

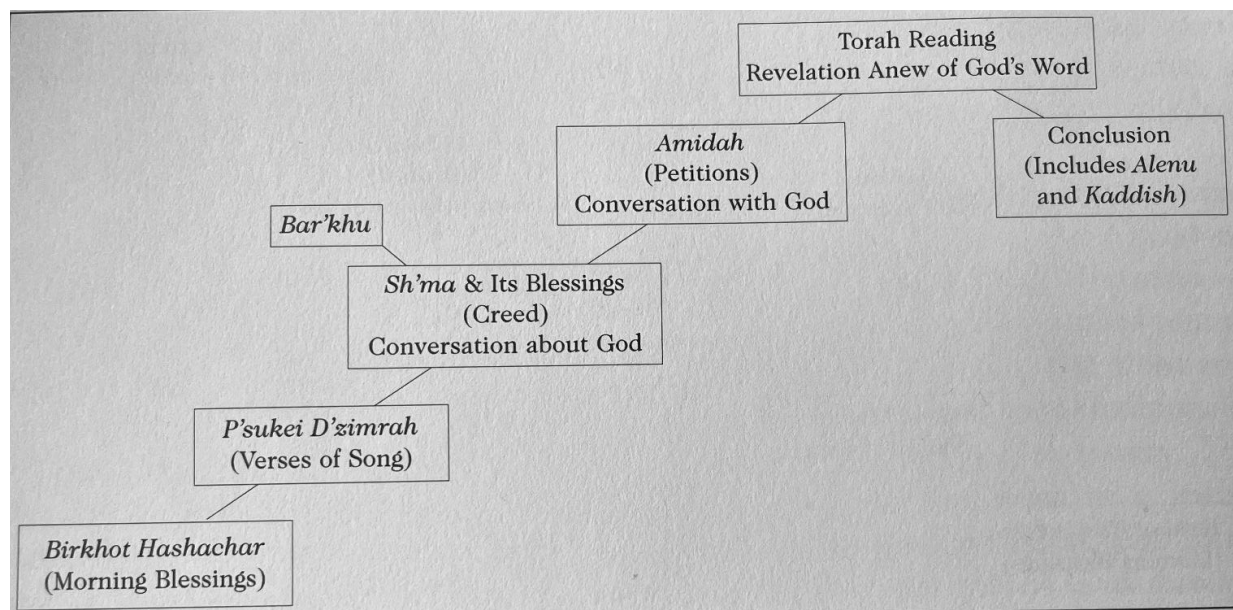
Birkhot HaShachar and P'sukei D'Zimra

Class 2: CDT Learner's Minyan

Structure of the Shabbat Morning Prayer Service

Quoted from *My People's Prayer Book*

We will return to this image throughout the Learner's Minyan. This is a diagram of the Shabbat morning prayer service.



In today's class, we will be taking a look at *Birkhot HaShachar* and *P'sukei D'Zimrah*.

Birkhot HaShachar: Meaning + Structure

Meaning

Let's start with Birkhot HaShachar, which literally means "Blessings of the Dawn" or "Morning Blessings". The following text is quoted from *My People's Prayer Book*:

"The core of the Birkhot HaShachar was a set of blessings that accompanied each act of awakening. These are listed in the Talmud, and although there may once have existed more of them than we have now, the Talmudic ones [cover] such ordinary acts as opening our eyes, getting dressed, and using the bathroom." It depends on which prayer book and which

denomination you're a part of, but in many communities, *Birkhot HaShachar* on Shabbat also includes:

- A prayer of gratitude that acknowledges the fragility of life (*Modeh/ah Ani*)
- A blessing for putting on tallit
- A blessing to acknowledge the purity of one's soul (*Elohai Neshama*)
- A blessing to acknowledge the miracle of one's body (*Asher Yatzar*)
- A blessing to enter a synagogue (*Mah Tov*)
- A blessing for the study of Torah (*La'asok b'Divrei Torah*)

Structure

All page numbers below are for Kol HaNeshamah

Birkhot HaShachar goes from pg. 141 (*Mah Tov*) until 174 (Psalm 30 - A Psalm of Dedication).

In a normal CDT Shabbat morning service, we most often sing the following:

- *Mah Tov* pg. 141
 - Sometimes we also do *Va'ani Tefilati* (pg. 141, second Hebrew line from the bottom - in transliteration, the end of the 3rd line from the bottom)
- *Birkhot HaShachar* pg. 153 - 161 (the core blessings)
- *Elohai Neshama* pg. 165

P'sukei D'Zimrah: Meaning + Structure

Meaning

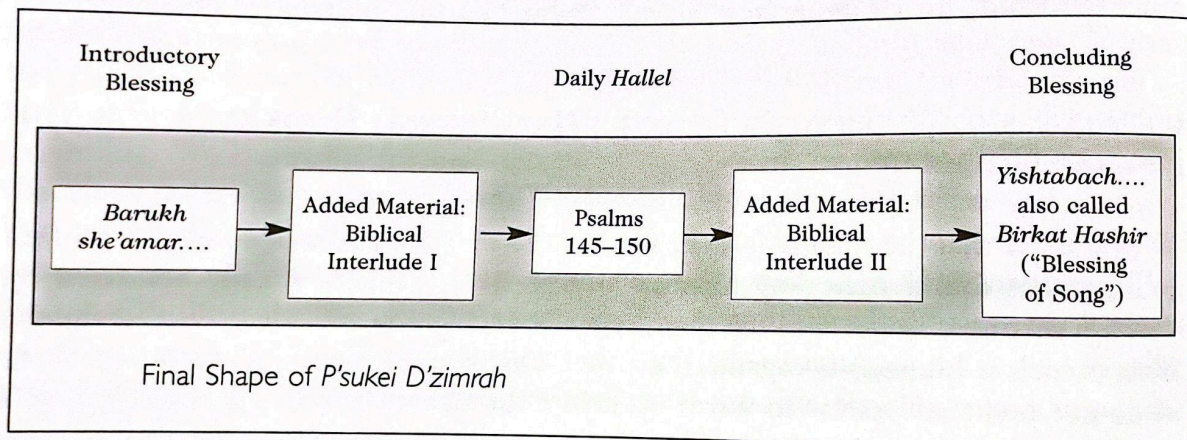
Pesukei d'Zimrah literally means "Verses of Song" or "Verses of Praise." The following text is quoted from *My People's Prayer Book*:

"*P'sukei d'Zimrah* is best regarded as 'the prayer before the prayer.' It functions as the warm-up for the morning service, a recognition that prayerfulness cannot be summoned on demand." At the center of *P'sukei d'Zimrah* are 6 psalms, 145-150, which, "all begin with 'Hallelujah,' a shout of joy to G-d..."

"...The essence of the *P'sukei d'Zimrah* is the affirmation within ourselves of the feeling of gratitude and praise for the tenuous mystery of life, and the parallel recognition that beyond the mystery of life there lies yet a deeper mystery whom we call G-d. Reciting the age-old passages from psalms [as well as blessings and Biblical texts] connects us with another mystery we call history, and not just history as an academic discipline, but the history of [the Jewish people's] own roots and beginnings... As introduction to the larger service, the *P'sukei d'Zimrah* sets the tone and prepares the way for our further conversation *about* G-d (the Sh'ma and its blessings) and then our conversation *with* G-d (the Amidah). It provides a transition from the daily grind of secular life to the meditative and sacred frame of mind that we want for our liturgy. Only when we finish the *P'sukei d'Zimrah* are we ready for the *Bar'khu*, the official call to public prayer."

Structure

Note: For the chart below, Hallel loosely translates to “praise.” The “Daily Hallel” is a name given to Psalms 145-150.



CDT follows this structure closely, except that the Reconstructionist editors of *Kol HaNeshamah* removed the “Added Biblical Interlude II” after Psalm 150 and tweaked where Psalm 145 is.

All page numbers below are for Kol HaNeshamah

P'sukei d'Zimra goes from pg. 177 (*Baruch She'amar*) until pg. 243 (the end of *Yishtabach*)

- *Baruch She'amar* (pg. 177-181)
 - p. 177-179 *Baruch she'amar* - chanted or sung, or chant below the line on page 177
 - p. 181 Done individually – until the leader chants the *chatima* (closing portion) at the asterisk, “*yachid chey ha'olamim...*” You can also close by chanting the last line in English on p. 180, “*Blessed are you...*”
- In a normal CDT service, Rabbi Toba picks and chooses which parts of Pesukei d'Zimra that we sing, and will prompt folks with page numbers. CDT leaders will choose 2 or 3 from:
 - p. 189 *Mi ha'ish* (3 lines from the bottom in Hebrew, 1st line of translit.) or *Sur me'rah* (last line on p. 189 - in Hebrew and in transliteration)
 - Psalm 136 (p. 201-2)
 - *Mah Gadlu* p. 209 (5 lines up from the bottom, in Hebrew only)
 - Missing translit
 - *Tzaddik katamar* p. 211 (4 lines up from the bottom in Hebrew, first line of transliteration)
 - *Esa Einai* p. 215 (first line of the Hebrew + transliteration)
 - *L'maan achai* p. 217 (2 lines up from the bottom in Hebrew + transliteration)
 - *Halleli* p. 219 (first two lines of the Hebrew - not transliterated)

- Almost all Shabbat services at CDT will contain Psalm 150, p. 231.
- A special prayer is added to *P'sukei d'Zimra* for Shabbat, called *Nishmat Kol Chai* (p. 235 - top of p. 241). CDT often does *Nishmat Kol Chai* in a few different ways:
 - p. 235 – the first line is sung in nusach and readers continue individually through page 239.
 - The Marge Piercy poem on p. 232-233 is sung in nusach and the leader closes with “*Mi yidmeh lach...*” on the bottom of p. 239, through the end of that page (no transliteration)
 - “*Nishmat kol chai*” chant, by Shefa Gold is done (p. 235)
 - Three-part “*Ilu finu*” chant, p. 237 (first line of the second paragraph in Hebrew, only line in English transliteration)
- *Nishmat Kol Chai* is closed at the top of p. 241, starting at the end of the first line of Hebrew “*Barchi Nafshi*” until the fourth Hebrew line “*hamelekh yoshev al kisei ram v'nisa.*” This can be found in the first four lines in English transliteration at the bottom
- *Shochein Ad* - At this point, there will be a change in the “sound” of the service - Rabbi Toba or a member leader will begin to sing Shochein Ad in Shabbat nusach (middle of p. 241), through the bottom of that page.
 - *Shochein Ad* continues. The leader will sing the first few words at the top of the page in nusach and people will be prompted to continue individually, silently until the asterisk, “*l'hodot l'hallel*” (3 lines down from the top in Hebrew, no transliteration) through the beginning of next paragraph, which is called *Yistabach*
- *Yishtabach* (p. 243) is the official end of P'sukei d'Zimra. It is sung by the service leader. The expectation in many communities is that people will be asked to rise for *Yishtabach*, but here at Dorshei, we rise just for the *Hatzi Kaddish* that follows afterwards and the *Barechu*.
 - The prayer leader will sing the words, “*Yishtabach shimcha l'ad malkeinu*” in nusach, and then people will continue individually/silently. The prayer leader will close with the chatima (seal), “*brachot v'hoda'ot*” (asterisk 3 Hebrew lines up from the bottom) through the end of the page.
 - Unfortunately, since this is traditionally sung only by the prayer leader, there is no transliteration for learners

Activity

Instructions: Read the English translations of the following prayers, and afterwards, discuss the guiding questions with a partner or two.

- Birchot HaShachar (p. 153-161) - and take a look at the handout if there's time
- Elohai N'shama (p. 164-167)
- Baruch She'amar (p. 177-179)
- Psalm 150 (p. 231)

- Nishmat Kol Chai (p. 234-middle of p. 240 - ending with the words “presiding on your lofty and exalted throne)

Guiding Questions: Based on what you read, turn to your partner(s) and discuss at least 4 out of the 7 following questions:

- What about these blessings and the theology they ascribe to resonates for you? Why?
- What about these blessings and the theology they ascribe to does not resonate for you? Why?
- Did any translation make you mad when you read it? Which ones?
- If you were to boil down each of these 5 prayers into their purest essence and put them into separate bottles as potion, what labels would you put on each of the bottles?
- You may have noticed in the English translations, especially in Baruch She’amar, that G-d’s name is a big deal. What do you think is going on there?
- What does it mean to say “Baruch atah Adonai” in these prayers? What does it mean to bless G-d?
- What is our role when we pray Birchot HaShachar and P’sukei d’Zimrah? What are we doing in these prayer services?