



**A Jew on the Loo:
The Asher Yatzar Blessing**
Sunday 22 December 2024 - 12:50-13:45

The Prayer Itself

Asher Yatzar

This version of the prayer is taken from the 2008 edition of Forms of Prayer, the siddur (prayer book) used by the Reform movement in the UK

<p>Blessed are You, our Living God, Sovereign of the universe, who formed human beings in wisdom, creating within them openings and vessels. It is revealed and known before the throne of Your glory that if one of them is opened or one of them closed it would be impossible to remain alive and stand before You. Blessed are You God, who heals all flesh and performs such wonders.</p>	<p>בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הַעוֹלָם. אֲשֶׁר יָצַר אֶת־הָאָדָם בְּחָכְמָה. וּבָרָא בּוֹ נִקְבִים וְנִקְבִים. תְּלוּלִים תְּלוּלִים: גְּלוּי וְנִדְוֵעַ לִפְנֵי כֶסֶף כְּבוֹדָךָ שְׂאֵם יִפְתַּח אֶחָד מֵהֶם. אוֹ יִסְתֵּם אֶחָד מֵהֶם. אֵי אֶפְשֶׁר לְהִתְקַיֵּם וְלַעֲמוֹד לִפְנֵיךָ: בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ הוֹהוּ. רוֹפֵא כָּל־בְּשָׂר. וּמַפְּלִיא לַעֲשׂוֹת</p>
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The Source Texts

Exodus 15:26

Context: After the Israelites cross the Sea of Reeds, they wander in the wilderness of Shur and find themselves without water. At Marah, they find undrinkable water; it is too bitter. The Israelites (understandably) grumble. God shows Moses a piece of wood; Moses throws it in the water. The water becomes sweet and therefore drinkable.

<p>He¹ said, “If you surely heed the voice of YHVH your God and you do what is right in His eyes and you listen to His commandments and you keep all His laws, all the illness that I</p>	<p>וַיֹּאמֶר אִם שְׁמוּעַ תִּשְׁמַע לְקוֹל יְיָ אֱלֹהֶיךָ וְהִישָׁר בְּעֵינָיו תַּעֲשֶׂה וְהִאֲזַנְתָּ לְמִצְוֹתָיו וְשָׁמַרְתָּ כָּל חֻקָּיו כֹּל הַמִּצְוָה אֲשֶׁר שִׁמְתִי בְּמִצְרַיִם לֹא אֲשִׁים עָלֶיךָ כִּי אֲנִי יְיָ רַפְּאֵךְ</p>
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¹ This could be Moses or God. In both Biblical verses, the abundance of masculine pronouns causes confusion. Whilst it would normally be my wont to translate God’s pronouns with the gender neutral “They/Them,” I opted for “He” in both cases to preserve the confusion of the original text.

put upon Egypt I will not put upon you, for I am YHVH your Healer. "	
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Judges 13:19

Context: Manoach's wife struggles with infertility. An angel appears to her and tells her she will bear a son. The angel gives her instructions about what she should and should not eat or drink during the pregnancy. He also gives her instructions that the child will be a Nazirite and therefore his hair should not ever be cut. There is comic back-and-forth about Manoach wanting to meet the holy visitor, wanting to hear the instructions himself and not realising the visitor is an angel. The angel refuses to give his name and tells Manoach to not give him any gifts, but rather to make an offering to God. After this verse, the angel ascends to the skies in the flames of the altar.

And Manoach took a goat kid and the offering and he offered them up on the rock to YHVH ² and H/he ³ was working wonders in doing ⁴ while Manoach and his wife were watching.	וַיִּקַּח מְנוּחָה אֶת גְּדֵי הָעִזִּים וְאֶת הַמִּנְחָה וַיַּעֲלֵה עַל הַצֹּרֵר לַיהוָה וּמִפְּלֵא לַעֲשׂוֹת וּמְנוּחָה וְאִשְׁתּוֹ רֹאִים
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The Prayer Emerges

Babylonian Talmud Berakhot 60b

The Babylonian Talmud is a many-voiced, many-layered text containing Jewish legal and narrative material from approximately 0-500 CE.

One who enters the restroom says, "Be in honour dismissed, you honoured holy ones who minister to the Most High, give honour to the God of Israel, cause yourselves to be relieved of me until I enter and do my will and I come [back] to you." Abbaye said, "Let a person not say thus, lest they leave him and go! Rather, let him say, 'Guard me,	הַנִּכְנָס לְבֵית הַכֶּסֶּא, אֹמֵר: הַתְּכַבְּדוּ מְכֻבָּדִים קְדוּשִׁים מִשְׁרָתִי עֲלִיּוֹן, תְּנוּ כְבוֹד לְאֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, הִרְפוּ מִמֶּנִּי עַד שְׁאֲכַנְס וְאֶעֱשֶׂה רְצוֹנִי וְאֶבֵּא אֵלֵיכֶם. אָמַר אַבְיִי: לֹא לִימָא אִינְשׁ הַכִּי, דְּלִמָּא שְׁבַקֵּי לֵיהּ וְאִזְלֵי. אֲלֵא לִימָא: שְׁמַרוּנֵי שְׁמַרוּנֵי, עֲזֵרוּנֵי עֲזֵרוּנֵי, סְמְכוּנֵי סְמְכוּנֵי, הַמְתִּינוּ לִי הַמְתִּינוּ לִי, עַד שְׁאֲכַנְס וְאֶצֵּא
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² Emended per *NJPS* translation, 549.

³ The subject is unclear (as well as whether there is a subject). Alter assumes the wonder worker is the angel ("the other was performing a wonder"), 130. BDB assumes it was God, 810. *NJPS* avoids ascribing a subject, 539. Presumably it could also be Manoach, a confusion Alter wishes to avoid, 130.

⁴ BDB, 810. *NJPS* reads "and a marvelous thing happened," but notes that the meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain, 549. This is a difficult phrase to translate, given the *hiphil* active participle followed by the infinitive. I opted for BDB's translation, since whilst clunky, it conveys a taste of the Hebrew. However, I would not recommend this translation for liturgical use, since I would in that case prioritise poetry and ease of use.

<p>guard me, help me, help me, support me, support me, wait for me, wait for me until I enter and I come out, for thus is the way of all human beings.’ When he comes out he should say, ‘Blessed is the one who created the human being with wisdom and created within them holes [upon] holes, hollows [upon] hollows. It is revealed and known before the throne of Your glory that if one of them should be opened or one of them should be closed, it would be impossible to stand before you.’” What is the [proper] closing [for this blessing]? Rav said, “Who heals the sick.” Shmuel said, “Father is making the whole world equivalent to sick people! Rather [it should be]: ‘Who heals all flesh.’” Rav Sheshet said, “Who works wonders in doing.” Rav Papa said, “Let us therefore say both: ‘Who heals all flesh and works wonders in doing.’”</p>	<p>שכן דרכן של בני אדם. כי נפיק אומר: ברוך אשר יצר את האדם בחכמה וברא בו נקבים נקבים חללים חללים גלוי וידוע לפני כסא כבודך שאם יפתח אחד מהם או אם יסתם אחד מהם אי אפשר לעמוד לפניך. מאי חתים? - אמר רב: רופא חולים. אמר שמואל: קא שוינהו אבא לכולי עלמא קצירי! אלא: רופא כל בשר. רב ששת אמר: מפליא לעשות. אמר רב פפא: הלכך נמרינהו לתרוייהו, רופא כל בשר ומפליא לעשות</p>
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Which Bodies Aren't Included? How Might We Include Them?

Rabbi Kelilah Miller, “Blessing for Breastfeeding”:

<https://ritualwell.org/ritual/blessing-breastfeeding/>

<p>Blessed are You Shaddai, Eloheinu, Mother of all worlds Who has formed us with wisdom And has created within us passages and openings Which are the font of sustenance and life May it be Your will that the milk of my breasts be for a blessing, for health and for peace Give this little one happiness, success, wisdom of the heart, love of Creation, and resistance to wrongdoing For this little one will one day grow And lead us in peace to a world flowing with milk and honey, speedily and in our days</p>	<p>ברוכה את שדי אלהינו אם העולמים אשר יצרה אותנו בחכמה ובראה בנו נקבים נקבים חלולים חלולים שהם מעין המזון והחיים יהי רצון מלפניך שחלב שדי יהיה לברכה לבריאות ולשלום תני לקטן (קטנה) זה (זו) אשר הצלחה חכמת לב אהבת הבריאות ויראת חטא כי זה (זו) הקטן (הקטנה) גדול (גדולה) יהיה (תהיה) תוליכינו בשלום לארץ זבת חלב ודבש במהרה במינו ברוכה את יה המינקת לכל בשר</p>
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<p><i>Conclusion, said after the nursing session ends: Blessed are You, Yah, who nurses all flesh.</i></p>	
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Rabbi Elliott Kukla, “An Asher Yatzar (‘The One Who Forms’) Blessing for Many Genders” in *Mishkan Ga’avah* (2020)

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Sovereign of the universe, who formed the human body with skill, creating the body’s many pathways and openings. It is well known before Your throne of glory that if one of them be wrongly opened or closed, it would be impossible to endure and stand before You.

May the day come when it is also well known that if just one unique body within Your creation is not allowed to make its distinctive beauty manifest in the world, it is impossible for all of Your creation to thrive and rise each day joyfully before You.

Blessed are You, Source of all life and form, who implanted within us the ability to form ourselves - moulding, changing, transitioning, and adorning our bodies - so that the fullness of our many genders, the abundance of our desires, and the diversity of our souls can be revealed.

ברוכה אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם אֲשֶׁר יָצַרְהָ אֶת בְּנֵי וּבָנוֹת אָדָם וְחוּהוּ בְחָכְמָה
B'ruchah atah Adonai Eloheinu Melech ha'olam asher yatzrah et b'nei uv'not adam v'chavah b'chochmah.

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, who has made me Your partner in daily completing the task of my own formation.

Jamie S.K. Starr, “Asher Yatzar (The One Who Forms) for Disabled Liberation”

<https://www.atthewellproject.com/blog/adapting-prayers-a-liberation-practice-steeped-in-tradition>

Blessed are you, our God/Divine Presence/Holy One/Shekhinah, who in Your infinite wisdom formed the universe and within it each unique human body.

You created each of us *B'tzelem Elohim* – in the image of the Divine – and crafted in our bodies openings and cavities, pathways and connections.

The bodies You created for each of us sustain us through both the mysteries of their creation, and the inspired work of medical assistance which supports Your works, and these bodies have brought us to this moment.

Whether that sustenance comes from the air around us or oxygen tanks,

food grown in the earth and eaten with the mouth, or brought to our digestive system through a port, and bodies voiding through openings or catheters, we are sustained, alive, and able to be present here before you.

May we still honour and nurture our bodies if they cease to work in the ways society expects them to, for we know that even disability is still a part of a body made in Your image.

May we hold to the knowledge that our uniqueness and survival are two of Your many miracles which You have made us a partner in creating.

May the day come when each of our unique, beautiful bodies is valued and supported equally in Your world, when our disabled bodies are recognised as *B'tzelem Elohim*, and when this knowledge allows the creation of a truly liberated world where all Your creation may thrive joyfully before You.

Blessed are You, source of all life, who created the abundance of our means for survival and thriving.

Rav Kohenet Shoshana Jedwab, “Openings” (2020)

<https://www.shoshanajedwab.com/openingssingle>

I bless Shechinah for creating my body
I bless Shechinah for my beautiful form
With passageways and organs working together
Chambers of wonder that open and close

Chorus:

But if one of them should fail, I cannot stand before you
Shechinah You're my healer, the Life Force that I know
In my heart beating, lungs breathing, muscles reaching, excreting, pleasure
seeking, deep feeling, body in rhythm, singing your song
Openings, chalulim, boundaries, nnnnn'kavim
Openings, chalulim, boundaries, mmmmmysteries
I bless Shechinah for the wisdom inside me
I bless Shechinah for my skin, flesh and bone
I'm an animal creature of hunger and kindness
A puzzle of pieces, fragile and strong

I bless Shechinah for the touch of another
I bless Shechinah for the power we hold
And the love that we bring through our beautiful bodies
The games that we play, and the lives that we grow

And when I'm at the end, when my breath will release then
I will shed my skin, I will join with the whole

But for now, I will sing with my beautiful body
Shechinah has made for my journeying soul

Berucha asher yatzra et ha'adam bechochmah x2

U'vara'a vo n'kavim nekavim nekavim

U'vara'a vo chalulim chalulim chalulim

*Berucha at Shekhinah, Eloteinu ruach ha'olam, rofah kol basar u'mafliah
la'asot*