

Jewish Laws: Morning Practices

This section outlines the halachic guidelines for how to begin your day, based on authentic Jewish law without added pressures or unnecessary stringencies. The goal is to connect with God through clarity, cleanliness, and gratitude—not through obsession or guilt.

1. Hand Washing in the Morning

Upon waking, it's appropriate to wash your hands (*Netilat Yadayim*). This practice prepares a person spiritually for prayer and is rooted in the purity customs of Temple times.

- **Minimum Requirement:** If no water is available, halachah allows you to clean your hands with any dry, clean material (e.g., cloth, stone, or dust) and say *Al Nikyut Yadayim*.

אם אין לו מים יקנח ידיו בצרור או בעפר או בכל מידי דמנקי ויברך על נקיות ידים ויועיל לתפלה

- **With Water:** If water is available, the Rambam (Hilchot Berachot 6:3) rules that pouring a single *revi'it* (about 3.3 oz.) over both hands is enough. You may pour up to three times per hand if you wish, but that is optional.
- **Don't Obsess:** Many have turned this simple mitzvah into an anxious routine filled with extra steps and pressure. These stringencies are not required by halachah. The focus should be on cleanliness and intention—not mechanical perfection.

היצר הרע בתחילה בא אל האדם במידת החסידות ואחר כך מפילו

(*Even Sheleima, Chapter 1*)

The Yetzer Hara often disguises itself as religious zeal, luring a person with excessive stringencies only to lead them astray.

2. Blessings (Birkot HaShachar)

Both men and women recite the morning blessings. These express gratitude for the basic functions and gifts that allow us to live each day with purpose. Men aim to reach the halachic goal of 100 blessings daily, while women are not obligated in that count, but still say the full set of blessings.

- **Al Netilat Yadayim** is said after washing.
- **Asher Yatzar** is said after using the bathroom—every time, throughout the day.
- *Do not say Al Netilat Yadayim again after using the bathroom unless you're specifically washing before eating bread.*

כל היום כשעושה צרכיו... מברך אשר יצר ולא על נטילת ידים (Shulchan Aruch O.C. 7:4)

Order of Berachot in the Morning

Normally after the bathroom you say the berachah of *Asher Yatzar*, and after washing you say *Al Netilat Yadayim*. But in the morning, you can save the blessings and say them together in order, as many do before morning prayers. Learn the meaning of the berachot—they're beautiful. They follow the natural progression of waking up and help you acknowledge Hashem's kindness and brilliance step by step.

Breakdown of the Morning Blessings

The morning blessings (*Birkot HaShachar*) follow the order of how a person typically wakes up and begins their day, offering praise and gratitude for each stage of physical and spiritual awareness. They thank God for returning the soul (*Elokai Neshamah*), giving strength to the weary, opening the eyes (*Pokeach Ivrim*), providing clothing (*Malbish Arumim*), straightening the bent (*Zokef Kefufim*), giving mobility (*Matir Asurim*), enabling us to stand (*Zokeif Kefufim*), placing the earth beneath our feet (*Roka Ha'aretz*), guiding our steps (*HaMeichin Mitzadei Gaver*), and so on—each blessing acknowledging a basic, often overlooked function or gift, turning routine moments into points of spiritual reflection and appreciation.

טוב מעט תחנונים בכוונה מהרבות בלא כוונה

(*Shulchan Aruch O.C. 1:4*)

Better a little prayer with intention than a lot without it.

המשהה נקביו עובר משום בל תשקצו

(*Shulchan Aruch O.C. 3:17*)

One who delays relieving themselves transgresses the prohibition of *bal teshaktzu*. Your health is most important.

3. “Shelo Asani Isha” and Related Blessings

Men recite three blessings that express gratitude for their mitzvah obligations:

- *Shelo Asani Goy* – Who has not made me a non-Jew
- *Shelo Asani Aved* – Who has not made me a slave
- *Shelo Asani Isha* – Who has not made me a woman

These blessings are not about status—they express gratitude for mitzvah responsibility, as men are obligated in more time-bound commandments. They were also structured to help fulfill the obligation of reciting 100 blessings daily.

Women do not say *Shelo Asani Isha*. Some say *She'asani Kirtzono* (“Who made me according to His will”), though it is a later custom, not required, and **very likely inappropriate**, as it was never instituted by Chazal and may have been introduced as a reaction to misunderstanding rather than grounded halachic reasoning.

4. Torah Study and Birkat HaTorah

Everyone—men and women—must say **Birkat HaTorah** in the morning. Women are required to learn the halachot that apply to them, and that alone obligates them in the blessing.

- **Men** have a mitzvah to engage in ongoing, broad Torah study to accumulate knowledge and deepen understanding of Hashem's will.
- **Women** are not obligated to study Torah for its own sake but are certainly permitted to learn, and even to teach.

Can Women Learn Torah?

Yes. The Rambam's quote about teaching women Torah being "like teaching *tiflut*" is a citation from the Gemara (Sotah 20a), reflecting concerns of that era—not a ban on sincere Torah study. Halachic authorities like Rashi, Rav Moshe Feinstein, and the Chafetz Chaim all endorsed Torah learning for women when it supports emunah and halachic observance. Women like Devorah HaNeviah, Beruriah, and others were Torah leaders in their time—and women today can be as well.

5. Tefillin, Tallit, and Tzitzit

- **Tefillin:** Worn by men during weekday morning prayers. While it was once customary to wear them all day, today they are worn only during Shacharit. Missing a day is not a sin; if it were a strict daily requirement, we'd likely wear them on Shabbat and Yom Tov too.
- **Tallit:**
 - In Ashkenazi custom, typically only married men wear a Tallit. In many other communities, single men do wear a Tallit as well.
- **Tzitzit:**
 - Wearing a tallit katan under your clothing is a *minhag*, not an obligation.
 - If it's uncomfortable, there is no halachic obligation to wear it.
 - Pulling the tzitzit strings outside your pants is not required. "*Ure'item oto*" does not obligate external visibility when worn under clothing.
 - There is currently no authentic *Techelet*. Wait for Moshiach to identify the true Techelet.

- חוטי ציציות שנפסקו יכול לזורקן לאשפה מפני שהוא מצוה שאין בגופה קדושה

Once tzitzit strings are detached from the garment, they may be discarded. While attached, they must not be used for other purposes due to *bizui mitzvah* (disrespect of a mitzvah).

- **Women and Tefillin, Tallit, and Tzitzit:**

Women do not need to wear these items because they are *mitzvot aseh she'hazman grama*—time-bound positive commandments—from which women are halachically exempt.

6. Additional Notes

- Most of the detailed rules about bathroom conduct from early sources (e.g., outdoor facilities) no longer apply.
- Customs like putting on the right shoe before the left and tying the left one first are *midat chassidut*—fine if you do them, but they are not essential.
- If you're traveling or feeling unwell, you may skip customs such as Tallit or Tefillin for that day. Prayer, Tallit, and Tefillin are important mitzvot that should be practiced in a calm and reflective environment, not out of pressure or discomfort.

Morning practices in halachah are not just checklists—they're a way to start your day with clarity, gratitude, and connection to Hashem. By grounding yourself in these simple yet meaningful actions, you set the tone for the entire day—building it on a foundation of awareness, humility, and recognition of God's constant presence in your life.