

LESSON 3

BREATHING *BERAKHOT* INTO LIFE, AND LIFE INTO *BERAKHOT*



TEXT 1

VIDEO: [SHEHECHEYANU BLESSING](#) (2021)

A blessing marking special moments as performed by the Academy for Jewish Religion Cantorial Students for the 2021 AJRCA Graduation.

(The video is hyperlinked to the title above.)

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Sovereign of all,
who has kept us alive, sustained us, and brought us to this season.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם
שֶׁהֵחֵינּוּ וְקִיָּמָנוּ וְהִגִּיעָנוּ לְזֶמֶן הַזֶּה.



TEXT 2

ALAN MINTZ, *BLESSING AND AFFIRMATION*

(1947–2017) Professor of Hebrew Literature at The Jewish Theological Seminary.

One of the key features of the fixed part of the *berakhah* . . . is the double way God is addressed. When God is addressed as “You,” implied is an intimate relationship with an individual pray-er, a relationship that is accessible and personal. When God is referred to as the “King of the universe,” the perspective shifts to a vast
5 cosmic plane over which God is the absolute ruler. The simultaneous immanence of God *within* the world and His transcendence *of* the world expresses the rabbis’ conviction of the fundamental nature of the divine mystery . . .

The purpose of the *berakhah* is to acknowledge the primary connection between God and a phenomenon or process in the world . . . To praise God or to say,

- 10 “Praised are You,” “Blessed art Thou,” is not simply to release an emotional outpouring or to describe some beatific aspect of God’s nature. It means making a connection between a phenomenon and its source; “praised” means “deserving to be acknowledged” for this reason.

A. Mintz. “Prayer and the Prayerbook,” in *Back to the Sources*, ed. Barry W. Holtz, 407. New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 1984.



TEXT 3 MAIMONIDES (RAMBAM), *MISHNEH TORAH*, *LAWS OF BLESSINGS 1:4*

(1135–1204) (Moshe ben Maimon) Philosopher, codifier, communal leader, and doctor in Spain and Egypt.

All the blessings can be divided into three categories:

- a) blessings over enjoyment;
 - b) blessings over mitzvot;
 - c) blessings recited as expressions of praise and thanks to God and as a means of
- 5 petition.

רב משה בן מימון (רמב"ם), משנה תורה, הלכות ברכות א, ד
נמצאו כל הברכות כִּלְכֵּן שְׁלֹשָׁה מִיָּנִים
בְּרֻכּוֹת הַנִּיָּה
וּבְרֻכּוֹת מִצְוֹת
וּבְרֻכּוֹת הוֹדָאָה שֶׁהֵן דֶּרֶךְ שִׁבְחָ וְהוֹדָיָה וּבִקְשָׁה.



TEXT 4

DEUTERONOMY (*DEVARIM*) 8:7-10

7 For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land, a land with streams and springs and fountains issuing from plain and hill; 8 a land of wheat and barley, of vines, figs, and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey; 9 a land where you may eat food without stint, where you will lack nothing; a land whose rocks are iron and from whose hills you can mine copper. 10 When you have eaten your fill, give thanks to the LORD your God for the good land which He has given you.

דְּבָרִים ח, ז-י

ז כִּי ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ מְבִיאֲךָ אֶל אֶרֶץ טוֹבָה אֶרֶץ נַחֲלֵי מַיִם עֵינַת וְתַהֲמַת יְצָאִים בְּבִקְעָה וּבְהָרָה. ח אֶרֶץ חֹטָה וְשָׁעֲרָה וְגִפְנִים וְתַאֲנָה וְרִמּוֹן אֶרֶץ זֵית שֶׁמֶן וְדִבְשׁ. ט אֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר לֹא בְמִסְכָּנָתָהּ תֹאכַל בָּהּ לֶחֶם לֹא תִחְסַר כָּל בָּהּ אֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֲבָנֶיהָ בְּרֹזֶל וּמַהֲרָרֶיהָ תַחְצֹב נְחֹשֶׁת. י וְאָכַלְתָּ וְשָׂבַעְתָּ וּבִרְכַּתָּ אֶת ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ עַל הָאֶרֶץ הַטּוֹבָה אֲשֶׁר נָתַן לָךְ.



TEXT 5

BABYLONIAN TALMUD, TRACTATE *BERAKHOT* 35A

Compilation of teachings of 3rd–6th century scholars in Babylonia (*amora'im*); final redaction in the 6th–7th centuries.

From where do we derive the principle [of reciting a blessing before partaking of food]? . . . We infer it from the more lenient case: If a person is obligated to recite a blessing when they are full, all the more ought they do so when they are hungry! . . . Actually [even without a logical argument], it is reasonable to suppose that it is

- 5 forbidden for a person to derive any benefit from this world without first reciting a blessing. Our Rabbis taught: It is forbidden for a person to derive benefit from this world without first reciting a blessing, and whoever derives benefit from this world without first reciting a blessing is guilty of embezzlement . . . Rabbi Levi contrasted two verses: On the one hand, Scripture says that “The earth and all that it contains
- 10 are God’s” (Psalms 24:1), but on the other hand, Scripture says that “The heavens

are God's, but He has given the earth to human beings" (Ibid. 115:16). This, however, is not a contradiction. The first verse speaks of the situation prior to the recitation of a blessing, and the second speaks of the situation after a blessing has been recited.

תלמוד בבלי, מסכת ברכות דף לה עמוד א

מנא הני מילי . . . דאיתא בקל וחומר כשהוא שבע מברך כשהוא רעב לא כל שכן . . . אלא סברא הוא אסור לו לאדם שינהנה מן העולם הזה בלא ברכה תנו רבנן אסור לו לאדם שינהנה מן העולם הזה בלא ברכה וכל הנהנה מן העולם הזה בלא ברכה מעל . . . רבי לוי רמי כתיב לה' הארץ ומלואה וכתיב השמים שמים לה' והארץ נתן לבני אדם לא קשיא כאן קדם ברכה כאן לאחר ברכה.



TEXT 6

BABYLONIAN TALMUD, TRACTATE *PESACHIM* 7B

Compilation of teachings of 3rd–6th century scholars in Babylonia (*amora'im*); final redaction in the 6th–7th centuries.

Rav Yehudah says in the name of Shmuel, In the case of all mitzvot, a blessing is recited immediately prior to their performance.

תלמוד בבלי, מסכת פסחים דף ז עמוד ב

[אמר] רב יהודה אמר שמואל כל המצות מברך עליהן עובר לעשייתן.



TEXT 7

RABBI CHERYL PERETZ, *THANK YOU GOD* (2019)

Associate Dean of the Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies, where she also received her ordination.

Baruch Atah Adonai Eloheinu Melech Haolam – Blessed are You, Adonai, Sovereign of the universe . . . If you look at the words of our blessings, the six-word formula that the rabbis implore us to say 100 times a day, nowhere is the word thanks or gratitude even mentioned. In fact, if anything, our blessings are a statement of theological truth, an acknowledgement that without God’s active participation, the bread that is in front of us would not be. And so we say, *Baruch Atah Adonai* – Blessed are you Adonai Our God, sovereign of the universe, who brings bread from the earth. Yet, blessings are our way of expressing delight, and gratitude, and appreciation.

The Talmud teaches us that each time we benefit from something in this world, it should be preceded by the recitation of a blessing – lest we be labeled a thief, stealing from God and/or from the society in which we live. Intentional gratitude transfers ownership from God to the one who says the blessing. So, we bring to the words of the blessing formula the feeling of thanks, and that changes our experience; it changes us. Perhaps it is for this reason that Midrash Vayikra Rabbah teaches: “In the World to Come all sacrifices will be annulled, but the Thanksgiving Sacrifice will not be annulled. All prayers will be annulled, but prayers of thanksgiving will not be annulled.” (9:7)

We cannot really live, even in the utopian state of the world to come, without gratitude. Our lives are enriched, our experience more meaningful, when we acknowledge with gratitude the bounty we receive – health, food, shelter, the ability to make a living and live in comfort. On the other hand, failure to acknowledge or living as if these blessings are our expectations lead us to apathy or worse, living with a sense of entitlement.

Available online at aju.edu. Viewed July 2021.



TEXT 8

LILAH PECK, "A LIGHT UNTO THE NATIONS": THE POWER OF OUR WORDS (2020)

In 2020, Peck was a junior at Charlotte County Day School in Charlotte, North Carolina.

We often think about the impact that our voices can have on a large scale, but it's equally important to think about the power of our words on a personal and immediate level. Judaism teaches that speech distinguishes humans from other animals and helps us to emulate G-d. My Judaism guides me to use my words in order to lead a mindful life of gratitude. In fact, the word "Jew,"** is related to "*lehodot*" which means to thank. Jews are a people defined by gratitude. . . .

My words also sanctify the things around me and help me recognize everything I have to be grateful for. Throughout the day I try to say blessings over my food and use my words to bring holiness and mindfulness into my life. It takes two seconds to say a blessing that will remind me that my food is not something to take for granted. I shouldn't feel entitled to anything . . . Saying a simple and quick phrase every time I eat or drink dramatically changes the way I view seemingly trivial things. Judaism also asks one to say a prayer of gratitude after using the bathroom. It's easy for me to take for granted the miraculous systems of the body that allow me to do something as small (but important) as using the bathroom. Saying the blessing "*Asher yatzar* . . ." takes under a minute, but the impact lasts much longer.

**The word Jew in Hebrew, *Yehudi*, shares the same root as the word *lehodot*, "to thank."

Available online at jwa.org. Viewed July 2021.



TEXT9

RABBI REUVEN LEUCHTER, *ORAL COMMENTS ON THE BERAKHOT* (2012)

Leading teachers of *mussar* in Israel and rabbi in the Ner LeElef training and placement organization for leadership in Education and Outreach.

The world is full of many details, and in order for us to be able to recognize God in this world we need to learn to focus on those details. Our senses do not relate to “big things” such as the creation of the world, but rather to small details like the beauty of an apple, its smell, its texture. Small things can create awareness; generalizations cannot.

5

This is the purpose of Brachot – to develop a consciousness of God. Brachot are the tools to build our awareness of God. They are the tools to help us change our perspective of God from “out there,” to bring Him closer to our senses, to be able to perceive Him in our own lives. . . .

10

This is the reason we need to say one hundred Brachot every day. We need to focus on a hundred different facets of the goodness bestowed upon us by God. This is what develops an awareness of Him.

The Concept and Practice of Brachot. Ner Le’Elef resource sheet. Available online at nleresources.com. Viewed Aug 2021.



TEXT 10

RABBI BEN GREENFIELD, *WHAT BLESSING DOES ONE SAY FOR THE COVID VACCINE?* (2020)

Contemporary Modern Orthodox Rabbi and founder of the Upper West Side Moishe House.

One must offer words of praise and blessing to Hashem upon the amazing event of receiving this vaccine! That is clear. The question is if one should do so using one of the official, canonical brachot of our tradition, which would entail uttering God's sacred name.

5

Here, too, the short answer is yes, complicated only by the fact that there are so many brachot which apply that it is hard to know which one is correct! Shehecheyanu, recited upon occasional events that spark gratitude (e.g., buying new furniture, eating new fruit, important rain falling on one's field) seems, at first glance, to easily qualify. On the other hand, ha-Tov v'ha-meitiv (who is good and causes good) should be recited if the event is shared by multiple people (e.g., rain falling on a shared field, a couple buying furniture, new wine brought out to the dinner table), and receiving a vaccine is of both personal and public health benefit. Finally, ha-Gomel (who rewards the undeserving with goodness, and who has rewarded me with goodness) is recited upon rescue from an illness. A strong argument can be made for this blessing, too.

10

15

My master and teacher, Rabbi Dov Linzer, addresses all these possibilities and advises reciting HaTov, and to do so before receiving the first shot.

20

COVID has been a dark reminder of an eternally true fact: Our lives and our health are connected with those of strangers we will never meet. To have the opportunity to protect ourselves and, in doing so, grant protection to others is a gift from God worthy of a most heartfelt "HaTov v'ha-meitiv."

Cited by L. E. Adkins and available online at jta.org. Viewed July 2021.



TEXT 11

DR. MARCIA FALK, *THE BOOK OF BLESSINGS*

(b. 1946) Writer, poet and feminist, former university professor of Hebrew and English literature, Jewish studies, Tanakh, and creative writing at Stanford, the State University of New York at Binghamton, and the Claremont Colleges.

A rabbinic invention based on a biblical form, the traditional blessing is a statement consisting of two parts: an opening clause declaring God “blessed” and a content-specific phrase or phrases relating this declaration to the occasion being marked. In the latter half of the *b’rakhah*, the rabbis have explored a variety of life experiences.

- 5 The first half, in contrast, is a formula: *Barukh atah, adonay elohéynu, mélekh ha’olam*, “Blessed are you [masc., sing.], Lord our God, king of the world.” . . .

Of course, the heavily patriarchal imagery of the rabbinic formula makes it particularly problematic. Yet it is not a satisfying solution merely to replace the
10 direct address of the Lord-God-king with address of a female image or images (as in *B’rakhah at, sh’khinah*, “Blessed are you [fem.], Shekhinah,” one proposal that has circulated widely in alternative liturgies). While it is refreshing to see images other than the single rabbinic icon, the retention of the formulation “Blessed are you” has its own limitations. This passive construction is ultimately disempowering in that
15 it masks the presence of the speaking self (whether personal or communal) that is performing the act of blessing. Perhaps most important, the statement “Blessed are you” leaves the traditional view of God as Other unchallenged—and this theology is clearly problematic for many Jews today. . . .

- 20 . . . I have to say that the image of God as Person is not one I find helpful, and I believe that, in this regard, I speak for many others. It is not at all true for me that “it is primarily as Person” that I know God; I experience the divine in many ways, ways that are better represented by nonpersonal images, as well as by other, less direct modes of expression that do not attempt to locate divinity in specific images at all. . . .

- 25 The **Blessing Before the Meal** was one of the first new blessings I composed, and in doing so I established the fundamentals of my liturgical-poetic process. In creating it, I replaced the phrase *barukh atah*, “blessed are you [masc., sing.],” with an active, first-person plural, gender-inclusive form, *n’vareykh*, “let us bless.” With this word, the community exhorts itself to experience oneness with the whole in the
- 30 very act of blessing. The speech that follows this opening is unrestricted; unlike the word *barukh*, “blessed,” which is gender-specific, *n’vareykh* may introduce images in either gender, drawn from any number of contexts.

- Thus in this first of my blessings I followed the word *n’vareykh* with the first of
- 35 my images to replace the rabbinic Lord-God-king. I derived that new image from an ancient text, Deuteronomy 8:7: *éretz náḥaley máyim, ayanot ut’homot yotz’im babik’ah uvahar*, “a land of watercourses, wellsprings, and depths emerging from valleys and from hills.” In the wellsprings that rise from the land, pouring their waters back into the land, I found what seemed to me the perfect metaphor for my Blessing
- 40 Before the Meal: *áyin*, “wellspring” or “fountain,” with the figurative meaning of “source.”

Let us bless the source of life that brings forth bread from the earth.

נְבִרְךָ אֶת עֵין הַחַיִּים הַמוֹצִיָּאָה לֶחֶם מִן הָאָרֶץ.

M. Falk. 1996. *The Book of Blessings*. San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 16-17, 417–419, 422, 429–430.



TEXT 12 SHELDON HARNICK, *TRADITION*

(b. 1924) An American lyricist and songwriter, well-known for composing the lyrics to the music in the 1971 movie based on the 1964 Broadway hit, *Fiddler on the Roof*.

And, most important of all,
our beloved rabbi.
Rabbi, may I ask you a question?
Certainly, Leibesh.

- 5 Is there a proper blessing . . . for the Tzar?
A blessing for the Tzar?
Of course.
May God bless and keep the Tzar
far away from us!

Available online at script-o-rama.com. Viewed Aug 2021.

The video from [Fiddler on the Roof](#) that portrays this scene is hyperlinked to the title.



TEXT 13 RABBI LAURA GELLER, [CREATING BLESSINGS FOR WOMEN](#)

One of the first female rabbis ordained in the United States, rabbi emerita of Temple Emanuel in Beverly Hills, California.

(The video is hyperlinked to the title above.)

KEY TERMS

Berakhah. [בְּרָכָה]. (pl. *berakhot*) Blessing or benediction. Jewish liturgy and daily life are replete with *berakhot*. The different categories include *Birkot shevach veHoda'ah*, *Birkot haNehenin*, and *Birkot haMitzvot*.

Birkat HaGomel. [בִּרְכַּת הַגּוֹמֵל] A blessing recited when one survives a potentially life-threatening experience. The text of the blessing is: *Blessed are You, O God, . . . Who bestows kindness on the undeserving, and who has bestowed goodness to me*. Upon hearing this blessing, the congregation responds with a refrain requesting that God continues to reward the individual with bounty.

Birkat HaMazon. [בִּרְכַּת הַמֶּזֶן]. Grace after meals. Traditionally consists of four *berakhot* praising God for food, the Land of Israel, King David and Jerusalem, and for everything. Abridged versions exist.

Birkot HaMitzvot. [בִּרְכוֹת הַמִּצְוֹת]. Blessings recited upon the fulfillment of mitzvot. These include the formula *asher kideshanu beMitzvotav veTzivanu* (who sanctified us with his mitzvot and commanded us to). Examples of this category are the blessings recited upon lighting the Shabbat lights, upon the performance of a *berit milah* (circumcision), and when donning *tallit* and *tefillin*.

Birkot haNehenin. [בִּרְכוֹת הַנְּהֵנִין]. Blessings for enjoyment or pleasure. Examples of this category are the blessings recited prior to drinking wine or eating bread.

Birkot shevach veHoda'ah. [בִּרְכוֹת שִׁבְחָ וְהוֹדָאָה]. Blessings of praise and thanksgiving. An example of this category is the *Birkat haMazon*.

KEY NAMES

Falk, Marcia. For fifteen years she was a university professor, teaching Hebrew and English literature, Jewish studies, Bible, and creative writing at Stanford, the State University of New York at Binghamton, and the Claremont Colleges. Her work has been published widely in magazines and anthologies in the United States and abroad. In addition to pursuing her own poetry, she has devoted her creative energy to discovering and translating old and new voices of other women poets, in particular, those writing in Hebrew and in Yiddish. Her groundbreaking prayerbook, *The Book of Blessings: New Jewish Prayers for Daily Life, the Sabbath, and the New Moon Festival*, re-creates Hebrew and English liturgy in poetic forms from a contemporary, gender-inclusive perspective.

Geller, Rabbi Laura. The only woman rabbinical student among men classmates and teachers in the early 1970s at Hebrew Union College, she was ordained in 1976. She came to see that women rabbis could offer all congregants a different relationship to the sacred, opening new possibilities in Jewish life. She is the Rabbi Emerita of Temple Emanuel of Beverly Hills, was twice named one of *Newsweek's* 50 Most Influential Rabbis in America, and was named by PBS *Next Avenue* as one of the fifty 2017 Influencers in Aging.

Greenfield, Rabbi Ben. Rabbi of the Greenpoint Shul, he studied at Yeshivat Har Etzion, Yeshiva University, Oxford University, and Johns Hopkins, before receiving ordination from Yeshivat Chovevei Torah. He is a founder of the Upper West Side Moishe House, where he coordinated 200+ Jewish communal events for over 2,500 Manhattan Jews.

Leuchter, Rabbi Reuven. A leading *mussar* personality in Israel today, he is the author of *Meshivas Nefesh* on the *Nefesh HaChaim*, an annotated commentary on Rav Yisrael Salanter's *Ohr Yisrael*, and *The Pesach Hagaddah – Living Our History*.

Maimonides. (1135–1204). Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon, also known as Rambam, acronym for Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon, was born in Spain, but he lived most of his life in Egypt, where he served as a physician and leader of the Jewish community. He is one of the pre-eminent Jewish philosophers and codifiers of all time. His *Mishneh Torah* became one of the central works of halakhic literature and his *Guide for the Perplexed* (*Moreh Nevukhim*) is one of the most important Jewish philosophical treatises ever written.

Mintz, Alan. (1947–2017). Professor of Hebrew Literature at the Jewish Theological Seminary from 2001 to 2017, and was one of the preeminent scholars of Hebrew Literature of the 20th century. Founder of *RESPONSE* magazine and of *PROOFTEXTS*, a preeminent journal in the field, he won several awards for his scholarship.

Peretz, Rabbi Cheryl. Associate Dean of the Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies, where she also received her ordination, she is a regular contributor to Today's Torah, the School's virtual Torah learning program. She served as a pulpit rabbi in Los Angeles area synagogues such as Sinai Temple, Adat Shalom in West Los Angeles, and Burbank Temple Emanuel. She also worked for United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism before embarking on a full-time career in marketing consulting for Fortune 500 companies.

Rabbi Levi. 3rd century *amora* in *Eretz Yisrael*. His principal interest was in the field of *aggadah*.

SUGGESTED READINGS

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APPENDIX

A. EXAMPLES OF *BERAKHOT* RECITED OVER TYPES OF ENJOYMENT

All these blessings begin with the standard formula:

Blessed are You, *Adonai* our God, Ruler of the universe...

ברוך אתה ה' אלהינו מלך העולם

1. ... Who brings forth bread from the earth.	א. ... המוציא לחם מן הארץ.
2. ... Who creates all manner of nourishing foods.	ב. ... בורא מיני מזונות.
3. ... Who creates the fruit of the tree.	ג. ... בורא פרי העץ.
4. ... Who creates the produce of the earth.	ד. ... בורא פרי האדמה.
5. ... by whose word all things come into being.	ה. ... שחפל נהיה בדברו.
6. ... Who creates the fruit of the vine.	ו. ... בורא פרי הגפן.
7. ... Who creates all manner of fragrant spices.	ז. ... בורא מיני בשמים.
8. ... Who gives a pleasant scent to fruit.	ח. ... הנותן ריח טוב בפרות.

B. EXAMPLES OF *BERAKHOT* RECITED UPON THE FULFILLMENT OF A MITZVAH

All these blessings begin with the standard formula:

Blessed are You ...Who has sanctified us

with the commandments and Who has commanded us

ברוך אתה ה' אלהינו מלך העולם

אשר קדשנו במצוותיו וציונו

1. ... to affix a mezuzah.	א. ... לקבע מזוזה.
2. ... to light Shabbat candles.	ב. ... להדליק נר של שבת.
3. ... to wash hands.	ג. ... על נטילת ידים.
4. ... to light the <i>Chanukkah</i> candles.	ד. ... להדליק נר של חנוכה.
5. ... to enwrap [ourselves] with the <i>tzitzit</i> .	ה. ... להתעטף בציצית.
6. ... to eat <i>matzah</i> .	ו. ... על אכילת מצה.
7. ... to hear the sound of the <i>shofar</i> .	ז. ... לשמע קול שופר.
8. ... to perform circumcision.	ח. ... על המילה.

C. EXAMPLES OF *BERAKHOT* OF PRAISE AND THANKSGIVING

The following chart illustrates specific circumstances and their respective blessings.

All these blessings begin with the standard formula:

Blessed are You, *Adonai* our God, Ruler of the universe... בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם

Blessing in English	Blessing in Hebrew	Circumstance
...Who performs the work of Creation.	... עוֹשֶׂה מַעֲשֵׂה בְּרָאשִׁית.	when seeing lightning
... Whose strength and might fill the universe.	... שְׁכָחוּ וּגְבוּרָתוֹ מְלֵא עוֹלָם.	when hearing thunder
... Who remembers the Covenant, faithfully maintains it, and fulfills His word.	... זִכָּר הַבְּרִית וְנֶאֱמַן בְּבְרִיתוֹ וְקִיָּם בְּמַאֲמָרוֹ.	when seeing a rainbow
... Who has fashioned the great sea.	... שֶׁעָשָׂה אֶת הַיָּם הַגָּדוֹל.	when seeing the ocean
... Who has such creatures as these in the world.	... שֶׁכָּכָה לוֹ בְּעוֹלָמוֹ.	when seeing an exceptionally beautiful creature—animal, tree, bird...
... Who varies the forms of creatures.	... מְשַׁנֶּה הַבְּרִיּוֹת.	when seeing an exceptionally strange-looking creature
... Who shared His wisdom with those that revere Him.	... שֶׁחֶלַק מִחֻכְמָתוֹ לִירְאָיו.	when seeing an outstanding Torah scholar
... Who gave of His wisdom to mortals.	... שֶׁנָּתַן מִחֻכְמָתוֹ לְכָשָׁר וְדָם.	when seeing an outstanding secular knowledge scholar
... Who gave of his glory to mortals.	... שֶׁנָּתַן מִכְבוֹדוֹ לְכָשָׁר וְדָם.	when seeing a non-Jewish king
... the just Judge.	... דִּין הָאֱמֶת.	when receiving bad tidings, especially news of a person's passing

ENDNOTES

1 There are a number of ways to understand the debate.

a. Simply, Shmuel wishes to broaden the range of acceptable formulations for *berakhot* to include more than just one biblical usage. It is not that you cannot utter *attah* according to Shmuel, it is just that you do not need to.

b. On a more conceptual level, Shmuel may be arguing with Rav about who is the intended audience of the *berakhah*. The biblical verses that do not use *attah* in their formulations generally have one person speaking to another about God, rather than having one person speaking directly to God, and for that reason the third person is used in the verse. It could be that for Rav, in reciting *berakhot* one is speaking directly to God, while for Shmuel one is more likely speaking to others about God, and so the third person language is more appropriate.

c. In a third understanding, the one adapted by Mintz (Text 2; although he does not reference the talmudic debate in the excerpt here), Rav has no issue addressing God in the second person, while Shmuel can be taken as raising issues with addressing God in such a fashion. For those that apply this understanding, *attah* reflects Gods' immanence and closeness, God's accessibility, the personal nature of one's relationship with God, and sees prayer as being in conversation with God, while those that advocate for using the third person intend to stress God's transcendence, God's complete otherness, and considers the "vast cosmic plane over which God is the absolute ruler."

Those that endorse the third interpretation above, also see the accepted formulation of the *berakhot* as containing a compromise between the two views, for while *attah* is a grammatical second person term, many *berakhot* go on to include third person language, viz. **אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ** (*asher kid'shanu*, who sanctified us); a second person term would have been **אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁתָנוּ** (*asher kidashtanu*, you have sanctified us). In the *sheHecheyanu* blessing as well, the pronouns in the words *sheHecheyanu*, *kiymanu*, and *higi'anu* are all in the third person. Such a compromise, to use both second and third person formulations together like this, is also reflected in the Tanakh, in Avraham's accusation of God: "Will You sweep away the innocent along with the guilty? . . . Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?" (*Bereshit* 18:23, 25).

2 This approach to the *berakhah* would fit well with the view of Shmuel discussed in the endnote above that when reciting a *berakhah* one is likely speaking to others (or to themselves) about God, as in this approach one takes the time to remind oneself and others all around that a mitzvah is about to be performed.

- 3 See E. Russell and D. Fosha. 2008. “Transformational Affects and Core State in AEDP: The Emergence and Consolidation of Joy, Hope, Gratitude, and Confidence in (the Solid Goodness of) the Self.” *Journal of Psychotherapy Integration* 18(2): 167–190.
- 4 For more on this see *Tosefta*, Tractate *Berakhot* 6:5.
- 5 For an ever-relevant essay on the *asher yatzar* blessing, see K. M. Prager’s “For Everything a Blessing,” available online at daat.ac.il.
- 6 Available online at biblestudytools.com.