



Goodnight sleep tight

18 DOORS
Unlocking Jewish

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goodnight sleep tight



Rituals give a comforting shape to a child's day. They offer a child a sense of stability and security that provide a gentle transition to sleep. The regularity of brushing teeth, reading a story or singing a song before being kissed goodnight suggests to children that what they know and love is a constant and will be there again in the morning.

Adding a prayer at bedtime adds one more sweet element to the end of day ritual. It becomes another step in the letting go of day and activities, of color and light, of a parent's touch. Repeating these steps each night gives both parent and child a way to end the day peacefully.

As their children get older, many parents – whether intermarried, in-married or single – want their children to think about God at the end of the day, to think about being grateful for the day they have had, and to think about what went well and what they might have done better. These are values central to many religions.

Saying the *Shema*, the most well known Jewish prayer, at bedtime can be a prelude to these conversations. And by adding a Jewish flavor to the end of the day, whether by prayer, story or song, parents give color and shape to children's view of themselves and their world.

Even this small choice, to read a Jewish book, to choose a Jewish song, to say a Jewish prayer at bedtime, is a model to young eyes that watch and learn from your choices. Children are great mimics and will echo the tastes and gestures of their parents.

No two families need do things the same way. There are no absolutes here with “shoulds” and “shouldn'ts.” Create a bedtime ritual that suits you and your child. Bring the memories of your own childhood bedtime ritual into the present to flavor your choices.

The Shema can be the first prayer said by a child. And by teaching it to your child, you will be linking your family into a chain of tradition that stretches back two thousand years to Talmudic times. If you see yourself in a relationship with God who is in heaven and directs the world, the Shema affirms that there is only one God that we all worship. If you prefer a more mystical understanding and imagine God as not only present in the universe but that the universe is a manifestation of God, then the Shema affirms God's unity with all creation.

Some people tend to think that Jews in the past thought and did everything the same “orthodox” way, but Judaism has always been a pluralistic tradition that evolved and responded to the cultural milieu surrounding it. While the mystical approach to Judaism is less well known today, it was an important pathway for 14th century Jews in Spain and later for Chassidic Jews in Eastern Europe.

In the beginning, a parent can say the one line Shema out loud and once the child knows it, you can say it together. You can say the words in Hebrew or English; the choice is yours.

שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל, ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ, ה' אֶחָד

SH'MA YIS-RA-EL,
ADO-NAI, E-LO-HEI-NU,
ADO-NAI E-CHAD

Hear, O Israel:
the Lord our God,
the Lord is One.

[A translation from the
United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism's
Siddur Sim Shalom,
The Rabbinical Assembly.]

Hear O Israel –
The divine abounds everywhere
and dwells in everything;
the many are One.

[An alternative interpretation by Marcia Falk,
in *The Book of Blessing*, Harper.]

Young children love to imitate their parents, learning by watching. You can choose to close your eyes and cover them with one hand, and your little one will copy you. This is a sign that you are really focused on the words. Or you can cover your child's eyes with your other hand and have this touch be a transition to a goodnight kiss.

As the child grows, you can add the second line of the Shema in a whisper. It is told that Moses overheard angels saying these words when he was on Mt. Sinai and brought them down for the Israelites to use. Since we took it from the angels, we say it in a whisper.

בְּרוּךְ שֵׁם כְּבוֹד מַלְכוּתוֹ לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד

BA-RUCH SHEM
K'VOD MAL-CHU-TOE
L'O-LAM VA-ED

Blessed be the name
of God's glorious majesty
forever and ever.

[A translation based on Philip Birnbaum's
Ha-Siddur Ha-Shalem,
Hebrew Publishing Company.]

Holy One of Blessing,
Your Presence radiates glory
now and forever.

[An alternative interpretation from
V'tar Lebeinu, a prayerbook created at
Beth El of the Sudbury River Valley,
Sudbury, Mass.]

This story can open up a conversation about angels or messengers from God. Some traditional prayerbooks include a prayer that describes four angels (or four messengers from God) who guard the four sides of the bed. The feminine presence of God is pictured as floating above the bed like a canopy. What could make a child feel safer than this image of guardians all around?



The bedtime Shema concludes with Deuteronomy 6:5-9. A parent might choose to read these verses to a school-aged child explaining that they are taken from the Torah.

You shall love Adonai your God
with all your heart, with all your soul, & with all that is yours.
These words that I command you this day
shall be taken to heart.

Teach them again & again to your children;
speak of them when you sit in the your home,
when you walk on your way,
when you lie down, & when you rise up.

Bind them as a sign upon your hand & as a symbol above your eyes.
Inscribe them on the doorposts of your home
& upon your gates.

[A translation from Mahzor Lev Shalem, The Rabbinical Assembly.]

Loving life and its mysterious source
with all my heart and all my spirit, all my senses and strength,
I take upon myself and into myself these promises:
to care for the earth and those who live upon it,
to pursue justice and peace, to love kindness and compassion.
I will teach this to our children throughout the passage of the day –
as I dwell in my home and as I go on my journey,
from the time I rise until I fall asleep.
And may my actions be faithful to my words
that our children's children may live to know:
Truth and kindness have embraced,
peace and justice have kissed and are one.

[An alternative interpretation by Marcia Falk, in The Book of Blessing, Harper.]

Reciting the nightly Shema can open a conversational review of the day, of what went well and what went wrong. Reimagining the day and how the child might have done better can plant the seeds for the practice of self-examination which is the foundation of *teshuvah* (turning or changing), which is the basis of Yom Kippur.



You may also choose to end with a song, such as this one based on the *Hashkiveinu* prayer:

HASH-KI-VEIN'U,
A-DO-NAI EL-O-HEINU
L'SHA-LOM,
V'HA-AM-I'DEI-NU,
MAL-KEI-NU
L'CHA-YIM.
UF-ROS A'LEI-NU
SU-KAT SH'LO-ME'CHA

¹(A translation from
Mishkan T'Filah: a New Reform Siddur,
Central Conference of American Rabbis.)

²(An alternative interpretation by Rabbi
Josh Zweiback and Larry Jonas in
Shireinu: Our Songs — A Songbook for
Camps, Conclaves, Kallot and Retreats,
Transcontinental Music Publications.)

Grant, O Eternal God,
that we may lie down
in peace,
and raise us up, our Guardian,
to life renewed.
Spread over us
the shelter of Your peace.¹

Shelter us beneath thy wings,
O Adonai
Guard us from all harmful things,
O Adonai
Keep us safe throughout the night
'Til we wake with morning's light
Teach us, Eli wrong from right.²

Whatever you decide, you can count on your ritual becoming a precious memory for your child. It may even end up being repeated to your grandchildren. All you need do is begin and let your ritual evolve as your child grows and changes, and their understanding and language skills develop. The important thing is to start. Regardless of

your background, you can add meaning to your children's lives, shaping their views and attitudes, by engaging in these Jewish practices and the process of “doing Jewish” together as a family will foster Jewish identity and connection.

Resources

Taking time to go to a Jewish bookstore together, if you have one in your neighborhood, or a virtual Jewish bookstore, if you do not, will give both you and your child a peek at soft Jewish toys for bedtime cuddling and highlighted books and CDs of the season. Building a library of Jewish books for your child is easy with the guidance of the Association of Jewish Libraries www.ajljewishvalues.org/search.aspx, which has a searchable database by values as well as holidays. We urge you to sign up for books and CDs from the PJ Library www.pjlibrary.org/home.

There are many songs being written every year for children and families. Check the library at your local synagogue and Jewish Community Center for CDs that you can borrow. Ask the cantor or preschool director for recommendations. The Union for Reform Judaism has a music and books division with CDs for children that can be found at www.urjbooksandmusic.com/home.php?cat=340.

A Word About Purpose, Affiliation & Translation

InterfaithFamily.com's mission in part is to empower people in interfaith relationships to engage in Jewish life. We are an independent non-profit, working with many Jewish denominations but not affiliated with any one in particular.

Hebrew is the language of Jewish prayer. In our resources we offer the Hebrew and a phonetic transliteration so that everyone can say the prayer whether or not they read Hebrew. We also offer a translation of every prayer, which we draw from a variety of sources. One of the messy beauties of Jewish life is that there is no hierarchy or central authority to establish universally-agreed upon translations of Jewish prayers, so you will undoubtedly encounter others. Finally, we also offer an alternative interpretation of each prayer from among the many that are available.



18Doors mission is to empower people in interfaith relationships— individuals, couples, families and their children— to make Jewish choices, and to encourage Jewish communities to welcome them.

18Doors offers consultation and resources for synagogues, agencies and schools of all affiliations to assist them in their welcome and engagement of interfaith families and all those who are interested in exploring Judaism.

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