

### Who Gives Sight to the Blind

When we thank God for giving sight to the blind, we express thankfulness not only for the literal gift of sight, but also for our capacity for insight, for our ability to be aware of the world around us, and for the capacity to understand ourselves and our world.

Rabbi Benjamin said: We are all blind until the Holy One enlightens our eyes, as the Bible records regarding Hagar, "And God opened her eyes and she saw a well" (Genesis 21:19).

—GENESIS RABBAH

### Imitating God

Our prayers thanking God for the clothes we wear and for the ability to stand up and walk about are also a reminder of the imperative for us to provide clothing for the "naked," to offer help to those who are in physical need, and to defend those who are unjustifiably "bound." The ancient rabbis commented on the verse, "You shall follow Adonai your God..." (Deuteronomy 13:5)—just as God is kind and loving, so too you should be kind and loving; just as God performs acts of generosity, so should you; just as God is patient, so should you be, as it is written, "You shall make yourselves holy, for I, Adonai your God, am holy" (Leviticus 19:2).

—based on THE BABYLONIAN TALMUD

### Blessings for a New Day

We rise.

*Barukh atah Adonai, our God, sovereign of time and space, who enables the bird to distinguish day from night, who made me in the divine image, who made me free, who made me a Jew, who gives sight to the blind, who clothes the naked,*

- Barukh atah Adonai eloheinu melek ha-olam, asher natan la-sekhvi v'nah l'hav'vin bein yom u-vein lailah.*
- Barukh atah Adonai eloheinu melek ha-olam, she-asani b'tzalmo.*
- Barukh atah Adonai eloheinu melek ha-olam, she-asani ben/bat horin.*
- Barukh atah Adonai eloheinu melek ha-olam, she-asani yisrael.*
- Barukh atah Adonai eloheinu melek ha-olam, pokei'ah ivrim.*
- Barukh atah Adonai eloheinu melek ha-olam, malbish arumim.*

### ברכות השחר

We rise.

*ברוך אתה יהוה אלהינו מלך העולם, אשר נתן לשכוי בינה להבחין בין יום ובין לילה. ברוך אתה יהוה אלהינו מלך העולם, שפעשני בצלמו. ברוך אתה יהוה אלהינו מלך העולם, שפעשני בשראי. ברוך אתה יהוה אלהינו מלך העולם, שפעשני בשראי. ברוך אתה יהוה אלהינו מלך העולם, שפעשני בשראי.*

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Hilkhot Tefillah 7:7, 9). Other authorities, however, beginning with the siddur of Rav Amram Gaon in the 9th century, recommended the public recitation of these *brakhot*. This has been the standard Ashkenazic practice to this day; the common Sephardic practice is to recite these *brakhot* privately and to begin the service with the morning psalms.

**BARUKH** Many commentators argue that the word *barukh* is not a passive verb meaning "blessed," but rather an adjective descriptive of God: God is the wellspring of all blessings. (The similar-sounding Hebrew word *breikhah* means "pool of water.") Thus the opening words of a *brakha* are an acknowledgment that God is the source of all blessings (*Meir ibn Gabbai*).

**WHO ENABLES THE BIRD TO DISTINGUISH** אֲשֶׁר נָתַן לַשְׁכוּי בִּינָה לְהַבְחִין בֵּין יוֹם וּבֵין לַיְלָה. We are a part of the natural world, responding to the morning sunlight as does all of nature. This first blessing attributes understanding to the animal realm and points to humans taking instruction from them.

The language is taken from the Book of Job (38:36), where God responds to Job out of the whirlwind, saying: "Who placed wisdom in the most hidden places? Who gave understanding to the bird? Who is wise enough to describe the heavens?" The word used for bird is *sekhvi*, and the Babylonian Talmud identifies it as a rooster (Rosh Hashanah 26a).

**WHO MADE ME IN THE DIVINE IMAGE** שֶׁפִּעֲשֵׂנִי בְצִלְמוֹ. This blessing and the next one ("who made me free") are versions of blessings mentioned in the Tosefta (Berakhot 6:18) and in the Babylonian Talmud (Menahot 43b). They have been emended in Conservative prayer-books on the basis of manuscript fragments, found in the Cairo Genizah.

**WHO MADE ME A JEW** יִשְׂרָאֵל יִשְׂרָאֵל. This positive formulation is the wording in the Babylonian Talmud (Menahot 43b).

**WHO GIVES SIGHT TO THE BLIND** פּוֹקֵי'הּ עִוְרִים. Said when opening the eyes. Many of these blessings are taken from the psalmist's descriptions of God's actions: "... sets prisoners free ... restores sight to the blind ... makes those who are bent stand straight ..." (Psalm 146:7–8).

**WHO CLOTHES THE NAKED** מְלִבִּישׁ עֲרֻמִּים. God's clothing of Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:21) was an act of kindness exhibited to these first humans, even as they were exiled from the Garden.

**BLESSINGS FOR A NEW DAY** בְּרֻכּוֹת הַשָּׁחַר. As reported in the Babylonian Talmud, most of the *brakhot* in this collection were originally recited at home as one went through the daily acts of waking and rising (Berakhot 60b). Each passage extols God as we begin the day: on arising from sleep, on hearing the birds sing, on dressing, on taking one's first steps, and so on.

Maimonides stated: "These *brakhot* are without a prescribed order; each is to be recited only on the appropriate occasion ... and not as part of the synagogue service" (Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Tefillah 7:7, 9).

Other authorities, however, beginning with the siddur of Rav Amram Gaon in the 9th century, recommended the public recitation of these *brakhot*. This has been the standard Ashkenazic practice to this day; the common Sephardic practice is to recite these *brakhot* privately and to begin the service with the morning psalms.

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