Mah tovu ohaleha ya’akov mishkenoteha yisra’el. Va’ani berov hasdeha avo veeyteha eshtahaveh el heyhal kodsheha beyirateha. Adonay ahavi me’on beyteha umkom mishkan kevodeha. Va’ani eshtahaveh ve’e’ha’ah evre’ah lifney adonay osi va’ani tefilati leha adonay et ratzon elohim berov hasdeha aneni be’emet yishcheha.

KAVANAH. It is only a true and close community that develops associations, traditions and memories that go to make up its soul. To mingle one’s personality with that soul becomes a natural longing. In such a community one experiences that mystic divine grace which, like radiant sunshine, illumines our lives when joyous and, like balm, heals them when wounded or stricken. Then all questions about saying this or that become trivial, for the real purpose is attained in having each one feel with the Psalmist: “One thing I ask of God that will I seek after, that I may dwell in the house of God all the days of my life, to behold the graciousness of God.”

M.M.K. (ADAPTED)

עניא יאנו / as for me, my prayer is for you. The Hebrew text has often been creatively misread to mean “I am my prayer.” All I have to offer in prayer is myself. We begin our prayers with a feeling of humility, knowing that the vaunted words we are about to speak are no greater than the person who speaks them. Most of the prayers in our liturgy are phrased in the first person plural, in which we as a community stand before the Divine presence. But here they are introduced in the halting and somewhat unsure voice of the individual, expressing some of that inadequacy that each of us feels as we enter the place and hour of prayer.

A.G.

141 / MAH TOVU
Blessed are you, THE ARCHITECT, our God, the sovereign of all worlds, who shaped the human being with wisdom, making for us all the openings and vessels of the body. It is revealed and known before your Throne of Glory that if one of these passage-ways be open when it should be closed, or blocked up when it should be free, one could not stay alive or stand before you. Blessed are you, MIRACULOUS, the wondrous healer of all flesh.

COMMENTARY. This blessing expresses wonder at the simple but necessary functioning of the human body. We do not need to stand before any greater wonder of nature than our own bodies in order to appreciate the intricacy and beauty with which our world is endowed. A sense of awe at our own creation is a starting point of prayer. A.G.
Barух אָתָה הַדָּגָד הַשָּׁמַיִם הַמַּעֲצָמָhim יְשָׁרֵי צְדָקָה קְדֻשָּׁה מַעֲשֶׂיהָ הָלָהְלוּיָם
וְבִּכְלָיוֹנָהּ בָּאָדָם בֵּיתָהוּ בְּאַלְמָנָא שֶׁיְשָׁרֵי צְדָקָה יַעֲבֹר מַעֲשֶׂיהָ הָלָהְלוּיָם
כַּל צָעִיד וַגָּדֹלָא לְהַמַּעֲשֶׂיהָ הָלָהְלוּיָם צֶּרֶךְ שֶׁיַעֲבֹר מַעֲשֶׂיהוּ הַשָּׁמַיִם מַעֲשֶׂיהָ הָלָהְלוּיָם
כַּל צָעִיד וַגָּדֹלָא לְהַמַּעֲשֶׂיהוּ הָלָהְלוּיָים.

Baruh atah Adonay eloheynu melech ha'olam asher yatzar et ha'adam bechomah uv'ara vo nekavim nekavim halulim halulim.
Galuwi veyadu'a lifney hisey hevodeh she'im yipate'ah ehad mehem o yisatem ehad mehem i efsnar lefi'tkayem ve'ala'mod lefanha. Baruh atah Adonay rofey hol basar umafi la'asot.

לְכָלָיוֹנָהּ / all the openings. We regularly perceive by contrast: light and shadow, height and depth, loudness and softness...Often we become aware of health only after illness has replaced it. This brief paragraph of praise for the wondrous workings of the human organism encourages recognition of the blessing of health in its presence, not its absence. Every moment we are healing!

E.G.

163 / BIRTOT HASHAHAR/MORNING BLESSINGS
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Elohay neshamah shenatata bi tehorah hi.

אֵלֹהֵי נְשָׁמָ֑ה שֶׁנַּתַּ֖תִּה בָּיְ֥הוּדֵ֑ה אַחֲרֵ֖ה בָּאֵ֥מֶרֶת בִּעְלָהֶּֽה בִּֽהְמַֽה וְפַֽעֲמָֽה בָּכֻֽלֶּּֽה֙

ם יִשְׂרָאֵל / restoring [the soul] to everlasting life. The traditional Hebrew text says, “and restore it to me in the future to come.” The text in our siddur, rather than stressing the traditional notion of individual afterlife, or of personal resurrection in the messianic End of Days, reverses the emphasis: the soul, having sojourned in the physical life, is restored to the everlasting stream of life—to the continuum of being that is the sum-total of all transitory lives, when viewed from the perspective of eternity. J.R.

GUIDED MEDITATION. In the Hebrew of אֵלֹהֵי נְשָׁמָה / My God, the soul, many of the words end with the sound “ah,” spelled “ה.” When this prayer is chanted slowly, you breathe these words. Thus this prayer suggests an opportunity, through breathing, to explore the connection between neshamah as breath and as soul:

Sit comfortably with your eyes closed, feet uncrossed, and hands loosely on your lap. Take a series of slow, relaxed breaths. Don’t try to control them. Just let them come and go freely. Focus your concentration on your breath. Let the thoughts you have flow through you. Don’t try to control them. Each time you end a thought, return your focus to your breath. Do this for several minutes. As you follow your breath, reflect on the divine energy it contains.

L.W.K./D.B.

165 / BIRHOT HASHAHAR/MORNING BLESSINGS
The following blessing is said only when it precedes Jewish study. Some appropriate study texts can be found on pages 694-703. Any other Jewish sources may of course be selected.

ברכה לامية תוראה

Baruḥ atah adonay eloheynu meleḥ ha'olam asher kideshanu bemitzvatav vetziyanu la'asok bedivrey torah.

לפש טבריה תוראה / to occupy ourselves with words of Torah. The Hebrew words here do not say “to study Torah,” but rather to “be engaged” or “to be busy with” the study of Torah. We study Torah not as an intellectual exercise alone. Rather, we understand our “engagement” with Torah more holistically—as an every day, every moment activity. We also understand that to be fully “engaged” with Torah is to wrestle with Torah—to challenge our tradition while loving it, to question while celebrating it. L.B.

169 / BIRKAT LIMUD TORAH/TORAH STUDY BLESSING
Esa cynay el heharim me'ayin yavo ezri.
Ezri me'im adonay oseh shamayim va'aretz.

DERASH. If we lift our eyes towards the mountains, be they rounded from weathering or jaggedly youthful, their connecting of the molten innards of earth with the luminous stretches of heaven arouses wonder at the dynamism and eruptive creativity amidst which we live. Depths become heights while hills are laid low, and the hardest of surfaces yields to the softness of water and wind. Change is ceaseless, and transformation knows no pause. The dynamism both exhilarates and exhausts the spirit; no wonder that we seek stability amidst this endless process.

Many of this psalm’s readers may find such stability in the seemingly solid image of the Maker of heaven and earth. But those whose ears are attuned to mystical overtones may hear in the word יְיִהוָה יְיִי/ me’ayin echoes of the Creative Nothingness, the Divine Void, the AYIN, the Mysterious and Ever Elusive Source from which all existence springs. The Name for that Source—four letters without consonantal substance, the stirrings of breath captured only in vowels—hints at stability amidst ceaseless process, a dizzying term of pure becoming. The paradox of this affirmation contributes to the spiritual vertigo which may, along with the heights of the highest peaks, help us sense that Source of our being that lies both above and beneath our furthest seeing.

E.G.

215 / PSALM 121
A Song of Ascents. Of David.

I rejoiced whenever people said to me,
let's journey to the house of THE UNSEEN!

Our feet would stand
inside your gates, Jerusalem,

Jerusalem, built up, a city
where all things converge,

the place to which the tribes would climb,
the tribes of Yah,

the place of Israel's witness,
for acknowledging the name of THE ETERNAL.

For there the seats of justice dwell,
the thrones of David's house.

So, let us say: Shalom, Yerushalayim,
and let all who love you be consoled,

great solace be upon your force,
salvation's rest amid your halls,

for all my kin, for all my friends,
may I now speak: Shalom to you!

And for the house of THE INDWELLING ONE, our God,
I only seek your good.

Psalm 122

COMMENTARY. Psalms 121 and 122 are included from the Sephardic rite. They are part of a group of pilgrims' songs, sung by our ancestors as they went up to the Temple. These two psalms, simple in their language and strong in their faith, are classics of our ancient religious literature. A.G.

PESUKEY DEZIMRAH/VERSE OF PRAISE / 216
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Halleluyah halelu el bekodsho. Haleluhu birki’a uzo.
Haleluhu vigvurotav. Haleluhu kerov gudlo.
Haleluhu beteka shofar.
Haleluhu benevel ve’hinor.
Haleluhu betof umahol.
Haleluhu beminim ve’ugav.
Haleluhu betziltzeley shama.
Haleluhu betziltzeley teru’ah.
Kol haneshamah tehalel yah. Halleluyah.

כברד יוהו עלולם אמן זאמ: כברד יוהו מצרי שער וירשל’ם
העלולם: כברד יוהו אליהם יSpecifier עשה כמלאת לברד;
יבור ושם בברד עולם יפחלו כבודי עמי ויפלח ידיהם אמן זאמ:

/ and may God’s glory fill all the earth. The meaning of the Hebrew phrase is rich in ambiguity. All earth is filled with divine glory, but divine glory itself is filled up with earthliness. It is the reality of this world that fills God’s presence, as it is the presence that gives the world its glory. A.G.

ברד...אמם / Blessed...Amen! (Psalms 89:53, 135:21, 72:18-19).

231 / PSALM 150
It is customary for mourners, and those observing Yahrzeit, to stand for Kaddish. In some congregations everyone rises.

Reader: Yitgadal veyitkadash shemey raba
be’alma divra hirutey veyamliḥ malhuṭey
beḥayeḥon uvyomeyḥon uvḥayeḥey deḥol beyt yisra’el
ba’agala uvizman kariv ve’imru amen.

Congregation: Yehey shemey raba mevarah le’alam ulalmey almaya.

Reader: Yitbarañ veyishtabah veyitpa’ar veyitromam veyitnasey
veyit-hadar veyitaleh veyit-halal shemey dekvudsha beriḥ hu
le’ela (On Shabbat Shuvah add: le’ela) min kol birḥata veshirata
ṭushbeḥata venuḥemata da’amiran be’alma ve’imru amen.

Yehey shelama raba min shemaya vehayim aleynu ve’al kol
yisra’el ve’imru amen.

Oseh shalom bimromay hu ya’aseh shalom aleynu ve’al kol
yisra’el ve’al kol yoshvey tevel ve’imru amen.

During the month of Elul, many congregations sing Aḥat Sha’alti, page 832.

451 / MOURNERS’ KADDISH
OSEH SHALOM
Oseh shalom bimromav
Hu ya'aseh shalom aleynu
Ve'al kol yisrael
Ve'al kol yoshvei tevel
Ve'imru Amen

The One WHO MAKES PEACE

The who makes peace in the high places
Shall make peace upon us
And upon all of Israel
And on all who live on Earth
And say Amen
MI SHEBEIRACH BY DEBBIE FRIEDMAN

Mi shebeirach avoteinu
M'kor hab'racha l'imoteinu
May the source of strength,
Who blessed the ones before us,
Help us find the courage to make our lives a blessing, and let us say, Amen.

Mi shebeirach imoteinu
M'kor habrachah l'avoteinu
Bless those in need of healing with r'fuah sh'leimah,
The renewal of body, the renewal of spirit, And let us say, Amen
Oh Lord prepare me to be a sanctuary, Pure and holy, tried and true
and with thanksgiving, I'll be a living sanctuary for you

Ve-a-su li mik-dash
ve-sha-han-ti be-to-ham
Va-a nahnu ne-va-reh Yah
Me-a-tah ve-ad o-lam