

NOT TO BE

by Rabbi Daniel Travis

Almost all of the morning blessings are in the positive, except for three: "who did not create me as a member the other nations of the world" "who did not make me a slave" and (for men) "who did not make me a woman." Why are these blessing phrased negatively?

Our Sages saw fit to establish these three separate blessings in order to give us the opportunity to express our appreciation for every facet of Hashem's kindness. If I would simply thank the One "who made me a Jew," thanking Hashem for not making me a slave or a woman as well would seem superfluous. Additionally we should not say the blessings in reverse order, for the last blessing implies the praise of the first two. Saying these blessings in the negative allows us to recite all three blessings, thus increasing our praise of our Creator (Mishna Berura 46,15).

The Zohar adds deeper meaning to the wording of these blessings. Every night our souls ascend to heaven to be recharged and cleansed for the upcoming day. We thank Hashem that when He returns our neshama to our body that he did not send with it the soul of a non-Jew, slave, or someone of the opposite gender (Magen Avraham 46,9). [See end of essay regarding a woman's blessing.]

Some siddurim cite this blessing with alternative wording: "who did not make me an idol worshiper." Although we are certainly thankful for not practicing idolatry, our gratitude goes beyond this base level. We say "create me as a member the other nations of the world" in order to express that we are happy that we were given the Torah and elevated above all of the nations (Responsa Teshuvos V'hanhagos 1,6).

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