

peace) on the outbreath. But even for me, fluent in Hebrew, it takes time to establish the connection between my heart and the words. It is much easier in your native language, so proceed to Hebrew only after you have gained some experience in your first language (unless, of course, you grew up speaking Hebrew!).

A more complete description of this practice can be found in Rabbi Jeff Roth's *Jewish Meditation Practices for Everyday Life: Awakening Your Heart, Connecting with God* (Jewish Lights), chapter 7.

PRACTICE 8

Jewish Blessings

This exercise is a direct continuation of practices 2 and 3. Here we put our gratitude practice into Hebrew language and Jewish form. Blessings practice is wonderful in nature, where you can hardly take a step without seeing a part of creation for which you might be grateful. But it is an even more powerful practice in places where gratitude may not arise naturally. Can you say blessings while contending with traffic, in the kitchen, or at the workplace?

1. Identify an activity or an entity or a living being you would like to bless.
2. You might start with the traditional blessing formula:

... בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם ...

Baruch ata Adonai, Eloheinu melech ha-olam ...

Blessed be You Adonai, Sovereign of the world ...

Others are more comfortable with an alternative formula that includes feminine language and different images for God, such as:

... בְּרוּכָה אַתְּ יְהוָה, רוּחַ הָעוֹלָם ...

B'ruchah at Yah, ruach ha-olam ...

Blessed be You Yah, spirit of the world ...

or

... בְּרוּכָה אַתָּה יְיָ, הֵשְׁכִינָה

B'ruchah at Yah, ha-Shechinah ...

Blessed be You, Yah, *Shechinah* (God's immanent presence) ...

3. Continue in English or, if you can, in Hebrew, and compose your blessing. Typical blessings might be as follows:

Baruch ata Adonai, Eloheinu melech ha-olam, ... for the feel of my cat's fur when she snuggles with me in the morning.

B'ruchah at Yah, ruach ha-olam, ... for the robins who join me in the backyard and the gift of sight to see them.

4. The more detail you include, the better. You are seeking to connect what is happening in your life to the presence of God. For most people, it is much harder to do so with formulas or generic statements.
5. Blessings should be said out loud, but a whisper will do.

PRACTICE 9

Learn the Traditional Blessings

While connecting to a liturgical formula is hard for most people (but not all) and you must also contend with the Hebrew, there are plenty of reasons to learn the traditional blessings and use them in your spiritual practice. When a tradition works, it opens us to an experience that we likely would not have reached on our own, and it give us the language and the ideas to appreciate it. Who would have thought to bless a trip to the restroom? But as we all learn at one point or another, the daily functioning of our complicated, intricate bodies is nothing short of a miracle and shouldn't be taken for granted. The traditional blessings are often beautiful and, as in the case of *baruch dayan emet* (said upon hearing of a death), give us words to express the inexpressible. Finally, by adopting the