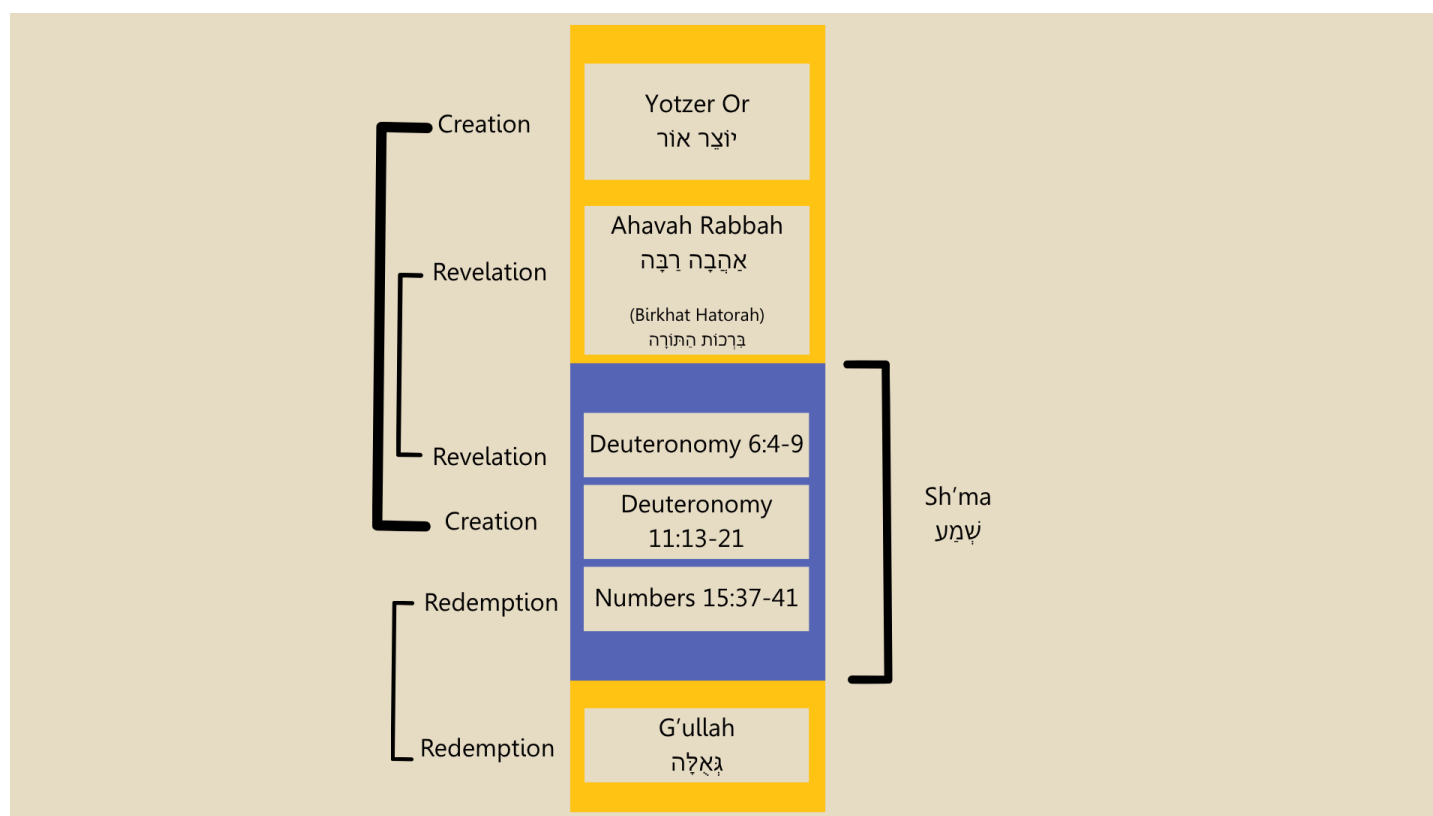
⁸*You have chosen us from among all peoples and nations and brought us closer to your great name with truth, to acknowledge You and declare your unity with love.*

⁹*Blessed are You, Adonai, who chooses his People Israel with love.*

The Shema

The Shema is the Jewish declaration of faith. Following the variety of tribulations they suffered, Ashkenazim have used it as a creed of religious martyrdom, in the vein of Rabbi Akiva's death during the Bar Kokhba Revolt. Given the historical context of slaughters at the hands of Christians, the Shema was also a repudiation of the trinity (a polytheistic concept for Jews).

In a chiastic structure, it picks up the theme of the prior blessing (revelation), returns again to creation (regarding agriculture), then follows to the end of the arc with redemption (as does the blessing bracketing the end of the unit).



It is constructed of three sections of bible verses as follows:

Deuteronomy 6:4-9

¹*Hear O Israel: Adonai is our God; Adonai is One.*

²*Blessed is the One the glory of whose kingdom is renowned forever.*

³*You shall love Adonai your God with all your mind and body and strength.*

⁴*Keep these words, which I command you today, in mind.*

⁵*Instruct your children about them.*

⁶Use them when you sit at home and when you walk about, when you lie down and
⁷when you stand up.

⁸Bind them to your hand as a sign and set them between your eyes as a symbol.

⁹Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

Deuteronomy 11:13-21

¹⁰If you carefully heed my commandments, the ones I command you today, to love Adonai your God and worship Him with all your mind and body, then I shall grant your land's rain in its season, in the autumn and in the spring, that you might gather your grain, wine and oil.

¹¹I shall grant grass in your fields for your cattle, that you might eat your fill.

¹²Take care lest your mind tempt you to rebel by worshipping other gods and by bowing down to them.

¹³For then the fire and fury of Adonai will turn against you.

¹⁴Adonai will stop the flow of the sky.

¹⁵There will be no rain.

¹⁶The earth will not grant its produce.

¹⁷You will quickly perish from the good land that Adonai grants you.

¹⁸So put these words of mine in charge of your mind and body, bind them to your hand as a sign and set them between your eyes as a symbol; teach them to your children, using them when you sit at home and when you walk about, when you lie down and when you stand up; write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates — that your days and your children's days in the land that Adonai promised to give to your ancestors may be as numerous as the days that the sky overlooks the earth.

Numbers 15:37-41

¹⁹Adonai said to Moses: "Speak to the children of Israel, and tell them to make themselves a tassel on the corners of their clothes in every generation, and to put a blue thread on the tassel of each corner.

²⁰Let it be a tassel for you.

²¹When you see it you shall remember all of Adonai's commandments and do them, and not follow your mind or eyes which you follow in false worship.

²²Thus will you remember and do all of my commandments, and so be holy before your God.

²³I am Adonai, your God, who led you out of the land of Egypt to be your God.

²⁴I am Adonai your God.

³The commandment here arose from the context of a vassal state treaty (b'rit, or covenant, means "treaty" in some contexts. This portrays God as a feudal lord with Israel as a vassal owing services and fidelity. "Love" was often found in vassal treaties of Assyrian kings.

^{8,9,18}This is a partial reference to the amulets worn in near east cultures, although the written signs here are not a measure of protection, but a reminder of the singularity of God.

¹⁰⁻¹⁷This is a callback to the power of God, who unlike mortal kings, could not only threaten political exile, but also agricultural exile as punishment for lack of obedience. The concept of

reward and punishment here, as group exercises, is theologically challenging and has been assuaged by a variety of notions of justice and the unfathomable nature of God.

¹⁹“Speak to the children of Israel...” this removes the class structure of other nations. Judaism is not a knowledge to be kept upon the altar of an elite few.

²⁰This reference to tassels, a near eastern practice in which nobility were adorned with fringed garments, provides a sanctifying of ordinary objects as a reminder of God’s sovereignty (i.e. an expensive blue dye) and democratization process in which *all* Israel is seen as a priestly class ([1 Kings 19:6](#)).

²¹This represents somewhat of an education system, the tassels are enjoined as a reminder of this covenant.

G’ullah

The G’ullah, or Emet Veyatziv (the first words of the blessing), is the final blessing bracketing the end of the Shema. It declares God’s sovereignty, singularity, and expresses gratitude for the redemption of Israel. This is constructed, heavily from both the Song of the Sea and Deutero-Isaiah passage

¹True and established and accurate and enduring and right and steadfast and beloved and precious and desirable and pleasant and awesome and mighty and correct and accepted and good and beautiful for us are these words for ever and ever.

²True it is that the everlasting God is our Sovereign, the rock of Jacob is our saving shield.

³From generation to generation He endures, and his name endures, and his decrees are accurate and his reign and faithfulness endure forever, and his words live and endure, steadfast and desirable, forever and to the ends of time, for our ancestors and for us, for our children and for our generations, and for all of the generations of the progeny of Israel, your servants.

⁴For the first and for the last, these words are good and enduring for ever and ever, truth and faith, a law that will not pass.

⁵True it is that You are Adonai our God, and our ancestors’ God; our Sovereign, our ancestors’ Sovereign; our redeemer, our ancestors’ redeemer; our creator, our saving rock; our deliverer and our rescuer.

⁶Your name is eternal.

⁷There is no god but You.

⁸You have always been our ancestors’ help, protecting and saving their children after them in each and every generation.

⁹High above the world lies your habitation, and your justice and righteousness reach the ends of the earth.

¹⁰Happy is the one who obeys your commandments, taking your Torah and your words to heart.

¹¹True it is that You are lord over your people, and a mighty Sovereign to battle their battle.

¹²True it is that You are the first and You are the last, and other than You we have no king who redeems and saves.

¹³You redeemed us from Egypt, Adonai our God, and You set us free from the House of Bondage.

¹⁴*You killed all their first-born, and redeemed your first-born, and You parted the Red Sea and drowned the insolent and brought the precious across the water, and the water covered up their foes.*

¹⁵*Not one of them was left.*

¹⁶*The beloved lauded and praised God for this, and the precious offered hymns, songs and praises, blessings and thanks to our Sovereign, the living and eternal God, high and exalted, great and revered, humbling the proud and raising the humble, freeing the captive and redeeming the meek, helping the poor and answering his people when they cry out to Him for help.*

¹⁷*All praise to God on high, most blessed be He.*

¹⁸*Moses and the children of Israel most joyfully answered You in song, all of them singing: Who is like You among the gods, Adonai! Who is like You, adorned in holiness, Revered in praise, worker of wonders!*

¹⁹*At the seashore the redeemed sang a new song to your name.*

²⁰*Together they all gave thanks, exalting You with these words: Adonai will reign for ever and ever.*

²¹*Rock of Israel, arise to help Israel, and deliver Judah and Israel, as you promised.*

²²*Our redeemer, Lord of Hosts is his name, Israel's holy one.*

²³*Blessed are You, Adonai, who redeemed Israel.*

¹This initial verse harkens to both the Song of the Sea and the final verse of the Shema from a forward looking perspective, with the redemption of Israel from Egypt as a sign of God's truth and reliability.

^{14,15}This particularly graphic passage has been jettisoned by more liberal movements, as a means of avoiding supremacist or chauvinistic language or depicting a violent and vengeful God.

¹⁸This is a repetition of Mi Kamokha from Song of the Sea, one of the oldest pieces of text in the bible. In this context, at which time the liturgy reflected radical monotheism, the phrase "*among the gods*" is reinterpreted as "angels" or "divine beings", however, at the time it was written "*among the gods*" was referencing other gods.

²¹"...*deliver Judah and Israel*" has been removed by some movements, and readmitted by some, to avoid overtly nationalistic or particularistic connotations.