

אֶהְבֶּה רַבָּה אֶהְבַּתְנִי, יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ,  
 חֲמֵלָה גְדוֹלָה וַיִּתְרָה חֲמֵלָתָ עָלֵינוּ.  
 אָבִינוּ מִלְכֵנוּ, בְּעֵבוֹר אֲבוֹתֵינוּ [וְאִמּוֹתֵינוּ]  
 שִׁבְטָחוּ בָךְ וַתִּלְמְדֵם חֻקֵי חַיִּים,  
 כִּן תַּחַנְּנוּ וַתִּלְמְדֵנוּ.  
 אָבִינוּ, הָאֵב הַרְחֵמוּ, הַמְרַחֵם,  
 רַחֵם עָלֵינוּ וְתֵן בְּלִבֵּנוּ לְהִבִּין וּלְהַשְׁכִּיל,  
 לְשִׁמְעַ, לְלַמֵּד וּלְלַמֵּד, לְשִׁמּוֹר וּלְעֲשׂוֹת  
 וּלְקִיָּים אֶת־כָּל־דְּבָרֵי תִלְמוּד תּוֹרָתְךָ בְּאֶהְבָּה.

וְהָאֵר עֵינֵינוּ בְּתוֹרָתְךָ,  
 וְדַבֵּק לִבֵּנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתֶיךָ,  
 וַיַּחַד לְבַבֵּנוּ לְאֶהְבָּה וּלְיִרְאָה אֶת־שְׁמֶךָ,  
 וְלֹא נָבוֹשׁ לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד.  
 כִּי בְשֵׁם קִדְשְׁךָ הַגְּדוֹל וְהַנּוֹרָא בְּטַחֲנוּ,  
 נִגִּילָה וְנִשְׁמַחָה בִּישׁוּעָתְךָ.

(Gather Tzitzit in Right Hand) *Some gather their tzitzit before reciting this line:*

◀ וְהִבִּיאֵנוּ לְשָׁלוֹם מֵאַרְבַּע כַּנְפוֹת הָאָרֶץ,  
 וְתוֹלִיבֵנוּ קוֹמְמִיּוֹת לְאַרְצֵנוּ,  
 כִּי אֵל פּוֹעֵל יִשׁוּעוֹת אַתָּה,  
 וּבָנוּ בְּחֵרֶת מִכָּל־עַם וּלְשׁוֹן,  
 וְקִרְבַּתְנוּ לְשִׁמְךָ הַגְּדוֹל סֵלָה בְּאַמֶּת,  
 לְהוֹדוֹת לָךְ וּלְיַחַדְךָ בְּאֶהְבָּה.  
 בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה, הַבּוֹחֵר בְּעַמּוֹ יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּאֶהְבָּה.

YOU HAVE LOVED US DEEPLY אֶהְבֶּה רַבָּה. The Hebrew root *alef-hei-vet*, meaning “love,” appears six times in this passage (both as the noun and a verb). Reuven Hammer points out that three of them speak of our love for God and three speak of God’s love for us. While reciting this *b'rakhah*, the worshipper can anticipate the seventh occurrence, which is found in the first paragraph of the Sh'ma: “You shall love Adonai your God.”

אָבִינוּ AVINU MALKEINU. Literally, “our father, our king.” The pairing of the two words emphasizes that God is at once both intimate as a close relation and distant as a monarch. The word *av*, “father,” suggests the image of God as source or progenitor, and therefore it may also be translated as “creator.”

חֻקֵי חַיִּים LAWS OF LIFE. The word “Torah” encompasses many different meanings. In its most limited usage, it refers to the Five Books of Moses. But in a larger sense it refers to all of Scripture, and even to all of later Jewish teaching. Thus, the rabbis of the Talmud spoke

of the “Written Torah” and the “Oral Torah,” the latter referring to the teachings of the Midrash, Mishnah, and Talmud—and even to “whatever new teaching a student of wisdom might impart until the end of time” (Leviticus Rabbah 22:1). In this prayer, “Torah” embraces the widest meaning: the laws of life—all those teachings that instruct us concerning a full ethical and religious life.

לְהִבִּין וּלְהַשְׁכִּיל . . . לְשִׁמּוֹר וּלְעֲשׂוֹת וּלְקִיָּים. TO UNDERSTAND AND DISCERN . . . OBSERVE, FULFILL, AND PERFORM. This sequence implies that study is intimately linked with action—indeed, that study should lead to action.

GATHERING THE TZITZIT. Many observe the custom, originating in the late Middle Ages, of gathering the four *tzitziyot* (plural of *tzitzit*) of the *tallit* while reciting the words “bring us safely from the four corners of the earth,” thus symbolizing Israel’s unity and ingathering. The *tzitziyot* are then held through the third paragraph of the Sh'ma, and kissed when reciting the word *tzitzit* (which appears three times in that paragraph). By this practice, we indicate that we are lovingly undertaking to observe these words of Torah, and we hope that our commitment to strive for holiness will lead to greater unity. We are also gathering within us all our positive intentions.