



My Jewish Learning Prayer Series: “Asher Yatzar”

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Sources referenced or quoted

Asher Yatzar, *Siddur*

<p>Blessed are You, YHVH our God, Ruler of the Universe, who has formed the human being in wisdom, and created within them numerous orifices and cavities. It is revealed and known, before the Throne of Your Glory that if but one of them were to be blocked or one of them were to be opened, it would be impossible to exist for even a short while. Blessed are You, YHVH, who heals all flesh and performs wonders.</p>	<p>בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם אֲשֶׁר יָצַר אֶת הָאָדָם בְּחָכְמָה וּבְרָא בּוֹ נְקָבִים וְנְקָבִים חֲלוּלִים חֲלוּלִים. גְּלוּי וְדוּעַ לְפָנַי כִּסֵּא כְבוֹדְךָ שְׁאֵם יִפְתַּח אֶחָד מֵהֶם אוֹ יִסְתֵּם אֶחָד מֵהֶם אִי אֶפְשֶׁר לְהִתְקַיֵּם וְלַעֲמוֹד לְפָנֶיךָ אֶפִּילוּ שְׁעָה אַחַת. בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה רוֹפֵא כָּל בְּשָׂר וּמַפְלִיא לַעֲשׂוֹת.</p>
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Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, *God in Search of Man: A Philosophy of Judaism*

<p>The surest way to suppress our ability to understand the meaning of God and the importance of worship is to take things for granted. Indifference to the sublime wonder of living is the root of sin. Wonder or radical amazement is the chief characteristic of the religious man's attitude toward history and nature.</p>

Genesis 2:7

<p>God formed <i>adam</i> from the dust of the earth. God blew into <i>adam</i>'s nostrils the breath of life, and <i>adam</i> became a living being.</p>	<p>וַיִּצְרֵן יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָאָדָם עֹפָר מִן־הָאֲדָמָה וַיִּפַּח בְּאַפָּיו נְשֵׁמַת חַיִּים וַיְהִי הָאָדָם לְנֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה:</p>
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Psalms 111:10

<p>The beginning of wisdom is the fear of God...</p>	<p>רֵאשִׁית חָכְמָה יְרֵאת יְהוָה...</p>
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Rabbi Rami Shapiro, “The Blueprint of Creation”, *The Interfaith Observer* (excerpt)

I am the deep grain of creation, the subtle current of life.
God fashioned me before all things; I am the blueprint of creation.
I was there from the beginning, from before there was a beginning....

Wisdom of Solomon 7:25

Wisdom pervades and penetrates all things

כִּי הַחִכְמָה מְהִירָה יוֹתֵר מִכָּל

Rabbi Kerry Olitzky, *Jewish Paths Towards Healing and Wholeness*

...most prayer books attempt to translate the core elements of the prayer rather creatively “intricate network of finely tuned organs and orifices” for nikavim nikavim chalulim chalulim. I prefer to let the Hebrew speak for itself -- “holes, holes, tubes, tubes.”

Rashi on Brachot 60b

A body is similar to a flask filled with air and hence naturally the air should leave if even a small hole is punctured. The wonder of the body is that despite it being full of holes its spirit is still guarded within it.

Rachel Barenblatt “Morning Blessings for Body and Soul,” *The Velveteen Rabbi.com*

A *chalal* is a flute, so this blessing evokes the ways in which our bodies are like flutes through which the *ruach ha-kodesh* ("holy spirit," more or less) flows.

Dr. Evan Fischer, “The Blessing of Asher Yatzar and the Miracle of the Human Kidney,” *Ideals*

The entirety of the human body is nothing short of astounding. Looking at every individual organ system shows an unbelievable functional design down to the smallest and most intricate details.



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Thuli Zuma, "90 Trillion" (excerpt)

Even on your worst days
When there is nothing fair about enough
And you feel you do not come close to it anywhere.
When you cannot bring yourself to say the words you mean
Let alone mean the words you say....
You are still 90 trillion cells holding together.
Building up life
Willing you be.
You are harmony.
A celestial symphony.
This is not a metaphor.
It is a statement of fact.....

... You are miracle.
A quilt of dreams stitched together with
Blood, bone and limb.
And even on those dark days
Though the voices in your head will not agree.
You are not defect
You are not damaged
You are not default.
You are not sorry and you should not be.
You are miracle.
You are harmony.
You are 90 trillion cells weaving new tapestry.
Each one testifies to the mystery
That even on the worst day
Even at your worst
You are still your be
You are miracle
You are miracle
Why is it you insist on walking through this life
As though you are any less?



Rabbi Rachel Barenblatt “A Daily Love Song for the Body,” *The Velveteen Rabbi.com*

After I had my strokes, I developed a new relationship with the idea that if one of the body's many openings should be accidentally closed, it's no longer possible to stand before God and offer praise. My relationship with the blessing changed again when I became pregnant and started giving myself daily injections of blood thinner; I recited the blessing every morning as the needle's plunger found its way home. And then I treated my expanding belly to some lotion, both to soothe the sting of the injection and because I couldn't help marveling as my physical form started to shift and change.

Today the blessing has become mundane again. I'm no longer worried about blood clots sneaking their way into my brain; I take my handful of pills every morning, and I trust that they're all doing their jobs and that my blood will continue to flow freely where it ought to be flowing. And I no longer have to steel myself to pinch a generous fold of flesh and guide a needle home. But the habit of reciting the blessing remains, a reminder that my body is a miracle -- that every body is a miracle, always.

Rabbi Emily Aviva Kapor-Mater “Asher Yatzar prayer for recognizing the Divine Image in All Our Bodies,” *Open Siddur.com*

Asher Yatzar (the “bathroom blessing”, traditionally said every morning and after every time one goes to relieve oneself) has always rung hollow to me, at best, and at worst has been a prayer not celebrating beauty but highlighting pain.

The original version praises bodies whose nekavim nekavim ḥalulim ḥalulim (“all manner of ducts and tubes”) are properly opened and closed—yes, in a digestive/excretory sense, but it is quite easy to read a reproductive sense into it as well. What do you do if the “ducts and tubes” in your body are not properly opened and closed, what if one is open that should be closed, or vice versa?

The prayer goes on to say that if one of the “ducts and tubes” that should be open was closed, or vice versa, “it would be impossible to stand and become established in Your presence”. The **ableist** implications of this have always also rung hollow. Many people cannot stand. Many people can stand, and it is not impossible for them to be established in the Divine presence despite the imperfections of their bodies. There's a whole range of experiences here.

How can we affirm these experiences rather than continue to celebrate the normativity thrust upon us by a normative society? That's something I struggle with every day....

...The Hebrew word be-ḥokh'mah means “with wisdom”, and it has the same syntactic



ambiguity as in English: did God create by utilizing God's own wisdom in our creation, or did God create humanity to embody wisdom as part of our deepest strata of being? I think it can be both, but it can be often difficult for us—disabled people, transgender people, all sorts of people with non-normative bodies—who often feel disconnected and pained about our bodies, to have to hear repeatedly that God “made us with wisdom”, for a reason. I think you can read it as the latter: we have been given wisdom—the wisdom to recognize the divinity within each of us, the sacredness of our essence, the power and potential for continuous creation and re-creation. That's what it means to be created in God's image: God may be a creator, but so are we. We are creators, and that is a sacred and beautiful task.

Rabbi Shefa Gold, “Oh Wonderous Healer, Rofei Chol,” *RabbiShefaGold.com*

It is the Divine spark within me that gives my body the intelligence to heal itself. That amazing intelligence is at work at this very moment. With this practice, I recognize my body's capacity for self-healing and I activate that Divine Healing power that is latent within each and every cell.

Kitzur Shulchan Aruch

1. One must relieve oneself as soon as one feels the need, without delay.
2. One must be modest in the toilet, and not relieve oneself in front of other people unless there is a partition.
3. One must be careful not to overly strain, for it could create problems in the colon.
4. One must not think about Torah or Torah-related subjects in the toilet; instead, think about mundane matters such as business or commerce.
5. One must cleanse oneself thoroughly after visiting the toilet, for it is forbidden to pray if one's body isn't completely clean of excrement traces.
6. Every time after visiting the toilet, even after urinating one drop, one must wash one's hands thoroughly and then say the “Asher Yatzar” blessing.

Rabbi Sandra Lawson, “Asher Yatzar -- Thank You For Creating Me,”
RabbiSandraLawson.com

While I was studying to become a rabbi this prayer meant everything to me and it became my favorite prayer. I did not see this prayer as just a bathroom blessing thanking God for allowing me to relieve myself in the morning. I saw it as a prayer thanking God for creating me exactly who I am. A black, queer, Jewish woman and a rabbi.