

## REL 402 - Judaism - Blessings

For this essay I really wanted to visit a synagogue but was unable to arrange a visit within the time frame, so I chose Blessings. I have been intrigued by Judaism for quite some time for several reasons. One of my very close friends is an Orthodox Jew, and another is a Reform Jew. I have very lively discussions with them about theology and Christianity. As a child, my father's best friend and our neighbor was a Conservative Jew who converted to Christianity. I vaguely remember my family attending synagogue with him when I was perhaps 7 or 8 but it was as foreign to me as a Roman Catholic service would be to a Muslim. My family also observes several Jewish holidays like Passover. Not because we are Jewish, but because my family has always believed that it important to remember not only where our own traditions come from, but the great things that God has done for the world through the Jewish people. I am also on a personal quest to understand why more Jewish people don't accept Jesus as the messiah.

I am "fascinated" by Jewish culture and traditions but in reality I don't understand them very well, nor have I ever studied their religious works outside of the Old Testament. I am speaking of the Mishnah and other rabbinical commentaries. I had started on my own self-education before this class in discussions with Jewish friends, and by reading books, but this gave me the chance to explore a little more deeply. I chose Blessings because I don't think as Christians we spend enough time in thanking God for everything we have and do.

Jews have blessings for almost any aspect of daily life including waking up. Following is a short list of DAILY blessings (*taken from <http://www.siddur.org>*).

- On becoming conscious
- After washing hands
- After going to the bathroom
- Before donning the tallis
- When ready to don the tallis
- While the head and body are wrapped recite verses 8-11 of Psalm 36
- Before tightening the arm t'fillin
- Before tightening the head t'fillin

These are done before you ever leave your room. There are blessings before and after snacks or meals. There are blessings for each weekday, for Sabbath services, the Friday meal, the Saturday meals, and so on. The point is, almost every aspect of life includes a blessing.

As I am not an Orthodox Jew I obviously could not do all of these since I do not have the paraphernalia. I could however choose to do many of the normal ones that do not require specific items like a t'fillin, and even for those I could substitute "getting dressed" or some other aspect of the day.

I would like to start with the blessing "on becoming conscious". This blessing is essentially thanks to God for waking up alive. I can count the times I have done this before on one finger, and that was when I woke up from surgery. I am "zombie" in the morning and just trying to remember to do this was very difficult for me. I still have a problem doing it. Similarly to that, I have a problem with saying the blessings after washing hands and after going to the bathroom in the morning because I am just not thinking well at that point in the day. The past week I have not remembered once until later.

The blessing upon waking is (*again from siddur.org*) :

"I give thanks before You,  
living and eternal King,  
who has returned my soul into me in compassion;  
great is Your faithfulness."

After washing hands:

"Praised are You, *HaShem*,  
Our God, King of the Universe,  
who has hallowed us via His commandments,  
and commanded us concerning the elevation of hands."

After going to the bathroom and washing hands:

"Blessed are You, *HaShem*,  
Our God, Sovereign of Space-Time,  
Who formed *Adam* with wisdom  
and created within him many openings and many cavities."

It is obvious and known before Your Throne of Glory  
that if one of them were to be ruptured or one one of them were to be blocked  
it would be impossible to survive and to stand before You [for even one hour].  
Blessed are You, *HaShem*,  
Who heals all flesh  
and acts wondrously. "

Blessings over meals are different. I am used to saying blessings over meals, but I found that even when I pay attention to doing it, I forget to do it always. If I go through a drive-thru, I usually don't say a blessing in my car. If I am at a party, I don't either.

In the morning, I usually have a cup of milk, maybe a yogurt, and don't thank God for any of it. I just don't even think of doing so. Now that I have experienced it and tried it, I have learned and realized several things.

The first is that we often don't thank God enough for what we have. We usually thank God for "everything we have" in very general terms. At least I do. I might get specific sometimes and say "Thank you for my family". But the only time in my life that I thanked God for waking up was when I wasn't sure beforehand that I was going to. I have never ever said a blessing before washing a dish or utensil.

I think we often spend a lot of time asking God for things and not very much thanking God for all we do have and each little blessing in our daily lives. At any moment in time it could all be gone so it is appropriate to say thank you often, and for each blessing. How many Christians have ever thanked God for allowing them to evacuate their bowels? It's a funny question, but I bet you it is very few. And it's probably only people who have trouble doing so. Why not thank God that our bodies are working normally every day?

This has encouraged me to really think about what I do have and what I might not have had God not blessed my life so much. Another important aspect I have learned is that I need to thank God often. When I prayed before, I made it a point to thank more than ask, but I think it needs to be about 20 to 1. That is just a random number but the point is I know on a much deeper level that to thank and praise God often is worthy of God.

For example, tomorrow afternoon I am going into surgery again. It's not major, just shoulder reconstruction, but I don't know for sure if I will "wake up" from the surgery. Tonight I have thanked God for writing this paper because why should I even be alive to write it? I thank God that I am taking this class and learning more about my relationship with God. I will thank God tomorrow morning when I wake up to go to surgery because I will be alive to go to it. It doesn't really matter if I make it through the surgery because God woke me up for it and I have a few more hours to enjoy time with my wife. I am thanking God right now for allowing me to have a wonderful day with my family to celebrate my birthday today and for allowing me to provide the food for it. The main thing I have learned is that every part of every day is a blessing and we should be thankful for even the tiny little things.