Blessings for a New Day

As reported in the Babylonian Talmud, most of the brakhot in this collection were originally recited at home as one went through the daily acts of waking and rising (Berakhot 6b). Each passage extols God as we begin the day: on arising from sleep, on hearing the birds sing, on dressing, on taking one’s first steps, and so on. Maimonides stated: “These brakhot are without a prescribed order; each is to be recited only on the appropriate occasion... and not as part of the synagogue service” (Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Tefillah 7:7, 9). Other authorities, however, beginning with the siddur of Rav Amram Gaon in the 9th century, recommended the public recitation of these brakhot. This has been the standard Ashkenazic practice to this day; the common Sephardic practice is to recite these brakhot privately and to begin the service with the morning psalms.

Baruch. Many commentators argue that the word barukh is not a passive verb meaning “blessed,” but rather an adjective descriptive of God: God is the wellspring of all blessings. (The similar-sounding Hebrew word bereikhah means “pool of water.”) Thus the opening words of a brakhotah are an acknowledgment that God is the source of all blessings (Meir ibn Gabbai).

Who Enables the Bird to Distinguish... תַּעֲבִר נְפָץ לַעֲבִרֵי בֵּית. We are a part of the natural world, responding to the morning sunlight as does all of nature. This first blessing attributes understanding to the animal realm and points to humans taking instruction from them.

The language is taken from the Book of Job (38:36), where God responds to Job out of the whirlwind, saying: “Who placed wisdom in the most hidden places? Who gave understanding to the bird? Who is wise enough to describe the heavens?” The word used for bird is sekhvi; and the Babylonian Talmud identifies it as a rooster (Rosh Hashanah 26a).

Who Made Me in the Divine Image... שׁמַעַהוּ יִתְנַאֶל. This blessing and the next one (“who made me free”) are versions of blessings mentioned in the Tosefta (Berakhot 6:18) and in the Babylonian Talmud (Menahot 43b). They have been emended in Conservative prayerbooks on the basis of manuscript fragments, found in the Cairo Genizah.

Who Made Me a Jew... שְׁמַעַהוּ יִתְנַאֶל. This positive formulation is the wording in the Babylonian Talmud (Menahot 43b).

Who Gives Sight to the Blind... פַּרְדָּס עֲרִירָה. Said when opening the eyes. Many of these blessings are taken from the psalmist’s descriptions of God’s actions: “… sets prisoners free... restores sight to the blind... makes those who are bent stand straight…” (Psalm 146:7–8).

Who Clothes the Naked... נִנְּפַר תִּשְׂמָע. God’s clothing of Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:21) was an act of kindness exhibited to these first humans, even as they were exiled from the Garden.
Who Gives Sight to the Blind

When we thank God for giving sight to the blind, we express thankfulness not only for the literal gift of sight, but also for our capacity for insight, for our ability to be aware of the world around us, and for the capacity to understand ourselves and our world.

Rabbi Benjamin said:

We are all blind until the Holy One enlightens our eyes, as the Bible records regarding Hagar, "And God opened her eyes and she saw a well" (Genesis 21:19).

—Genesis Rabbah

Imitating God

Our prayers thanking God for the clothes we wear and for the ability to stand up and walk about are also a reminder of the imperative for us to provide clothing for the “naked,” to offer help to those who are in physical need, and to defend those who are unjustifiably “bound.” The ancient rabbis commented on the verse, “You shall follow Adonai your God...” (Deuteronomy 13:5)—just as God is kind and loving, so too you should be kind and loving; just as God performs acts of generosity, so should you; just as God is patient, so should you be, as it is written, “You shall make yourselves holy, for I, Adonai your God, am holy” (Leviticus 19:2).

—based on the Babylonian Talmud

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We rise.

Barukh atah Adonai, our God, sovereign of time and space, who enables the bird to distinguish day from night, who made me in the divine image, who made me free, who made me a Jew, who gives sight to the blind, who clothes the naked,

Barukh atah Adonai eloheinu melekh ha-olam, asher natan la-sekhvi vinah l'ḥavḥin bein yom u-vein lailah.
Barukh atah Adonai eloheinu melekh ha-olam, she-asani b'tzalmo.
Barukh atah Adonai eloheinu melekh ha-olam, she-asani ben/bat ḥorin.
Barukh atah Adonai eloheinu melekh ha-olam, she-asani yisrael.
Barukh atah Adonai eloheinu melekh ha-olam, pokei-ah ivrim.
Barukh atah Adonai eloheinu melekh ha-olam, malbish arumim.
WHO RELEASES THE BOUND
מוקיר עקריב. Releasing the
fetters of wickedness, free-
ing the oppressed, feeding
the hungry, and providing
for the homeless are men-
tioned by the prophet Is-
iah as acts that God desires
of human beings (586).

WHO STRAIGHTENS THOSE
WHO ARE BENT
 الأحد קרם. Literally, “mak-
ing those who are bowed
down stand upright.” This phrase,
as found in Psalm 146:8, is
the biblical warrant for stand-
ing up straight when
God’s name is pronounced,
after having bowed at the
beginning of a blessing.

WHO STRETCHES OUT THE
EARTH OVER THE WATERS
וף על מהתם. Psalm
136:6. Genesis depicts dry
land being formed from
the splitting of the primal
waters.

MAY IT BE YOUR WILL
לך ירא. A prayer recorded
in the Babylonian Talmud
(Berakhot 60b).

TRIALS משות. The trials of
life are many: confronting
personal illness or tragic
situations, difficult ethical
dilemmas, temptations that
may endanger us. In addi-
tion, because faith is often
accompanied by doubt,
and even the strongest
faith may be vulnerable in
trying times, we hope that
today will affirm rather
than challenge our faith.

INCLINATION TO EVIL יבר
על ערב. The ancient rabbis
believed that we are subject to impulses that lead us to do good or evil. For instance, competitiveness can
spur us to exert greater energy but it can also lead to hurtful behavior. The yearning for fame and the approba-
tion of others can influence us to perform acts of kindness and to exercise leadership roles, but it can also
produce egos that are never satisfied. We yearn to do good, but we are often impeded by our jealousies, our
self-concern, and our desire for mastery and conquest.
Barukh atah Adonai, our God, sovereign of time and space, who releases the bound, who straightens those who are bent, who stretches out the earth over the waters, who steadies our steps, who has provided for all my needs, who strengthens the people Israel with courage, who crowns the people Israel with glory, and who gives strength to the weary.

Barukh atah Adonai eloheinu melekh ha-olam, matir asurim.
Barukh atah Adonai eloheinu melekh ha-olam, zokef k'fu'im.
Barukh atah Adonai eloheinu melekh ha-olam, roka ha-aretz al ha-mayim.
Barukh atah Adonai eloheinu melekh ha-olam, ha-meikhin mitzadei gaver.
Barukh atah Adonai eloheinu melekh ha-olam, she-asah li kol tzori.
Barukh atah Adonai eloheinu melekh ha-olam, ozer yisrael bigvurah.
Barukh atah Adonai eloheinu melekh ha-olam, oter yisrael b'tifarakh.
Barukh atah Adonai eloheinu melekh ha-olam, ha-noten laya'el ko'ah.

Barukh atah Adonai, our God, sovereign of time and space, who removes sleep from my eyes and slumber from my eyelids.

May it be Your will, our God and God of our ancestors, that You accustom us to study Your Torah and cling to Your mitzvot; do not lead us into error, or transgression, or sin, nor subject us to trials or disgrace. Do not let the inclination to evil control us, and distance us from people who would do us evil and from friends who commit evil; spur in us the yearning to do good and to act with goodness. Bend our will and our desires to Your service.

› Today and every day, may You look upon us, and may all who see us look upon us, with eyes filled with kindness, love, and compassion. Act toward us with kindly love.
Barukh atah Adonai, who acts with kindly love to the people Israel.