FORMING LIGHT. This opening brakhah before the Sh'ma acknowledges that we experience God, first of all, through witnessing the miracle of creation. Praying in the morning, we are asked to pay attention to the wonder of the dawn, of sunlight, and of a new day. In the liturgy, the break of dawn is then imagined as a chorus of song in which we join.

This brakhah is adapted from a verse in Isaiah (45:7), which reads oseh shalom u-vorei ra, “who makes peace and creates evil.” The prophet insists that both good and evil come from the one God. But in the moment of prayer, we focus on all for which we can be thankful, beginning with the light that makes life possible; therefore, the ancient rabbis transformed this biblical verse and changed the ending to read “creating all.”

ALL hakol. The word hakol, “all,” occurs five times in quick succession and refers to the totality of humanity, all earthly creatures and forces, as well as the heavenly bodies and the most distant galaxies. It echoes the last word of the opening brakhah (borei et ha-kol, “creating all,” at the top of this page) and anticipates the affirmation of the one God, who is God of all, and whom we are about to praise in the Sh’mah.

NONE IS LIKE YOU. The poet is playing with a variety of biblical verses: Isaiah 40:18, “what image can be ascribed to You”; 1 Samuel 2:2, “there is none beside You”; and Isaiah 40:25, “to whom can you compare God.”

MESSIANIC AGE. The poet progresses through stages of redemption from olam ha-ba, the world that is coming, to y' mot ha-mashia'ah, the messianic age, to t'hiyat ha-meitim, life given to the dead.