

CURRENT TALMUD PASSAGE

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BH

A BLESSING FOR HEARING AND THINKING

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(In honor of studying Judaism and Disabilities this month)

If you look at the blessings we are supposed to say in the morning, you can see that we are supposed to thank God for each thing we have as we become aware of each blessing we have. We thank God for sight when we open our eyes. We thank God for the ability to stand up when we get out of bed. When we put on clothes, we thank God for them.

In fact, the list of blessings in the prayer book is only a suggested "starter list." We should get into the habit of thanking God for every single thing we have when we experience it. (In Eastern religions this is called "mindfulness" and, yes, we have it in Judaism.)

We have blessings to thank God for all these things but, at first glance, it seems that we don't have blessings for the two senses that are prerequisites for taking part in the sages' system: hearing/speaking and cognition. You could be a blind sage (in fact, two of our greatest sages, Rav Sheshet and Rav Yosef, were blind). But not hearing or speaking or understanding booted you right out of the sages' system. This put you in the class called, "the deaf/mute, the mentally ill/disabled and preverbal children." Those people fell outside the sages' system.

So if hearing was so important, why wouldn't that have been the very first blessing you'd say in the morning, right after you were awoken by the rooster (or your alarm clock)? Actually, you say a blessing that acknowledges not only your hearing and cognition but the hearing and cognition of all the world around you.

Before you even open your eyes, you hear the rooster, and you hear the rooster's cognition and voice, and you thank God for your hearing, for knowing what you hear, for knowing that the birds really only do start singing at the very first light of dawn, a light the human eye cannot discern, for the bird having a voice, for the whole world making sense again.

When you say, "Blessed be God, who gives the rooster the understanding to distinguish between day and night", you acknowledge the most profound gifts in your day: you woke up and you knew who you were.

Discussion Questions:

1. Why are those the two most profound gifts you have all day long? What would not having those gifts imply?
2. Now that we've unpacked some of the meanings of this blessing, can you find more?

3. What would this blessing be if the sages had invented it today?