

Wake-Up Rituals

Crafting Jewish Tradition for Young Children

When we think of rituals, we think of mothers or grandmothers waving their hands over the Shabbat candles, of an endless Passover seder led each year by the patriarch of the family, or of a bar or bat mitzvah. We rarely think of the everyday rituals that we engage in: the kiss goodnight, watching a special TV show together each Thursday night, or taking turns at dinner each night, talking about our days. Yet each of these are rituals also. They are acts we engage in, at a regular time, that have meaning for us. We look forward to these events and are disappointed when they do not occur. They are not just a physical priority, but an emotional priority in our lives.

Ritual turns the everyday into the sacred. Our tradition speaks of praising God with 100 blessings a day. Really, few of us actually stop 100 times a day to thank God; yet each time we do stop to sanctify time and space by remembering how blessed we are, we are enriched spiritually and emotionally. Praising God connects us to our families, to Judaism, and to the larger world. Our rituals, our sanctifying acts, are idiosyncratic, yet their roots are in the traditions of Judaism.

When we share rituals from our childhood or create new rituals for our families, we raise strong children. Research has shown that families who engage in rituals have children who are more resilient as adults. The rituals that we choose to share promote a shared language among members of our household. They tie our children to generations past and generations to come through shared behaviors. Most importantly, rituals enable us to communicate the values we cherish to our children.

Mornings are hectic times in any household, but especially so with children. Families who are successful in getting children out the door in the morning know the importance of routine—doing the same thing, in the same order, each day. Routines work, but they do not address the spiritual and emotional needs we have at all times of the day. Just as you feed your child's body with breakfast, you must feed your child's soul with wonder, awe, and blessing.

The following suggestions are intended to give you a starting place for making your mornings more spiritually fulfilling, more meaningful, and more connected to Judaism.

Upon Waking *Modeh Ani* is the traditional prayer to be said by children. Hold your child in a chair or sit on the bed with them, and share a special moment of closeness before the morning rush begins. Recite *Modeh Ani* together. For young children, sing or recite the blessing in English and in Hebrew. As they get older, encourage them to join you for the English and then later for the Hebrew.

מוֹדֵה אֲנִי לְפָנֶיךָ, מֶלֶךְ חַי וְקַיִם, שֶׁהַחַיּוֹת בִּי נִשְׁמָתִי בְּחֶמְלָה; רַבָּה אֱמוּנָתְךָ.

Modeh ani l'fanecha, melech chai v'kayam, shehechezarta bi nishmati b'chemlah; rabah emunatecha.

I give thanks to You, O God, eternal and living Ruler, Who in mercy has returned my soul to me; great is Your faithfulness.

While Washing Judaism considers the working of the human body an act of God. Jewish tradition contains a series of prayers with which we can thank God for our bodies. However, the following short prayer is more appropriate for young children. Since cleanliness of the body is considered essential for purity of the spirit, it is appropriate to recite this blessing before washing.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה, יְיָ, אֲשֶׁר יָצַר אֶת-הָאָדָם בְּחֶכְמָה.

Baruch Atah, Adonai, asher yatzar et ha-adam b'chochmah.

We praise You, Eternal God. Thank You for my body. It is a miracle!

Before Eating Take time in the morning to remember those who worked so that we would have food. Say a blessing as a family.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה, יְיָ, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, הַמוֹצִיא לֶחֶם מִן הָאָרֶץ.

Baruch Atah, Adonai, Eloheinu Melech ha-olam, hamotzi lechem min ha-aretz.

We praise You, Eternal God. Thank You for the food You provide for us to eat.

Before Leaving the House Plan your day. What special activities will occur? What will each of you do to make the world a better place? Help your child plan to perform a mitzvah each day. Will your child help a friend who is hurt? Call a friend who is ill? Water the plants? Feed the family pet?

Kiss the Mezuzah The *mezuzah* marks your home as a Jewish home. It is a sign of Jewish commitment. As you leave the house, stop to kiss the *mezuzah*. Do this by touching the mezuzah with your fingertips, then bringing your fingertips to your mouth and kissing them.

In the Car Keep Jewish books in the car for your child to look at. Play Jewish music and sing Jewish songs. Talk to your child about the things they see on the way to school or a play date. Point out the miracles of God's creation, people in need and people helping, and people acting in moral and just ways.