

Davvenen' through the Worlds: A Flow-Chart for the Shabbat Morning Service

The Jewish mystical tradition views the unfolding of creation as the emanation of four "worlds," or levels, of spiritual energy. Kabbalah teaches that these four worlds of energy emanated from the Divine Source in a dynamic process, as the forces of creation flowed into the unfolding cosmos. These worlds are called *Assiyah*, Action; *Yetzirah*, Formation; *Briyah*, Creation; and *Atzilut* – the blazing Emanation of pure Divinity.

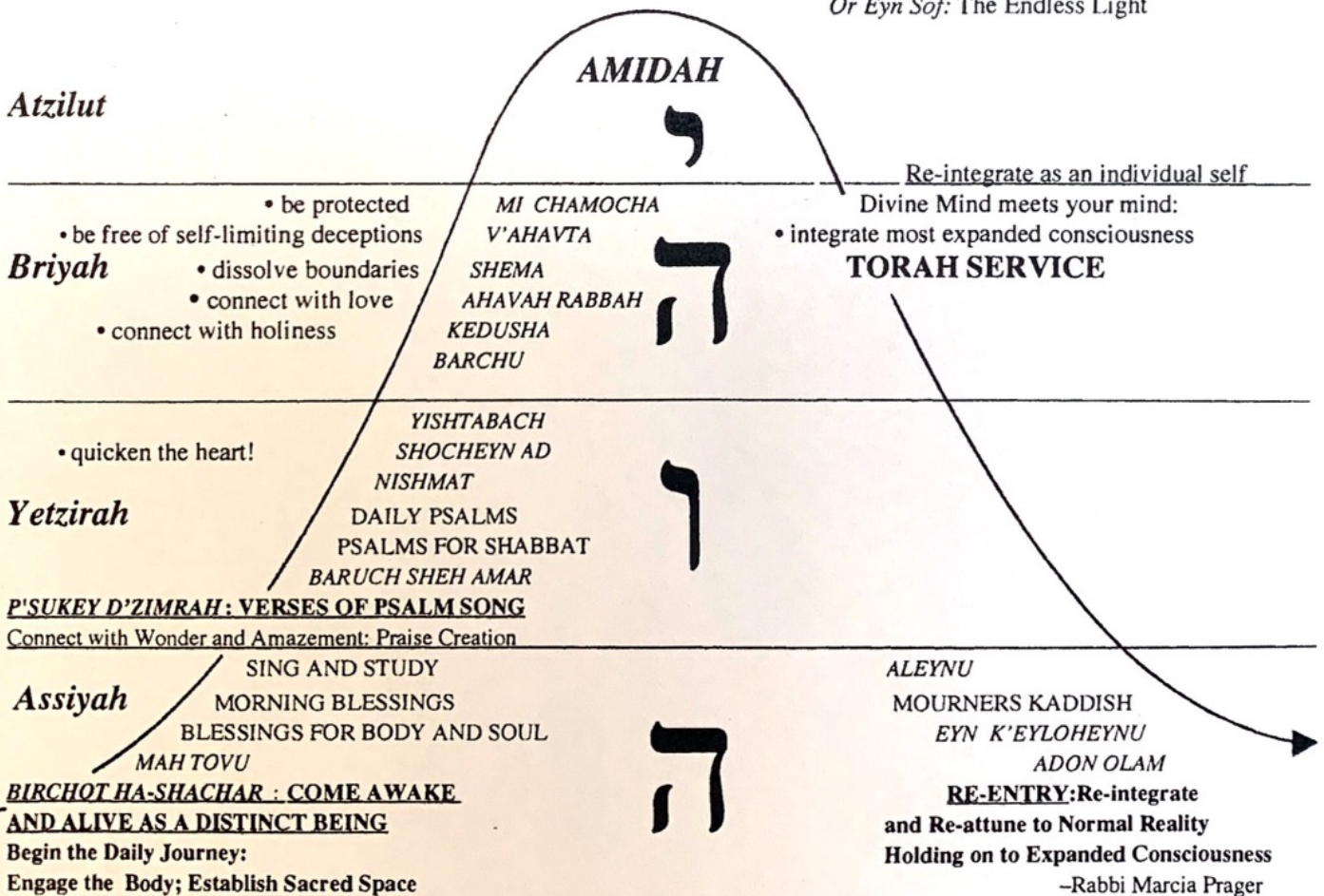
Kabbalah teaches that human beings, as living vessels of consciousness, are capable of experiencing these energies. We can use our capacity for heightened awareness to travel in these worlds, connecting with our source in the Divine. We can also use our capacity to tap these energies so that they flow freely in our lives.

The English word "services," that refers to organized prayer, derives from the Hebrew "avodah," meaning serving by doing sacred work. *Davvenen'*, the unique Jewish prayer practice which combines modal chanting of sacred text, meditation and movement, is one form of the spiritual work we do to restore our souls' living link with God.

The service takes us on a journey through the Four Worlds, from the most basic physical plane of *Assiyah* up through the peak of *Atzilut* and then gently back down. Hassidic teaching calls this progression "the ladder," referring to *Yaakov's* famous night-vision of "a ladder set in the earth whose top reached into the heavens." This ladder, said our teachers, is the ladder of the prayers. Each rung of the ladder offers its spiritual gift and challenge. The goal is not to rush overly swiftly to the top, but rather to savor the fullness of the journey. This is a pilgrimage of consciousness.

Talk to the Universe!

Or Eyn Sof: The Endless Light



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Rabbi Josh's Semi-random but Important Elements of Weekday Prayer:

- Less is more. Better a couple of prayers said with real heartfelt kavanah, than a lot of box checking. Build in spaciousness and conscious breaths. Make your practice nourishing and supportive.
- Make a connection with a couple of Psalms, or lines from Psalms that have melodies you like.
 - Especially during psukei d'zimrah, part of the goal is being in the open-hearted, praise state. It's very simple. Don't engage the critical mind.
- There's great stuff right after barchu! (Yotzer blessings, kedushah, ahavah rabbah)
- What to cut when short on time? Really, you can cut just about anything. For the early rabbis, prayer was primarily the Shema and her blessings and the Amidah. And the Amidah was more improvisational than it is now.
 - You almost certainly have time for the Shema. You could do a few prayers from birchot ha'shachar/psukei, the Shema and then stop there. You could then do the Amidah at Mincha.
 - A bare minimalist approach: go on a walk, find a place to stop, center yourself, and then offer a prayer or two. This can be wonderful for doing the bare minimum of maintaining the heart-Existence (aka God) connection. I like to do this at the end of the workday, to make a *havdalah* of sorts between the workday and transitioning to making dinner/being with my family.
- Prayer can be stress relief. Almost everything discussed in this recent NPR piece on dealing with stress can be effectively accessed through a regular weekday prayer practice: <https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2024/01/04/1221730997/want-to-stress-less-in-2024-a-new-book-offers-5-resets-to-tame-toxic-stress>
- You need to own more than one siddur, at least 2 or 3. One should be traditional, so you can know what the baseline is. One should also be interlinear because then you can understand a lot of what you are saying. Then you can balance this with a different translation that speaks more to your heart.
- A full-size tallit that you can wrap yourself in is very helpful and important. Also seriously consider getting a good pair of tefillin. They are power objects, and we do not have many other power objects in Judaism, especially ones we use every day. They are not for everyone, but I cannot imagine weekday davenning without them.