

Navigating the Shabbat Morning Service

Summary of the Series

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Part 2: Introductory blessings and Pesukei D'Zimra

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Rabbi Shimon Schwab, Rav Schwab on Prayer pages 30-32

שלא עשני גוי. שלא עשני עבד. שלא עשני אשה — He has not made me a gentile. He has not made me a slave. He has not made me a woman.

The Roedelheim Siddur has the text here as שלא עשני נכרי instead of the generally accepted שלא עשני גוי. However, this was a relatively recent innovation by Wolf Heidenheim and Dr. Baer of Bibrich and one other scholar. These authorities were of the opinion that גוי would simply mean “nation,” and would not convey the meaning “non-Jew.” They therefore changed the heretofore accepted word גוי to נכדי. However, this was not widely accepted, because the word נכדי only means “stranger,” an estranged person, another group. But the word גוי in the language of the Sages is definitely used to convey the meaning “non-Jew.”

In the Gemara we often find the acronym עבוי"ם for עובדי כוכבים ומזלות, worshipers of stars and mazalos, which was a refinement to satisfy the Christian censors. Although we do find in the Torah the Jewish people being called גוי, as in גוי קדוש (Shemos 19:6), nevertheless, our berachos utilize the lashon hakodesh used by the Anshei Knesses HaGedolah which is known as lashon Chachamim (the language of the Sages). In the language of the Sages, a member of the non-Jewish world is simply called goy. The different usages of Hebrew are expressed as לשון תורה לעצמה ולשון חכמים לעצמה, the language of the Torah is distinct, and the language of the Sages is distinct (Avodah Zarah 58b). There are numerous examples of these variations with regard to berachos.

There is another version of this berachah which I found in the old siddur of Rav Hertz Shaliach Tzibbur, with the words שעשני ישראל. This is also not in accord with our Gemara. So we will retain the generally accepted version: שלא עשני גוי.

It is important to understand why the Sages expressed the three berachos in the negative: *שעשני ישראל, שעשני בן חורין, שעשני איש*. *שלא עשני גוי, שלא עשני עבד, שלא עשני אשה*, just as the women actually do say *כרצונו*, for having made me according to His will?

The reason given by Bach, Orach Chaim 46, is based on Eruvin 13b, where there is a dispute which persisted for two and a half years between Beis Shammai and Beis Hillel as to whether *גוה לו לאדם שלא נברא יותר משנברא*. Since a person comes into the world and commits so many aveiros, wasting the precious neshamah which HaKadosh Baruch Hu has bestowed upon him, might it perhaps not be better, as far as kiddush Hashem is concerned, if he were not created at all?

Eventually, the matter was decided by a vote that it indeed would have been better (for most people — other than tzaddikim) if man had not been created. However, *עכשיו שנברא, יפשפש במעשיו*, now that man was created, he should make the best of it; he should examine his deeds and try to improve himself to the best of his ability. So we therefore do not express the berachah in the positive *שעשני ישראל וכי*. Instead, we say that, under the circumstances, we are thankful that *שלא עשני גוי*. [The question of whether a ger (convert) would actually say *שעשני ישראל* is discussed by the poskim.]

These three berachos have caused quite a stir and much criticism. It sounds as if we are arrogantly expressing our superiority that we are not non-Jews, slaves, or women. This applies especially to a woman, since it smacks of male chauvinism — especially in our time. However, upon deeper reflection, we get a much clearer picture of what this means.

Does *שלא עשני גוי* mean that Hashem did not make me:

- like Mesushelach, the *tzaddik* for whom the *mabul* (flood) was postponed seven days?
- or like Noach who is called *ish tzaddik*, in whose merit all present-day mankind exists?
- or like Shem and Ever, who were the teachers of Yitzchak and Yaakov?
- or like Yisro, in whose honour an entire parashah was added to the Torah?
- or like Iyov, who was called *עבדי איוב*, my servant Iyov, and was almost as great as Avraham Avinu?

Does *שליא עשני עבד* mean that Hashem did not make me like Eliezer the servant of Avraham, of whom it says, *המשל בכל אשר לו*, which is explained by Rashi to mean *המשל ביצרו כרבו*, he ruled over his *yetzer hara* just as his master Avraham did (Bereishis Rabbah 59:8)? Furthermore, Eliezer was known as *Damesek Eliezer* because *דולה ומשקה מתורתו של רבו לאחדים*, he “watered” the world with the teachings of his master [Avraham] (Yoma 28b). This “eved” was *zocheh* to nissim (miracles) in his search for a bride for Yitzchak.

Or does it mean that Hashem did not make me like Tovi the servant of Rabban Gamliel, whose master testified that he was a *talmid chacham* and was worthy of *semichah* (Succah 20b, Yoma 87b)? Would Rabban Gamliel call any one of us a *talmid chacham*?

Or does it mean that Hashem did not make me like אמתא דבי רבי, the handmaiden of the house of R' Yehudah HaNasi, to whom the Sages would come with their questions? (Rosh Hashanah 26b, Moed Katan 17a).

Does שלא עשני אשה mean that Hashem did not make me a woman:

- like one of the matriarchs, Sarah, Rivkah, Rachel, and Leah?
- like Devorah the Prophetess?
- like Queen Esther?

It is therefore clear that these berachos do not represent the “arrogant and eminent superiority” of a Jewish male over a non-Jew, a servant or a woman. Rather, they express thanks to HaKadosh Baruch Hu for the special opportunities of mitzvos which a Jewish male was granted, more than those assigned to:

- a non-Jew, who has only the seven mitzvos of bnei Noach, even if he is Noach, a righteous person;
- a servant, who has mitzvos like a woman, even if he is Eliezer, the servant of Avraham;
- a woman, who has all mitzvos except the few מצרת עשה שהזמן גרמא, time-bound mitzvos, even if she is Devorah the Prophetess.

Even if these individuals voluntarily perform mitzvos from which they are exempt, their reward is much less than that of one who is mandated to perform them. Chazal call this: גדול המצוה ועושה ממי שאינו מצוה ועושה (Avodah Zarah 3a). Tosafos (ibid.) explains this based on the fact that the person who is mandated to perform a mitzvah has a constant struggle with the *yetzer hara*. Thus the greater the temptation to violate a mitzvah, the greater the reward for performing it.

This goes contrary to our simplistic notion that one should be entitled to a greater reward for “Volunteering” to do a mitzvah than if he were commanded to do so. Our ego, our nature, prefers that we do things out of “the goodness of our heart,” rather than because we are required to do so. However, as far as mitzvos are concerned, the opposite is true.

Galatians 3:28

There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in JC.

Mizmor Shir (322): Psalm by king David for the inauguration of the Temple. It is read on Chanukah but is included here to mark the transition between the morning blessings and the *Pesukei Dezimrah* – blessings of praise.

Baruch She'amar (326): The first blessing in the *Pesukei Dezimrah* contains ten phrases which reflect the ten utterances used to create the world.

Hodu (326-330): Taken from the book of Chronicles I 16:8-36 this section was first recited when king David brought the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem. He reminds the people of their history and our dependence on God's Divine Providence.

Lamnatzeiach (332): The Universe testifies to God's work (Psalm 19).

LeDavid (334): Psalm of thanksgiving (Psalm 34).

Tefilah leMoshe (338): The eternity of God (Psalm 90).

Yosheiv b'seter (338): Prayer for protection from harm (Psalm 91).

Haleluyah (340): Psalm 135 is constructed in three parts; the first and third are about the truth of God and the fallacy of idol worship. The second is about God's power over nature and history. Psalm 136 also opens with the idea of God being above nature and ends with his dominance in history.

Rannenu (344): Psalm 33. The Malbim explains this saying that God controls through the laws of nature and through Hashgacha – Divine Providence.

Mizmor shir (346): Psalm 92. It is both unreasonable and unwise to pass judgment on a work of art before it has been completed; even a masterpiece may look like a grotesque mass of strokes and colors, prior to its completion. Human history is God's masterpiece. Physical creation was completed at the end of the sixth day, but the spiritual development of mankind will continue until this world ends. Thus it is both unfair and impossible to judge God's equity before the denouement of human history, despite the fact that history appears to be peppered with tragic injustices.

On the seventh day of the first week of creation, on the Sabbath, Adam surveyed God's completed work and he was stirred to sing of the marvellous perfection which his eyes beheld.

Similarly, when the panorama of human history is completed, the seventh millennium will be ushered in as the **יום שכולו שבת**, the day of everlasting Shabbat. At that time all Adam's descendants will look back and admire God's completed masterpiece.

This psalm speaks of man's bewilderment as he observes the inequity which is apparent in this world. It also tells of the joy he will experience when the inequities are resolved. Therefore, the Talmud (Rosh Hashanah 31a) prescribes this as the **שיר של יום**, the Song of the Day for the Shabbat, both in the song of the Levites in the Holy Temple and in the universal Sabbath liturgy.

Hashem Melech (346): Psalm 93. Rashi explains that this psalm is dedicated to the Messianic era, when all men will again recognize God's majesty. This psalm is a direct continuation of Psalm 92, which concluded with the prediction that in the Messianic era men will declare that God is just, My Rock in Whom there is no wrong (Psalms 92:16). At that time men will recognize that God [alone] reigns over all of creation and that He alone, **גאות לבש**, will have donned grandeur. Unlike the arrogant gentile monarchs such as Pharaoh of Egypt, Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, and Sennacherib of Assyria — who considered themselves to be gods and who brazenly defied the Almighty — Messiah will be a monarch noted for his humility.

Yehi Chavod (348): A collection of verses from Psalms, Chronicles and Proverbs. The prayer explains that God created the Universe and therefore is Sovereign over the Universe, not man.

Ashrei (348): This is the only composition in the entire Book of Tehillim, which is actually entitled **תהלה**, a praise, because these verses embody the essence of the Psalmist's passionate love and appreciation for God. Some commentators observe that the Psalmist distilled the essence of all the psalms and incorporated it into the words of this psalm, which contains exactly one hundred and fifty words, corresponding to the one hundred and fifty psalms in the Book.

The Talmud (Berachos 4a) states that whoever recites this psalm three times every day is assuredly a **עולם הבא** ft, a person [worthy] of the World to Come. The Talmud cites two elements which make this psalm so important. First, the initial letters of the verses follow the order of the alphabet, implying that this work is fundamental, as basic and essential as the alphabet. The alphabetical arrangement also alludes to the fact that this psalm presents an orderly program and design for life. Its consecutive verses demonstrate how to progress towards God in constant spiritual ascent.

Secondly, this psalm emphasizes God's most crucial function as supplier of the physical needs of all creations: **פותח את ידך ומשביע לכל חי רצון**, You open Your hand, and satisfy the desire of every living thing (v. 16).

When a person recognizes that every bit of his energy and vitality is a perpetual gift of Almighty God, Who constantly gives life, he will dedicate every moment of his existence to an effort to draw ever closer to his Creator. Such a person thereby belongs to the World to Come, because throughout his lifetime his heart and mind are trained upon Divinity and eternity.

Psalms 146-150 (352): This section forms another core aspect of the Pesukei D'Zimra. 146 relates the contrast between human and Divine rule. God is eternal and just as are the values by which He governs. 147 relates God's role in history. While He 'counts the stars' He also 'heals the broken hearted'. 148 is about how the entire universe sings praises to God. 149 thanks God for His role in our history, celebrating victories with various musical instruments. Psalm 150 is the final psalm and climax of praise of God. The repetition of the final verse indicates the end of the book.

Baruch Hashem l'Olam: Marks the end of this section of the Pesukei D'Zimra. Chosen verses which acknowledge God as the source of blessing.

Vayevareich David (358): Three passages marking historic transitions of the Jewish people.

Nishmat Kol Chai (362): *From Rabbi Dr. Eli Munk (The World of Prayer):* This hymn of praise has reference to the Exodus from Egypt. It is for this reason that it is recited immediately after the Song of the Red Sea and is called ברכת השיר "a blessing of thanksgiving for the Song." (Pesachim 118a). The hymn itself contains no specific reference to the Sabbath at all; it is recited on the Sabbath only because Sabbath rest allows sufficient time to recite it without undue haste, in inner peace and in a joyous mood.

It is composed of two parts; a blessing of song and a thanksgiving for rain. It is a very ancient prayer and mentioned in the Talmud in a number of places.