

Welcome! Take a deep breath, and ground yourself in this place and time.  
 Close your eyes for one moment.  
 Open your eyes and greet your *chevruta*. Introduce yourself and connect!  
 Offer them gratitude for their presence.  
 Commit to bringing fresh eyes, compassion, and an open heart to this process.  
 Offer this blessing for studying torah or a blessing from your own heart:

We experience your blessing, holy one of all time and space, in this opportunity to become aware of holiness through getting busy with words of torah.	baruch ata adonai eloheinu melech ha'olam asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu la'asok v'divrei torah	בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ לְעֹסֵק בְּדִבְרֵי-תוֹרָה
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Someone volunteer to read the Hebrew or transliteration aloud, as slowly as you can.  
 Feel the Hebrew on your tongue or in your ear if you are able.

אַשְׁרֵי יוֹשְׁבֵי בֵיתְךָ עוֹד יִהְיֶה לָּךְ סֵלָה

*ahsh-ray yosh-vay vay-te-cha, od ye-ha-le-lu-cha se-lah*

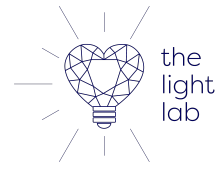
What do you notice, just based on the sound of these words? What do you feel?

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Read through these translations aloud.

Happy are those who dwell in your house- they forever praise You! <i>-Siddur Mishkan T'filah</i>	Joyous are they who dwell in Your house; they shall praise you forever. <i>-Siddur Lev Shalem</i>	Sitting in Your home is happiness. And, offering appreciation of You, Is even more so. Selah! <i>-Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi</i>	Happy are the dwellers in this house: they are always praising what lasts. <i>-Rabbi Jill Hammer</i>	Ahhh- Sitting in Your house, I am content. It will always be enough. <i>-Eliana Light</i>
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Which one catches your eye, your heart? What feelings arise?  
 What choices do you notice on the part of the translators? What questions arise?



Choose one of the following paths. Feel free to explore more than one if time.

### 1....but why?

Here are some facts about this prayer. For each fact, go a little deeper. Ask “why?”

1. These words are from Psalm 84 verse 5. It was chosen as an introduction, along with Psalm 144 verse 15, to Psalm 145 in the liturgy. (already by the time of the Talmud, the whole prayer was referred to as “ashrei”!) *Why this line as an introduction to reading a whole different psalm?*
2. Taken together, the two opening lines feature the word “ashrei” three times. Some connect this to a teaching in the Talmud, Berachot 4:b, that anyone who says Psalm 145 three times daily is assured a place in the world to come. *Why have “ashrei” be the repeating word, and not another word? Why have it repeated three times?*
3. In Berachot 32b, this line is brought as a proof text to explain why earlier sages would hang out for an hour in the synagogue before prayer. *Why is this line brought as a proof text, and not other texts? What is the connection? Why hang out for an hour before prayer?*
4. Ashrei appears three times in the daily liturgy: in the *p’sukei d’zimra*, morning psalms, part of the morning service; as the first prayer in the closing section of the morning service; and as the first prayer in the afternoon service. *Why these places, and not other places? Why twice in the morning? Why have it open the afternoon service?*
5. What other choices are being made? Can you question and ponder the choice?

### 2. Author Empathy

These lines are from Psalm 85. Someone wrote this.

Who was that person?

(Traditionally, we say king david wrote the psalms. But historically, we do not know. So you can choose!)

Can I imagine them? What was their life like?

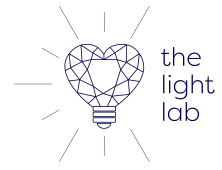
What did they experience that elicited this response?

Did the prayer arise in the moment, or was it written and worked on later?

Have I ever had an experience that might be similar? That might elicit a similar response?

When have I felt at home, content, or desired to feel that way?

Can I have empathy for the author of this prayer? Can I understand why they might have responded in this way, even if it’s different from my response?



### 3. Let the prayer speak

Scan the texts of the prayer above. Is there a word or phrase that catches your eye?  
Why is that word or phrase calling out to you today?  
If it seems random, can you find a reason?  
Repeat the word or phrase over and over, like a mantra.  
How does it feel to have the prayer speak to you?

### 4. Translation Lab

Using the translations above, as well as this word-by-word breakdown, play around with creating your own translation for Ashrei. Bring in your own language, experience, and flourish.  
How does it feel to craft your own translation?

אַשְׁרֵי Happy, content, blessed

יוֹשְׁבֵי Those who sit, dwell, reside

בֵּיתְךָ In Your house, home

עוֹד More, still

יְהַלְלוּךָ They will praise, bless You

סְלָה Forever, or a musical notation, perhaps a held-out note

### 5. Liturgical Advice

If this prayer text could give you a piece of advice, what would it be?  
(you can imagine it as a fortune cookie fortune, a self help book, a TedTalk title, etc.)  
If you lived according to that advice, how would your life be different?  
If we all lived according to that advice, how would the world be different?