

## CURRENT TALMUD PASSAGE

Posted July 1, 2004 by Rabbi Judy Abrams. Please refer to Maqom's home page for information about previous passages.

**BH**

### **LIVING IN A STATE OF MINDFULNESS: THE JEWISH PATH BEGINNING WITH BLESSINGS EVERY DAY**

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The sages believed that sleep was 1/60th of death (B. Berachot 57b) so coming into consciousness in the morning was, for them, a source of wonderment...engendering gratitude for so many things that we take for granted. Think of all the things for which you can be grateful before you even get out of bed. You're alive. You have a roof over your head. When you go to the bathroom you don't have to leave your house (a luxury few in this world have). When your eyes open, you see. You can stretch, stand up and walk. These are things whose sweetness can probably only be appreciated by those who have been deprived of them.

Judaism has a path that can help us live in appreciation of each moment; in a state of mindfulness. Judaism uses blessings to help us be aware of all that God gives us.

When he hears the cock crowing he should say, "Blessed be the One who has given the cock the understanding to distinguish between day and night." [...who knows the secrets Y. Berachot 9:1]

When he opens his eyes he should say, "Blessed be the One who opens the eyes of the blind."

When he stretches himself and sits up, he should say, "Blessed be the One who loosens the bound."

When he dresses he should say, "Blessed be the One who clothes the naked."

When he draws himself up he should say, "Blessed be the One who raises the bowed."

When he steps on to the ground he should say, "Blessed be the One who spread the earth on the waters."

When he commences to walk he should say, "Blessed be the One who makes firm the steps of man."

When he ties his shoes he should say, "Blessed be the One who has supplied all my wants."

When he fastens his girdle, he should say, "Blessed be the One who girds Israel with might."

When he spreads a kerchief over his head he should say, "Blessed be the One who crowns Israel with glory." (B. Berachot 60b)

These are only suggestions to get one's day going. Obviously, you should feel free to thank God for electricity, running water, microwave ovens, newspapers and so forth. The more you see the wonders of your world throughout the day, the more opportunities you have to thank God which, of course, brings you to an even greater state of awareness.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. This Talmud text makes it clear that one should say the blessing for one of God's gifts while consciousness of that gift is at its height. Unfortunately, these days, these blessings are usually said in synagogue, long after one has come back to a waking state and gotten dressed. What steps could you take to help you remember to say these blessings (or your own personal form thereof)? If you are used to saying them in synagogue, please try saying them at home. Is there a difference? If so, how so?
2. In the siddur there three somewhat problematic blessings about freedom/slavery, gender and religion. Note, please, that they are not included in the list of blessings, above. They come from B. Menachot 43b. T. Berachot 6:18 clarifies the meaning of these blessings: one is glad one is Jew for one is then liable to the mitzvot. One gives thanks that one is not an ignoramus (not a freedman!) because an ignoramus does not fear sin. And one gives thanks for not being a woman because they are not liable for all the mitzvot. There's an obvious flaw in the logic here. Did you spot it? What would you do about such blessings?
3. Is it wrong to thank God for the advantages you have by accident of birth? For example, I am grateful to be born in America. Had this country not taken my grandparents in, they would, in all probability, have died during the Holocaust. Or, perhaps, is blessing God for these accidents of birth the first step in becoming conscious of the fact that the vast majority of this world's population lives in poverty and need?

I look forward to your responses, as always. And, for our US citizens, happy Independence Day!

### "My Country 'Tis of Thee"

Lyrics by Samuel Francis Smith

My country 'tis of thee,  
Sweet land of liberty,  
Of thee I sing.  
Land where my fathers died!  
Land of the Pilgrim's pride!  
From every mountain side,  
Let freedom ring!

My native country, thee,  
Land of the noble free,  
Thy name I love.  
I love thy rocks and rills,  
Thy woods and templed hills;  
My heart with rapture fills  
Like that above.

Let music swell the breeze,  
And ring from all the trees  
Sweet freedom's song.  
Let mortal tongues awake;  
Let all that breathe partake;  
Let rocks their silence break,  
The sound prolong.

Our father's God to Thee,  
Author of liberty,  
To Thee we sing.  
Long may our land be bright  
With freedom's holy light;  
Protect us by Thy might,  
Great God, our King!

