

Dr. Peli is a renowned Israeli poet and writer.

BLESSINGS—THE GATEWAY TO PRAYER

Blessings were instituted by the Rabbis as a means for directing man into the presence of God at all times, thus providing for the continuous preservation of contact with the Creator.

Blessings have, however, a dual function. They enable man to descend from the heights of his abiding attachment to God in order to live in this material, human world. But there is an apparent contradiction. It is written, "the heavens are the heavens of the Lord" (Psalms 115:16), so that man cleaves to God and to His heavens. Yet in the same verse it is also written, "He hath given the earth to the children of men" (*ibid.*). How is man to accept this gift of God—to live in the world and enjoy its bounty—while remaining attached to God in heaven? The answer is given by the blessing through whose power man enters the world below without detaching himself from the world above. Just as through the blessing he leaves the spiritual for the material world, so through the self-same blessing does he return and enter the upper world of the spirit while still abiding within the lower, human material world. Blessings are formulated at one and the same time in both the second and third persons ("Blessed art Thou . . . by whose word everything came into being"). These two facets are like the two ends of a bridge that traverse a surging river. Man may descend into the depths of materialism or be elevated to the heights of absolute spirituality.

If there is a view that man should spend the whole of his life in prayer ("would that man would pray the whole day long!" *Berakhot* 33b) then it is the blessings which preserve the state of prayer between one formal prayer service and the next.

Our Rabbis have taught: It is forbidden for a man to enjoy any-

TRADITION: *A Journal of Orthodox Thought*

thing of this world without a benediction, and if anyone enjoys anything of this world without a benediction, he commits sacrilege. What is his remedy? He should consult a wise man. What will a wise man do for him? He has already committed the offense! Said Raba: What it means is that he should consult a wise man beforehand, so that he should teach him blessings and he should not commit sacrilege. Rab Judah said in the name of Samuel: To enjoy anything in this world without a benediction is like making personal use of things consecrated to heaven, since it says (Psalms 24:1), "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof," and it is also written Psalms 115:16), "The heavens are the heavens of the Lord but the earth hath He given to the children of men!" There is no contradiction: in the one case (the former) it is before a blessing has been recited; in the other case after (*Berakhot* 35a).

At first glance there seems to be a contradiction between the two views of the world expressed in the Biblical verses, "the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof," and that which states, "but He hath given the earth to the children of man." However, the contradiction is reconciled by the blessing, which brings heaven and earth nearer and effaces the distances between them.

If anyone enjoys anything of this world without a blessing he commits sacrilege. The world is holy.¹ The world belongs to the Lord. The Creator has not forsaken His world, for otherwise the world would not exist at all. The Lord continues to create His world unceasingly. If anyone enjoys ought without blessing, *i.e.*, diverts his mind from the abiding reality of God in each of the manifestations of the universe and of life, he commits sacrilege. A pledge was delivered to his care and he knew not how to maintain it. He who commits sacrilege is worse than a thief or robber. The latter are suspect *ab initio* of the dishonest deeds they perform, while he who commits sacrilege is at first presumed to be honest and faithful. The holy things of heaven were entrusted to him and only later did it become clear that he had not appreciated his trust. Therefore, he committed sacrilege.

Judaism is not opposed to enjoyment. On the contrary, "Man will have to render account and be brought to judgment for all he saw with his eyes and did not partake of" (*JT*, end of *Kid-*

Blessings — The Gateway to Prayer

dushin). When this enjoyment, however, becomes the most important thing and devours the whole person, making him forget his essential nature and dulling his soul—this is sacrilege. It is treachery to the sacred things of heaven, to the community of Israel, to his own self.

II

There is a Talmudic discussion which attempts to discover Biblical sources for the rule that man is duly bound to say blessings over his enjoyments. Proof is brought from a variety of Biblical verses, each of which is found not to be quite satisfactory. Finally, the Talmud concludes the argument in an unusual manner:

The fact is that it is a reasonable supposition that it is forbidden for a man to enjoy anything of this world without saying a blessing (*Berakhot* 35a).

It is a reasonable supposition; it is self-evident to him who knows his place in the world and senses the mystery of the universe in which he is placed. Such a person walks in the world of the Holy One with exceptional care, his eyes open, his ears alerted. He walks as if one is walking in a mysterious sanctuary, fearful for each step, trembling over every stride. Before deriving any enjoyment in the world, he meditates on Him who planted him in it. Man does not need to search for Him in distant and exalted worlds but sees Him everywhere so that he can even address Him as "Thou." Rav, interpreting the verse, "I have set the Lord always before me (Psalm 16:18), stated, that when man utters a blessing he must say, "Blessed art Thou, Lord" (Mid. Psalm 16). Man does not need special warnings and profound learning to know that he ought to utter blessings and request permission before having enjoyment of the world. For him it is a "supposition" that is self-evident. R. Akiva said, "A man is forbidden to taste anything before saying a blessing over it (*Berakhot, ibid.*). The blessing puts a different perspective on the enjoyment. For without it, the enjoyment is a misappropriation.

TRADITION: *A Journal of Orthodox Thought*

To quote another text (*Berakhot* 35b):

R. Hanina b. Papa said: "To enjoy this world without a benediction is like robbing the Holy One, blessed be He, and the community of Israel.² For it says, (Psalms 28:24), "Who robbeth his father or his mother and saidth, 'it is no transgression,' the same is the comparison of a destroyer, and father is none other than the Holy One, blessed be He, as it says, (Deuteronomy 32:6), 'Is not He thy father that hath gotten thee, and mother is none other than the community of Israel, as it says (Proverbs 1:8), 'Hear, my son, the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the teaching of thy mother.'" What is the meaning of 'he is the companion of a destroyer?' R. Hanina b. Papa answer: "He is the companion of Jereboam, son of Nebat who destroyed Israel's (faith in) their Father in heaven."

III

The basic idea of the blessing and its reasoning are already found in the Bible (Deuteronomy 8:10):

And thou shalt eat and be satisfied, and bless the Lord, thy God . . . Beware lest thou forget the Lord thy God . . . and thou say in thy heart: "My power and the might of my hand hath gotten me this wealth." But thou shalt remember the Lord thy God, for it is He that giveth thee power to get wealth . . .

The sages, however, clothed the idea with sinews and flesh. They arranged the blessings in accordance with categories and topics, each type having its own blessing. They also prescribed what blessing are appropriate at a meal, which blessing should be said first, and what blessing should be said when a full meal is not being taken. Thus a man is obliged to reflect before each of his actions and turn his attention to the blessing he must utter before he acts. This is to prevent blessings from becoming mere force of habit. Blessings were preparation and training for prayer. If prayer uplifts a man and elevates him to the highest peaks, then the blessing brings heaven down to earth into the personal sphere of every man. Wherever he goes and whatever he does the blessing reminds man that even when he is upon the earth the heavens are close by. Just as it is forbidden to eat bread without a blessing so it is forbidden to

Blessings — The Gateway to Prayer

say the blessing, "Who bringest forth bread from the earth" without eating bread. This is not merely saying an unnecessary blessing but also taking the name of the Lord in vain.³ The blessing is directed to the Lord, but it becomes attached to an object or a physical act. The blessing and its object become a single unity. The blessing elevates the piece of bread over which a blessing is recited above its single material existence, imparting to the bread a spiritual object.⁴

"The way to prayer extends during moments of wonder and amazement."⁵ Such moments are not isolated and fortuitous. Should you so wish it, they can encompass the life of a man. As soon as a man awakes from his sleep he senses that "the great King is protecting him,"⁶ and says: "Blessed art Thou O Lord Who restoreth souls to dead corpses." When he hears the cock crowing, he says: "Blessed is He Who has given to the cock understanding to distinguish between day and night." When he opens his eyes, he says: "Blessed is He Who opens the eyes of the blind." When he stretches himself and sits up, he says: "Blessed is He Who looseneth the bound." When he dresses, he says: "Blessed is He Who clothes the naked." When he draws himself up, he says: "Blessed is He Who raises the lowly." When he steps on to the ground, he says: "Blessed is He Who spreads the earth on the waters." When he commences to walk, he says: "Blessed is He Who makes firm the steps of man." When he ties his shoes, he says: "Blessed is He Who has supplied all my wants." When he fastens his girdle, he says: "Blessed is He Who girds Israel with might." When he spreads a kerchief over his head, he says: "Blessed is He Who crowns Israel with glory." When he wraps himself with the fringed garments, he says: "Blessed is He Who has satisfied us with His commandments and commanded us to enwrap ourselves in the fringed garments." When he puts the *tefillin* on his arm, he says: "Blessed is He Who has sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us concerning the commandment of *tefillin*." When he washes his hands he says: "Blessed is He Who has sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us concerning the washing of hands." When he washes his face, he says: "Blessed is He Who has removed

TRADITION: *A Journal of Orthodox Thought*

the bands of sleep from mine eyes and slumber from mine eyes.”

At every turn made by a man a blessing awaits. He who blesses everything recognizes the existence and the presence of God. In everything he sees the Creator Who has not severed His connection with His creation. “All those blessings point to the renewal daily of the acts of Creation.”⁸

IV

The experience of the blessing is the important thing; the formula was only coined as an external framework to preserve the inner content.

R. Meier says: Even if on seeing the bread, he said, “Blessed is He who created this bread, how beautiful is this bread” — this is its blessing. Even if on seeing figs, he said, “Blessed is He who created those figs, how beautiful they are” — this is their blessing.^{8a}

At first the committing to writing of blessings was forbidden. “Writers of blessings are like those burning the Torah.”^{8b} Nevertheless, the text or at least the form of the blessing was fixed. R. Yose said: “Anyone changing the form of a blessing formulated by the sages has not done his duty.”^{8c} However, even after the text was laid down liberty was still left with regard, at least, to the order of the blessings.

Those eighteen blessings (in the morning) have no order, but each one may be recited on the occasion to which the appropriate blessing applies. For instance, if he fastens his belt while still in bed, he says, who girds Israel with might; if he hears the cock crowing, he says, who has given the cock understanding. Any blessing for which he does not become liable, he does not say.

This is how Maimonides (*Yad Tefilah* 7:7, 9) understood the series of blessings detailed in the Talmud. The concept of the blessing as the immediate reaction of a person to what was happening around him guided Maimonides, in theory and in practice, in his ruling that the blessing should not be recited if there is no liability for it, *e.g.*, if he does not hear the cock

Blessings — *The Gateway to Prayer*

or does not fasten his belt. Yet as early in the time of Maimonides we see the blessings being torn from the soil of their spiritual growth and their original reason being forgotten. Thus he himself testifies:

It is customary in most of our towns to say these blessings in the synagogue one after the other whether there be liability for them or not.

His sharp protest that, "this is an error and it is not proper to do so" (*Aibid.*) was of no effect. This deterioration continued. Maimonides' son, Abraham, wrote: "We have abrogated this custom with the other worthless customs which we have abrogated."⁹ This "worthless custom" stayed on, so that the greatest halakhic authorities were compelled to agree to it as a concession in the consolidation of the text of the prayers." According to the order of the Talmud it was proper to say each blessing on its appropriate occasion, but because many were ignorant it was enacted that they be said in order in the synagogue.^{9a}

After the fixing of the text and the arrangement in the synagogue had displaced the blessing's connection with extemporized devotion there still remained a definite method of preserving the spiritual tension demanded by the blessing. The number of blessings that a person must say daily was established according to a Tannaitic tradition at 100.¹⁰ Hence opportunity again remained for spiritual alertness and persisted devotion in order to obtain the required number. The ruling stressing the number of blessings imposed upon the person the permanent alertness of all his senses, eyes wide open to look, ears alerted to hear, and even nostrils quivering to smell a pleasant smell. It did not permit a person to accept the manifestations of nature with indifference. He who sees the Mediterranean Sea is obliged to say a blessing. For thunder and for lightning, he must say a blessing. For a friend not seen in thirty days, he must say a blessing. On seeing kings and scholars, he must say a blessing. Man must be continually steeped in a state of watchfulness and instantaneous response. In other words, he is alive the whole time and realizes his liveliness so that he is on

TRADITION: *A Journal of Orthodox Thought*

the threshold of prayer all the time. For it is by this means that the living person reacts to Him Who gives life to all the living.

The Halakhah requires a person to say a blessing when he tastes, hears, sees, or smells. Whoever is not included among these is not bound to say a blessing. Though he is bound to attain a hundred blessings, it is not the number which is important but the intention of each of the blessings. "Whoever says a blessing which is not necessary transgresses the command of 'Thou shall not take' (God's name in vain)."^{11a} Some complain against those who are piety and complete the hundred blessings each day through guile by eating fruits without bread.^{11b} Not the number of blessings is important but the blessings themselves. 100 blessings are 100 invitations to 100 spiritual experiences, 100 occurrences. The duty to say a blessing and its classification into categories and its forms takes place only after something has transpired in the person. One of the chapters of the tractate *Berakhot* that deals with the laws of blessings commences with the words:

If one sees a place where miracles have been wrought for Israel, he should say blessed be He who wrought miracles for our ancestors in this place.

A person can pass by a place 101 times and see nothing. The duty to say a blessing arises only "if one sees." To anyone who does not see by himself it comes as a reminder of his duty that *he ought to see*. But only then, when he does see is he bound to bless.

V

"The true origin of prayer," writes A. J. Heschel,

lies in inner contemplation, reflection upon the mystery of existence, the sense of wonder, which is a sense that is inexpressible . . . if we possess eyes and cannot see the majesty of being, then the way of prayer is locked against us. If the rising of the sun is merely a natural daily event, there is no sense in saying 'Who in mercy gives light to the earth and to them that dwelleth thereon . . . every day con-

Blessings — The Gateway to Prayer

tinually. 'If bread is merely flour kneaded with water and baked in the oven, there is no sense in saying 'Blessed art Thou . . . Who bringest forth bread from the earth.'^{11c}

In one of his essays on Judaism, Hayim Greenberg quotes this *midrash*:¹²

The wicked man is regarded as dead while living because he sees the sun shining and does not say the blessing "Creator of light," sees it setting and does not say "who brings in the evening twilight," eats and drinks and does not say a blessing. The righteous, however, say a blessing over everything they eat or drink or see or hear.¹³

He asks:

What does this *midrash* mean? Surely the fact of saying "Creator of light" or "Who brings the evening twilight" is not sufficiently potent to give life to the righteous just as abstention from saying the blessing cannot withdraw the life force from the wicked and make of him a corpse. The meaning, however, of this *midrash* is: the wicked person is so dead spiritually that he feels no need to say the blessing and derive benefit therefrom. He is so dead that he does not sense the mystery in the rising of the sun and in its setting, in the morsel of bread he eats, and in the measure of water he drinks; he does not feel the infinite eternal connection of these with the universe and with the God who resides within this universe. The wicked is regarded as dead because he looks upon the miracle as something usual, and revelations of eternity as daily occurrences; he sees externalities, mere prayer, and not the latent power in it.

By imposing the duty upon man to say a blessing Halakhah obliges him to see the wonder and the miracle in everything. The surprise wonderment arising therefrom is the gateway to prayer. The way to prayer flows over moments of wonder and amazement.

The simplest of blessings over any ordinary thing for which no special blessing was appointed, the blessing "by whose word all things exist"—that already testifies to the unique and the wondrous in all the phenomena of life. Even the phenomena which are most humdrum cannot in the final analysis be explained save by the fact man is astonished before them and expresses thanks by saying "by whose word all things exist."

TRADITION: *A Journal of Orthodox Thought*

All things—literally all things.

Earth crammed with heaven
And every common bush alive with God
But only he who sees takes off his shoe.

So wrote the English poetess, Elizabeth Browning. Even so it all depends upon the person seeing. The duty to say a blessing is intended to remind him of this—reminding him early and reminding him late.

The blessing is a remedy against forgetfulness. It is a frequent reminder not to become enslaved to the conventional. The blessing holds man in a continuous condition of wonderment, causing him to preserve the connection with that above. The blessing is a reminder to pray. But whence comes prayer itself? How does man achieve prayer itself? With what does he commence to pray? How can he converse with what is beyond his life, with that, confronting which he stands and proclaims the words: "Blessed art Thou?" For thereby not only does the one blessing acknowledge and lay it down that the Lord is God of the universe and by His word all things exist, but in addition that He is "Thou," i.e., present and confronting him, listening and attending, understanding and having regard to man.

VI

It is worth examining the text of the blessing as instituted by the rabbis—"Blessed art Thou, O Lord!" This combination, taken from the verse (Psalms 118:12), "Blessed art Thou, O Lord, Teach me Thy statutes," was not established at once. In the Jerusalem Talmud (*Berakhot* 9:1) there is a dispute between Rab and Samuel. Rab says that one should say "Blessed art Thou," which is found only twice in the Bible. Samuel, on the other hand, says that one should not say "Thou" but simply "Blessed be the Lord," a combination found tens of times in the Bible. The Halakhah accepted the text of Rab—"Blessed art Thou," thus asserting that the moment a person feels and expresses "Blessed" he, as it were, finds himself

Blessings — The Gateway to Prayer

in His company and can say “Thou” like one speaking from mouth to mouth to a listener, or “like a man making a declaration into the ear of his attentive fellow.”¹⁴ Every blessing extends the presence of God in the world according to Heschel. God is transcendental to the universe but the blessings makes Him immanent; it causes Him to dwell in the world. For His dwelling in the world depends upon us. When we say “Blessed” we extend His glory, imparting and introducing some of His spirit to the world.

The duty to recite the blessing and all the admonitions connected therewith call upon man to be continuously amazed before the wonders of the Creator, to perceive Him in everything, small and great. Whenever a man moves to do anything—to derive benefit from the world, to eat, to drink, to live in the lap of nature—immediately rushing to meet him is the duty to say the blessing instituted by the halakhic sages, commanding: “Mortal man, open up your eyes and see, do not move through the world like one blind, alert your brain and think, do not pass through the world like a robot.” The duty to say the blessing restrains man in each of his actions, telling him to stay awhile and ask himself a number of questions. The blessing itself is not simply an answer to questions, it is a conclusion. You stand amazed, wondering who has created all these. You do not understand how the simplest things in the world act, just as you don’t understand how the complex ones act. You wish to know, how, what, who? The answer thereto is: “by whose word all things exist.” The blessing takes you beyond the borderline between the known and the mysterious. You are now within, standing face to face, opposite that which is “beyond the mysterious” and He, King of the universe and of the unknown—but also “blessed”; He reveals Himself to you wherever you turn like a pool whose water flows from the unknown into the open. Here is He who made the creation, who imparts of His wisdom to them that revere Him, who creates the fruit of the tree and brings forth bread from the earth, who causes this drop of water to descend and gives you life, preserving you to see it. In brief, here is He “by whose word all things exist.”

TRADITION: *A Journal of Orthodox Thought*

As for you, mortal man, when you attain this sensation as you look at the world surrounding you—then you are to pray. But when you pray, do not pray before some “third person,” before the “that” who made all this. When you achieve this feeling and knowledge that “by His word all things exist,” and apart from Him there is nothing in the world, then you are also to feel and know that just as you are now standing before Him, so He is standing before you. The moment you are aware of “blessed,” you may continue and murmur, “Thou”—and He, by whose word all things exist, has become “Thou” to who you utter a prayer, that is more than a process of thought and a movement of the lips, that is “an occurrence transpiring between man and God in the presence of God.”

VII

In this manner the blessing prepares the ground for prayer, and itself becomes prayer. The whole *Amidah* prayer, usually referred to simply as “the prayer,” which contains praise of the Omnipresent and petitions for the needs of man, is nothing but a collection of blessings. Indeed Judah Ha-Levi regards Jewish prayer as one series of blessings preserving man all his days in a continuous state of prayer.

Judah Ha-Levi compares the ideal pious man to a ruler. Just as the ruler has dominion over the kingdom, so does the pious man rule over his instincts and wishes, directing them to a single purpose: to the service of God. The pious man’s way is not to flee from life into the isolation of prayer and supplication, but to serve God in the midst of life, while directing life towards the supreme goal of the service of God.”¹⁵

He writes:

In this way the time of prayer will be for the pious like the kernel of time and its fruit. The remaining hours will be for him like paths leading to this hour, for whose coming he looks forward. By means of it he becomes like the spiritual essences and becomes remote from the animal-like . . .

The value of all these [blessings] to the soul is like the value of food for the body. Man’s prayer is good for his soul just as food is

Blessings — The Gateway to Prayer

a benefit for his body. Similarly the blessing of each prayer rests upon the person until the time of the following prayer, just as the benefit from the meal he partakes of during the day endures until he partakes of the night-meal.

In addition

every sensual pleasure which the pious enjoys—he is privileged to bless God for it . . . and what increases the enjoyment is the life of the pious and strengthens and adds pleasure to his enjoyment is the duty of saying the “blessings” which he has to say over everything that happens to him in the world.

Concerning this the Kuzari asks: “How is this possible? Surely the blessings are an added bother?” The sage replies with a question:

Is it not proper for the perfect man to say that he enjoys the pleasure of his food and drink more than does a child or an animal—just as it is proper to assign more pleasure to an animal than to vegetation although vegetation absorbs food all the time?

To this the Kuzari replies: “Indeed it is so.” Indeed, it is so because of the advantage in feeling and consciousness which man has at the moment of pleasure. For we have learned by experience that

if a drunkard had all the things he longed for while he was drunk—if he ate and drank, listened to music, was in the company of his friends, and embraced by his beloved—was then told all about this when he became sober he would be distressed and regard it as a loss since he did not have those pleasures when in a state of full consciousness.

Thereupon the sage replies:

On the other hand, the preparation for pleasure, its discrimination, and thinking of its absence before its arrival—all these things multiply the pleasure. And this is one of the benefits of the “blessings” for all who undertake to fulfill them with intention and perfectly, for they bring to the soul of man discrimination in the type of pleasure and create the feeling for the need to give thanks for it to the One who gave it, seeing that man was apprehensive of its absence, and

TRADITION: *A Journal of Orthodox Thought*

as a result the enjoyment of this pleasure becomes greater. Thus the blessing: 'Who has kept us in life and has preserved us' is said because you regard yourself as ready for death; and so you give thanks for still being alive, regarding this as a benefit; and then illness becomes of little account in your eyes, and in due time death too when it comes; for you strike the account of your soul you find that you have profited from your dealing with God. Because of your nature, which is dust, you really deserve to be deprived of everything good. God, however, has dealt with you and given you life and enjoyment, and for these you give thanks. When the hour comes and he takes them from you—you will give thanks and say: "The Lord gave, the Lord has taken away—let the name of the Lord be blessed." Thus you will be found to enjoy all the days of your life. Anyone not accepting this approach, regards his pleasure not as a human but as an animal pleasure like the pleasure of the drunkard.

The pious reflects in this way on the subject of each "blessing," imagining what it means and what is connected therewith. Thus in the blessing "Creator of the luminaries," he imagines the order of the upper universe, the essence of the celestial bodies and their great benefit, thinking that although they are enormous in our eyes because of the great benefit which we find in them, they are to their Creator but as the smallest of insects. In proof of this—that the wisdom of the Creator and His conduct revealed in the formation of the ant and the bee is not less than His wisdom and conduct of the sun and its sphere . . . Moreover the imprint of providence and of Divine wisdom is finer and more wondrous in the ant and in the bee, which, though so small have been given such powers and such instruments . . . Similarly in the blessing 'with everlasting love' the pious bears in mind that the Divine effluence cleaves to the congregation ready to receive it as light clings to the spotless mirror; and that the Torah was given to us by God when it became His will that His Kingship be revealed on earth as it is revealed in heaven; and that Divine wisdom required that God should create on earth not angels but men of seed and blood within whom various natural powers should be in conflict and within whom various temperaments should struggle.

Judah Ha-Levi goes on to describe the blessings in the *Amidah* prayer which embraces all Israel and which are prayers *par excellence*.

Thus the blessings serve as a gateway through which we enter into prayer. There can be no acceptance of the yoke of the kingdom of heaven contained in reading the *Shema* without the blessing before it and after it, and there is no *Amidah*

Blessings — The Gateway to Prayer

prayer without its blessings. In all our supplications for knowledge and healing, and for blessing and for salvation, and for our other human needs, we come first to the recognition of "Blessed art Thou, O Lord," gracious giver of knowledge, delightest in repentance, healest the sick of his people Israel, blessest the years, etc.

The development of prayer can best be summed up as follows: from man to the world through the blessing which makes us arrive at the correct view and time perception of our inner world and of the world about us as part of the regenerating world of God. Through the power of the blessing all common things become holy, all those things which at first sight seem explicable become wonders. On having this vision and feeling we say "blessed," and thereby proclaim the entry into the material and human world of Him who is the source of all these and gives life to them all. From this recognition of "blessed" the way is open to prayer itself, to the intimate saying of "Thou."

NOTES

1. According to this view—anyone enjoying anything without a blessing commits sacrilege—it follows that the world is holy. Another view is that anyone having enjoyment without blessing is guilty of robbery since the world belongs to the Lord. Thus we have two different views of the tie between the world and God. God's ownership of the world is regarded by Philo too an important element in his thinking. See Samuel Belkin, *In His Image*, p. 87-88. Whatever belongs to God is automatically sacred, holy. Hence some Jewish sages stressed the sanctity of the world as being due to its belonging to the Holy One. Thus the Amora Samuel says (*Berakhot* 35a): To enjoy anything in this world without a benediction is like making a personal use of things consecrated to heaven. Rabbi Avahu (J.T. *Berakhot* 6:9; Midrash Ps. 16) says with reference to the verse (Deut. 22:9), 'Lest the fulness of the seed which thou hast sown be forfeited together with the increase of the vineyard' the whole world and its fulness is assessed as if it were a vineyard. What is its redemption price? A blessing. See also the different approaches of the sages to this topic in *Torah Min Ha-Shamayim*, Pt. I, p. 130, by A. J. Heschel.

2. It is an interesting notion that he robs the community of Israel in addition to robbing the Holy One. Diminishing the power of God in the world automatically diminishes the power of Israel.

TRADITION: *A Journal of Orthodox Thought*

3. "Whoever says a blessing which is not necessary transgresses the command of 'Thou shalt not take [God's name in vain]'" (*Berakhot* 33a).
4. "This is the table which is before the Lord." The blessing converts the table into an altar and the bread eaten therein into a sacrifice. Cf. *Haggadah* 27a.
5. A. J. Heschel in *Ruach ha-Tefilah Be-Yisrael*.
6. Maimonides, *Guide to the Perplexed*. Pt. III, Ch. 51.
7. The whole passage in *Berakhot* 60a.
8. *Ha-Eshkol*, 1, 4, in the names of Nationai Gaon and Amram Gaon.
- 8a. *Tosef. Berakhot* 4:4-5.
- 8b. *Berakhot* 115b.
- 8c. *Tosef. Berakhot* 4:4-5.
9. Responsum 83, cited in *Yesodot Ha-Tefillah*, p. 130 of E. Levi.
- 9a. Tur., OH, 46.
10. "It was taught: R. Meir used to say, A man is bound to say one hundred blessings as it is written, 'And now Israel what (Hebrew $\eta\mu$ is interpreted as $\eta\mu = 100$) doth the Lord thy God require of thee" (*Men.* 43b). Cf. *Tosef. Berakhot* 6:22 and Lieberman, *Tosefta Kifeshuta*, p. 125.
11. "Ran Zutra b. Tobiah said in the name of Rab: Whence do we learn that a blessing should be said over sweet odors? Because it says (Ps. 150:6) 'Let everyone praise the Lord.' What is that which gives enjoyment to the soul and to the body? You must say this as fragrant smell" (*Berakhot* 43b).
- 11a. *Berakhot* 33a.
- 11b. See *Beer Esek*, no. 76 quoted in *Ozar Yisrael* o.v. *Berakhot*.
- 11c. *Ruah Ha-Tefillah*, p. 13.
12. *Shenei-Mikhtavim le Abraham Mannes*, letter 1, *The Inner Eye* by Hayim Greenberg, p. 38.
13. "The words of the *midrash* ring in my ears, although I do not remember its source," writes Greenberg. It is to be found in *Mid. Tanh.* end of weekly portion *Ve-Zot Ha-Berakhah*.
14. The former expression occurs in the Urbach edition of *Arugat Ha-Bosem*, p. 127 in the name of *JT*; Lieberman in *Tosefta Kifeshuta, Berakhot* p. 60, no. 10 states that it is not in our editions of *JT* and quotes the latter expression from *JT Berakhot* 9:1.
15. Kuzari, Excursus 3, 3f. All the Kuzari quotations are taken from the new Hebrew translation of J. Ibn Shmuel who was good enough to permit me to quote from his exemplary new translation although it is not yet published.