

The Benedictions of Self-Identity and The Changing Status of Women and of Orthodoxy

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A. Introduction

For many generations Jewish liturgy has included three benedictions or blessings which may be described as an attempt to create an awareness of self and one's position in the world. These blessings are an expression of gratitude to God for not having been created as a gentile,¹ as a slave, or as a woman. These three blessings are commonly referred to as the blessings of “non-Jew,

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1 The Hebrew word used in this context, גוי, is used in biblical Hebrew in the sense of “nation” or a member of a nation. The Jewish people are also called גוי and Abraham was promised that he would be a great גוי. It is only in rabbinic Hebrew that the word is used in opposition to the Children of Israel, in the sense of a non-Jew (cf. *Tosefta* Peah 2:9, p. 47). A similar development occurred in the Latin “gens” which originally meant people who were connected to each other by birth, but eventually was used by Romans to mean non-Romans and by Christians to mean pagans (cf. C.T. Lewis & C. Short, *A Latin Dictionary*, Oxford: Clarendon Press 1969, pp. 808–809; Elieser Ben Iehuda, *Thesaurus Totius Hebraicitatis*, Jerusalem, 2:718–719). Some later scholars objected to the use of this term in the blessing, claiming that it was ambiguous as Jews were also numbered among the גוים. One solution offered was to add to the blessing כגויי הארצות (Hizkiyahu Medini, *Sedeh Hemed, Aseifat ha-dinim, Ma'arekhet kherufin*, he; New York: Abraham Isaac Friedman, n.d., p. 174).

slave and woman” by their collective content, but they have also been called “the negative blessings”,² based on the fact that they are all phrased in a negative fashion. One thanks God not for being what one is but rather for what one isn't. One may describe this, in a certain sense, as being a form of “there, but for the grace of God, go I”.³ However, these statements, implying that it is unfortunate to be a non-Jew, a slave, or a woman, have also been considered as being negative blessings in the sense that their content implies disdainfulness and haughtiness towards other groups. Especially in modern times, both the expression of gratitude at not having been created a non-Jew and the expression of gratitude at not having been created a woman have served as a source for the claim that traditional Judaism considers gentiles and women as inferior beings.⁴ There is a fine line to be drawn between statements about pride in belonging to a particular group, meant to encourage *esprit de corps*, such as “thank God that I'm an American” [or English or French or Chinese], which many consider legitimate, and statements which encourage pride by denigration of other groups, which are considered illegitimate.⁵ Thus, many modern women substitute an expression of gratitude to God for having created them as women, without considering this denigrating to men.⁶ It is for this reason, perhaps, that no umbrage has ever

2 *Encyclopedia Talmudit*, Vol. 4, Jerusalem 1956, p. 371.

3 The son of Maimonides maintained that these blessings were to be recited only when one saw the people mentioned in the blessing (Rabbi Abraham Ben Moshe ben Maimon, *Sefer Ha-maspik le'ovdey Hashem / Kitab Kifayat al-'abidin* (Part Two, Volume Two; ed. and translated by Nissim Dana), Ramat Gan 1989, p. 247; cf. Mordechai A. Friedman, “Notes by a Disciple in Maimonide's Academy Pertaining to Beliefs and Concepts and Halakha” [Hebrew], *Tarbiz*, 62 (1993), pp. 563–569. Alex Haley, in his portrayal of the difficult conditions of the American black slaves in the 18th century, mentions that when they saw the poor whites, they would say “Not po' white, please, O Lawd, fer I'd ruther be a nigger” (*Roots: The Saga of an American Family*, New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1977, p. 316).

4 Although there may seem to be a basic difference between the way of relating to a more dominant group (non-Jews) and the way of relating to a subordinate group, this was not considered a material difference.

5 It is instructive to note here that Jesus denigrated the Pharisee who prayed while standing next to a publican (tax collector): “God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican” (Luke 18:11). The implication is that this prayer was obnoxious only because the pray-er was standing next to the publican.

6 In a review of “The Last Gold”, Amalia Ziv writes that many “gays” thank God daily “that He has not made me straight” (*Maariv; Tarbut*, p. 11). This was written in an attempt to

been taken at the priests who thank God “Who has sanctified me with the sanctity of Aaron”. According to rabbinic tradition, this phrase was included by the priests in any blessing made before fulfilling a priestly function. One may wonder how non-priests would have felt if the formulation of the priestly blessing took the form of thanking God for not being ordinary Jews.⁷ The intent of this paper is to show how the changing status of women within traditional Judaism is reflected in the halakhic discussions about this blessing and the changing methods of “orthodoxy” in relating to change. The parameters suggested by the discussions about these blessings lead us to divide our own discussion into three periods: antiquity, medieval times, and the modern era.

B. The Blessings in Antiquity

When we turn to antiquity, we find that the tradition of men thanking God for not having been created gentiles, slaves, or women goes back to the time of R. Judah,⁸ who is reported as having stated that one is required to recite these three blessings daily,⁹ and who may be presumed to have been the one who promulgated this series of blessings. In reality, the earliest form of this tradition, as reported in the *Tosefta* (*Berakhot*, 6:16, Lieberman, p. 38), in the

explain that many gays are happy about being gay. I am not aware that anyone has complained about her denigration of “straights”.

- 7 This fact was brought up in the context of the morning blessings by Joseph H. Hertz, as part of his apologetic defense of these blessings (see below, n. 27). Hertz did not dwell on the difference between the priest’s positive blessing and the male’s negative formulation.
- 8 The printed editions of the Babylonian Talmud report this in the name of R. Meir, but the Vatican ms. has R. Judah. From a philological standpoint, R. Judah is probably the correct version. The talmudic text was probably corrupted to R. Meir as a statement about blessings attributed to R. Meri appears immediately before it. It is also true that R. Judah may have been more receptive to Hellenistic influence (see W. Bacher, *Agada der Tanaiten*, 2, p. 202, n. 2; Kauffmann [note 39], p. 18, n. 1; הר [below, n. 34]. The Hellenistic origin of these blessings will be discussed further on). The statement of R. Judah is presented in the BT (*Menahot* 43 b) as being in apparent contradiction with the statement of R. Meir, which immediately follows it, according to which one is required to recite one hundred blessings daily.
- 9 The use of three as a natural grouping is well known. It is a cliché in the Israeli army that everything can be divided into three parts. For the use of threes in antiquity see Shama Friedman, “Some Structural Patterns of Talmudic *Sugiot*” [Hebrew], *Proceedings of the Sixth World Congress of Jewish Studies*, 3, Jerusalem 1977, pp. 391, notes 7–12.

Palestinian Talmud (*Berakhot* 9:1, 63 b) and in the Babylonian Talmud (*Menahot* 43b – 44a),¹⁰ does not include thanks for not having been created a slave. The three blessings for which gratitude is expressed are for not having been created a “gentile, boor, or woman”. The *Tosefta* explains that the satisfaction in being neither “gentile, boor, or woman” is that a man bears the full load of God's commandments and, presumably, is equipped to fulfill them. The proof-text used to explain the advantage in not being a gentile is Isaiah 40:17, which states “All nations are naught in his sight”. Continuing

10 The printed editions of the Babylonian Talmud have “Who has made me an Israelite” rather than “Who has not made me a non-Jew”. According to Rabinovitz (R. N. N. Rabinovitz, *Dikdukei Soferim* [Munich 1881, photographic reprint in 1960], p. 108), this change was first introduced in the Basel edition of the Talmud, in which many changes were made under the supervision of Marco Marino Fabrix (R.N.N. Rabinovitz, *Ma'amar 'al Hadpasat ha-Talmud*, Jerusalem 1952, pp. 74–79). However, tractate *Menahot* of this edition was printed in 1570 (Rabinovitz, op. cit, p. 74) and we find evidence of changes in the version of this blessing in prayer books which were printed earlier than this in Italy. In the copy of the Italian rite printed in Fano in 1504 found in the JNUL, the word *goy* has been replaced by *yehudi* and the word *shelo* has been replaced by the letter *shin*. In the copy of the fourth edition of this rite (Soncino 1521; see Y.Y. Cohen) found in the JNUL, we find that this blessing, together with some surrounding text, has been cut(!) out of the *siddur*. On a paste-in, in handwriting, has been added (בא"י אמו"ה כותי!) Although these changes cannot be accurately dated, they show the activity of the Italian censorship which flourished after the burning of the Talmud in 1559. However, Jewish sensitivity to this issue was apparently earlier than this. The earliest printed evidence of the changed version is apparently that of the Italian rite printed in Rimini in 1521, which reads “that You(!) have made me an Israelite” (see M. Benayahu, *Copyright, Authorization and Imprimatur for Hebrew Books Printed in Venice* [Hebrew], Jerusalem 1971, p. 170). The use of the second person in referring to the Deity may show that they adopted an ancient Palestinian form, which may still have been known in Italy (see below, note 19). However, later editions amended the changed form to the third person so that it was stylistically in line with the other benedictions. After this time, the use of the twice amended form became common. Evidence of Italian influence in this change is shown by the fact that the Ashkenazic *mahzor* printed in Salonika in 1548 retains the *shelo asani goy* while the edition of this *mahzor* printed in Savionetta-Cremona in 1558(?), which was copied from the Salonika edition (see M. Benayahu, *Hebrew Printing at Cremona: Its History and Bibliography*, Jerusalem 1971, pp. 139–178 and especially p. 168), has the newer form of this benediction. It is of interest to note that the 1541 Bologna edition of the Italian rite contains the newest form but the commentary attached to this edition, by Yohanan Trevits, reflects the original version. In the copy found in the JNUL, the three appearances of the word *goy* in this commentary have been cut out of the text, leaving little holes.

this line of thinking, it follows that women are also inferior to men as far as their relationship to God is concerned, since women have not been commanded to bear the full load of commandments. They do not have to keep those commandments whose fulfillment is prescribed at a specific time. The disadvantage in being a boor is that a boor does not fear sin. The *Tosefta* adds a parable to explain the relevance of this statement. The situation of a boor is comparable to that of a servant who is asked to prepare a meal for his master, but who doesn't know how to cook. The implication is that the boor should have prepared himself for the task which he had reason to assume would be demanded from him. It is important to note that the status of the boor is significantly different than that of the gentile or woman. The boor's status is not innate. One might think that the perception of ancient times was that a boor is born – not made. But the parable of the servant implies that the boor had the opportunity to learn what was required of him. He had the choice not to be a boor but, through his laziness or apathy to learning, he chose to be a boor. Thus, the real impact of this blessing, according to the *Tosefta*, is not so much one of thanksgiving as of self-education to the importance of the study of Torah.¹¹

Although scholarship often looks askance at reasons for laws given in the sources, frequently considering these reasons as having been created after the fact and not really reflecting the rationale of the early law, it is clear that these reasons were accepted by the *amoraim* and served as a basis for their discussions. The point in question is a story told in the Babylonian Talmud (*Menahot* 43b – 44a) of R. Aha bar Yaakov who heard his son reciting these blessings and objected to his son's thanking God for not being a boor. The reason for his objection is not entirely clear. He may have been objecting to his son's assumption that he was not a boor. On the other hand, he may have felt that there was no reason to give thanks for not being a boor as a boor is obligated to keep all the commandments.¹² Be that as it may, the important

11 Yonah Frankel, *Darkhei ha-aggadah*, p. 361. In a similar vein, Judith Hauptman has suggested that the thanksgiving for not being a woman may have been meant to strengthen male ego, "to comfort the men... for the large number of ritual demands placed upon them" (*Rereading the Rabbis: A Woman's Voice*, Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998, p. 237).

12 The rationale for the rejection of the statement about not being a boor is not clear. The two explanations that I have mentioned in the text have been offered by Rashi and *tosafot* to this passage. The Maharsha thought that there was nothing wrong with the blessing itself and the objection relates to the order of the blessings. According to him, there is no point in

point is his son's reaction. His son asked his father what blessing he should recite instead. From this question we may learn that, at this point of tradition, it was accepted that one should recite a threefold blessing but, if the text was not appropriate, it could be changed – provided that one kept to the threefold division. The conclusion of the Talmud was that gratitude for not being a boor should be replaced by gratitude for not being a slave. This conclusion was objected to since the status of women and slaves (non-Jewish slaves; Jewish slaves were not considered as slaves) was considered equal. However, the frame of reference for their equality is not clear. Rashi gives two explanations. One explanation is that women are subservient to their husbands, as slaves are subservient to their masters. Thus, once one has praised God for not being placed in a subservient situation, there is no place for a second blessing of this type. The response to this is that one should nevertheless recite this blessing, apparently just to retain the number of three blessings.¹³ Rashi's second explanation is more consistent with the context. This explanation assumes that the frame of reference is the relationship to God's commandments. Since the status of a woman and a slave were equal as

reciting the blessing for not being a woman after one had already expressed his gratitude that he was not a boor, as being a boor is worse than being a woman. A woman will not be punished for not fulfilling positive commandments – as she is not commanded to fulfill them. A boor, on the other hand, will be punished because he is commanded to fulfill these obligations, but he does not know how to do so. An alternative possibility is that R. Aha bar Yaakov's objection to giving thanks for not being a boor is that not being a boor is not a gift of God but is due to human activity. People are born "boors", in the sense of the Hebrew word בור which comes from a root describing an uncultivated field. It is possible that in the time of the Mishna the term "boor" was used to describe a person who was felt to be natively uncultured, with no possibility of change – very much as the Greeks thought of barbarians. This word appears twice in the Mishna: *Abot* (2:8) and *Mikvaot* (9:6). In the second case the reference is clearly to an uncultured person who does not take care of his clothes (see S. Lieberman, "*Perushim bemishnayot*", *Tarbiz*, repr. in *Studies in Palestinian Literature*, Jerusalem 1991, pp. 7–8). The first case states that a boor does not fear sin and it is not clear whether being a boor is an innate quality or if it reflects a lack of education. However, in the *tosefta* it appears a number of times as an epithet for one who recites blessings in forms which have been rejected by the rabbis (*Berakhot* 1:6, 6:20). Here it is clear that the boor is an uneducated person and this meaning is very obviously the one thought of by the Babylonian *amoraim* in b. *Sotah* 22a. It may be that R. Aha bar Yaakov's objection is based on a changed meaning of the term "boor".

13 The commentary of R. Gershom to this passage adds that reciting an additional blessing is an insignificant matter.

far as the commandments were considered, both being free of time-linked commandments, once a person had expressed his gratitude for being commanded to observe the time-linked commandments (not being a slave), there would be no point in reciting a blessing for not being a woman since there was no difference between a slave and a woman in this matter.¹⁴ Rashi explained that this objection was rejected based on the consideration that women were of a higher social status than slaves, and it was thus appropriate to give separate thanks for not being a slave and for not being a woman.¹⁵ It is appropriate to point out in this context that the blessings now changed their point of reference. Although the early tradition looked at all the blessings from one perspective, the relationship to God, the new statement about not being a slave was not based on the slave's inferior status in relation to the commandments, but rather on his inferior social status.

In discussing the history of tradition, it is appropriate to speculate here about the attitude of R. Aha bar Yaakov himself. The three blessings were of tannaitic origin and we find no tanna who disagreed with them. Why did R.

14 This is according to the second explanation given by Rashi to this passage. According to his first explanation, the status of a woman vis-a-vis her husband is no different than that of a slave to his master. Thus, a man who had already thanked God for not being a slave could not add thanks for not being a woman, as a woman is also a slave. The response to this is that one must keep the traditional number of blessings even though only one of them is necessary. This is the explanation of the passage given in the commentary of R. Gershom in the BT, loc. cit.

15 An assumption of this passage is that the blessings were arranged in a hierarchy: non-Jew, boor or slave, woman. R. Abraham Gombiner ruled that if one had inadvertently recited the blessing about not being a woman before the blessing about not being a slave, one should not recite the blessing about not being a slave since one had already expressed gratitude for not being in a higher status – that of a woman (*Mogen Avraham, Orach Chaim*, 46:9). However, the printed editions of the Rambam stated that the order of the blessings was: non-Jew, woman, slave (*Laws of Prayer*, 7:6; for the correct reading see Joseph Kafah's edition of the *Yad Hachazakah*). Since it was obvious that women were of a higher social status than slaves, the only recourse was to go back to the original concept, that the blessings referred to the status concerning commandments, and find a commandment which women were not commanded to fulfill while slaves were. Such a commandment was that of circumcision (see R. Yaakov Kaminitzky, "About the Blessing Who Hast not made me a Non-Jew" [Hebrew], *Yeshurun*, i [1996], pp. 96–100) and thus the earlier understanding of the significance of these blessings was restored, that they were all based on the relative obligation to keep the commandments, despite the fact that the Talmud seemed to reject this understanding.

Aha bar Yaakov express his objection only in response to hearing his son? Was he himself not accustomed to reciting these blessings? Or did he, perhaps, recite another form of these three blessings which had already been accepted in his milieu?¹⁶ Had his son been studying the tradition with a teacher who was heir to the tannaitic tradition of R. Judah, as opposed to a different tradition which was common in Babylon? These questions cannot be answered, but they should be asked, and this may help us to be aware of the limitations of our knowledge. We may sum up this section with the conclusion that the threefold blessing was well founded in Babylon, but this did not prevent scholars from reformulating these blessings in accordance with their conceptions.¹⁷

Palestinian tradition would have had no problem finding an alternate blessing – if they had decided to replace one of the original three. Many early *siddurim* and Genizah fragments, presumably of Palestinian origin, contain an expanded series of blessings which express the pride of the blesser in the status which had been granted to him by God.¹⁸ A number of manuscripts include gratitude to God for not having been created an animal. Two manuscripts from the Cairo Genizah, published by J. Mann and S. Asaf, thank God for having created the blesser “man and not brute, male and not female, Israelite and not gentile, circumcised and not uncircumcised, freeman and not slave”. Similar blessings are found in two manuscripts, one found in Parma

16 This question has been raised by I. Lévy, who thought that R. Aha bar Yaakov's suggestion was based on a Hellenistic prototype (Isidore Lévy, *La Légende du Pythagore de Grèce en Palestine*, Paris 1927, p. 262, note 3).

17 Kaufmann has suggested that the blessing about not being a slave belonged to the earliest tradition of these blessings. According to him, it was R. Judah who substituted the boor for the slave and R. Aha bar Yaakov was only reinstating the original form which had been retained in Babylonia (Kaufmann, op. cit., p. 15).

18 According to the Meiri, in his commentary to the Babylonian Talmud (*Berakhot* 60b), in Provence they used to recite all four blessings in his time. See Groner (below, n. 55). For additional references to *siddurim* which included this blessing see Moshe Hallamish, “Rare Blessings Included in the Morning Blessings” [Hebrew], *Yeda ‘-‘am*, 26 [59–60] (1995), p. 11.

and one found in Turin, both well known representatives of the Palestinian ritual tradition.¹⁹

Nineteenth-century scholars were the first to point out that these blessings were found not only in Jewish sources, but they, or similar concepts, were found also in Greek and Iranian sources. Plutarch reports that Plato, before his death, thanked the Fates that he had been born a human being rather than an animal,²⁰ Greek rather than barbarian, and that he lived in the time of Socrates.²¹ We may doubt the historical accuracy of the attribution to Plato,²² which would place these themes several hundred years before R. Judah, but Plutarch himself was contemporaneous with R. Aqiva, an important teacher of R. Judah, and thus presents an earlier source for these themes than is found in Jewish sources. It is of interest to note that Plutarch's tradition does not include thanks for not having been created a woman. This lack is made up for in a report of a variant tradition by a later scholar, Diogenes Laertius, who lived in the first half of the third century. He was thus presumably somewhat younger than the redactor of the Mishna, R. Judah the Prince, who was a student, inter alia, of R. Judah. Although later than Plutarch, his report claims to present an earlier tradition. He was apparently aware of a tradition which reputed the thanksgiving motif to Socrates himself, who lived in the fifth century BCE, although he remarks that Hermippus attributed this motif to

19 (מאן, עמ' 277, אסף, ספר דינבורג, עמ' 121) בא"י אמ"ה אשר בראת אותי אדם ולא בהמה איש ולא אשה (זכר ולא נקבה) ישראל ולא גוי מל ולא ערל חפשי ולא עבד (טהור ולא טמא) המוסגר נמצא אצל אסף בלבד; ראה עוד ש' ליברמן, תוספתא כפשוטה, ח"א, עמ' 120; (כ"י פרמה 887) שעשיתיני איש ולא אשה, אד' ולא בהמ', ישר' ולא ישמעאל; (כ"י פרמה 67) שעשיתיני איש ולא אשה, אדם ולא בה', מל ולא ערל, שלא שמתני עבד; (כ"י טורין, עמ' 89) שלא עשיתיני גוי [עובד ע"ז] כגוי הארצות; מל ולא ערל; שלא עשיתיני בהמה. (See Naftali Wieder, "About the Blessings Goy, Slave-Woman, Brute, and Boor", *Sinai*, 85 [1979], pp. 97–115.) David M. Goldenberg (below, n. 26, Appendix III, pp. 100–101) has pointed out that the existence of the circumcised/uncircumcised dichotomy in early Christian sources shows that this item in these versions may not be late – as assumed by Mann, Assaf, Lieberman and Wieder.

20 The possibility of having been created an animal may be connected to the theory of reincarnation or metempsychosis. In later Jewish literature a similar theory was used to justify the everyday recital of thanks for not having been created a gentile. It was thought that when the soul returns to the body after sleep, there was a chance that it would enter the body of a gentile.

21 The Life of Gaius Marcius, LCL, Vol. 9, p. 595.

22 Prof. Hallamish has pointed out that gratitude for not having been created as an animal is consistent with Plato's belief in metempsychosis.

Thales, who lived some hundred years earlier. Whoever it was, he was reputed to have said that “there were three blessings for which he was grateful to Fortune: ‘first, that I was born a human being and not one of the brutes; next that I was born a man and not a woman; thirdly a Greek and not a Barbarian’”. In the vein of tradition history, we might assume that the ancients connected with either Thales or Socrates a trifold²³ thanksgiving which was reworked by Plato. Plato wished to express his gratitude to the Fates for being born in the time of Socrates but, in order to retain the trifold formula, he eliminated the reference to not being a woman. It is instructive of the nature of tradition that Lactantius, a North African Christian writer who lived at the beginning of the fourth century CE, gives a conflated version of this thanksgiving. According to him, Plato was grateful that he was a human rather than an animal, a man rather than a woman, a Greek rather than a barbarian. He was additionally grateful that he was an Athenian and that he lived in the time of Socrates.²⁴ The structure of his report would seem to verify our conjecture about the identity of the original triad – human, male and Greek – with the reference to Socrates and another motif, that of being an Athenian, being considered as later additions.

A triad of a similar division of society appears in Christian sources. Paul, in his letter to the Galatians (3:28), declares that under Christ, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female”.²⁵ Although the general structure of the division is similar to that found in the Greek sources, it is noteworthy that animals are not included in

23 Note the trifold structure of the Pharisaic prayer in Luke (above note 5), with the addition of the publican. This does not imply that he thought that men and women were actually equal. For a discussion of this see: Kathleen O’Brien Wicker, “First Century Marriage Ethics: A Comparative Study of the Household Codes and Plutarch’s Conjugal Precepts”, *No Famine in the Land: Studies in Honor of John L. McKenzie* (eds. J.W. Flanagan and A.W. Robinson), Missoula, MT.: Scholars Press, 1975, pp. 141–153 and especially p. 149.

24 *Divine Institutes*, 3:19:17.

25 Paul’s attitude towards women is complex. Although he seems to call for equality between men and women, in his liturgical instructions to the Corinthians he calls upon women to be silent in church (1 Corinthians 14:33–36). For a discussion on this point see Peter J. Tomson, *Paul and the Jewish Law: Halakha in the Letters of the Apostle to the Gentiles*, Compendium Rerum Iudicarum ad Novum Testamentum, 1990, iii/1 pp. 131–139. See also Shaye J. D. Cohen, “Why Aren’t Jewish Women Circumcised?”, *Gender and History*, 9 (Nov. 1997), pp. 566–567.

the frame of reference and they are replaced by slaves. One wonders whether this difference reflects a variant tradition, or whether perhaps Paul changed another tradition because the possibility of being an animal was not relevant to the subject under discussion: the nature of Christian society. We may once again notice that the division implicit in Paul's writings follows the one adopted in the Babylonian Talmud rather than the division presented by the Palestinian *tannaim*, returning us to our speculation about the origins of the Babylonian pattern.²⁶ An interesting parallel to Paul's theme is found in *Seder Eliyahu* which states, in connection with the judgeship of Deborah, that "I call heaven and earth to witness that whether it be a heathen or a Jew, whether it be a man or a woman, a manservant or a maidservant, the holy spirit will suffuse each of them in keeping with the deeds he or she performs".²⁷

26 In a similar vein he writes to the Colossians (3:11) that "there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free". The categories of Barbarian and Scythian are a merism which includes the whole non-Jewish world. Cf. David M. Goldenberg, "Scythian-Barbarian: The Permutations of a Classical Topos in Jewish and Christian Texts of Late Antiquity", *Journal of Jewish Studies* (Oxford) 49/1 (Spring, 1998), pp. 87–102, esp. pp. 96–97. Thus, these terms would seem to be an expansion of the term "uncircumcised" – which would mean that this statement also has the threefold form. In a similar passage Paul declares that all were baptized into one body "Jews or Greeks, bond or free" (1 Corinthians 12:13). Only in his letter to the Galatians does he refer to the equality of men and women and this may be considered "a rhetorical outburst" (see Shaye J. D. Cohen [above, n. 25], p. 567). In the "mail-Jewish" list discussion on the internet, it has been suggested that the pattern adopted in the Babylonian Talmud is actually a reaction to Paul's statement. Chronologically, this is possible but it does not seem likely for two reasons. One is that the Babylonian Talmud presents the critical reason for adopting this pattern and it has nothing to do with theology. Secondly, although Paul's statement was made to a non-Palestinian community, Christianity was not a major concern of the Jews in Babylon and there is very little reaction to Christianity, if any, to be found in this Talmud.

27 *Tana Debe Eliyahu*, translated by William G. Braude and Israel J. Kapstein, Philadelphia 1982, pp. 152–153. This passage is quoted, in a slightly different translation, by Joseph H. Hertz, *The Authorized Daily Prayer Book*, New York 1965 (12th printing), p. 21, in connection with the morning blessings. This list appears in two other passages in *Tana Debe Eliyahu*. One passage states that anyone – whether gentile or Israel, whether man or woman, whether slave or maidservant – who reads a certain verse connected with sacrifices, will remind God of the binding of Isaac (*Tana Debe Eliyahu*, p. 124; this passage also appears in *Midrash Vayikra Rabbah* 2:11 [p. 51] where it seems to have been added from *Tana Debe Eliyahu* [see Margoliot's note in his edition of *Vayikra Rabbah*, p. 46]). The

Scholarly discussion of the relationship of the Jewish blessings to other traditions tended not to be judgmental but, rather, was interested in the question of cross-cultural influences. The first scholar to notice the correlation between the Greek and Jewish sources was, apparently, the philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer. He maintained that “theism” was introduced into Greek philosophy by Jewish influence. The earlier Iranic philosophy was not “theistic”. In the third edition of his work, published in 1859, he brought a “remarkable corroboration” (“*sonderbare Bestätigung*”) of his thesis. He mentioned Plutarch’s report that Plato had thanked the Fates for being born a human being rather than an animal, Greek rather than barbarian, and that he lived in the time of Socrates.²⁸ Schopenhauer found three similar blessings in a German translation of the Jewish prayer book²⁹ and found in this evidence that Plato had been influenced by Judaism.³⁰ Schopenhauer was not really interested in the attitude towards women displayed in these blessings; considering his own attitude to women, he would indeed have considered it a great misfortune had he been created a woman.³¹ His interest was limited to showing the direction of cultural influence.

Schopenhauer's theme was further developed by other 19th-century scholars – although in the other direction. In 1880, Manuel Joël published an extensive work on the influence of Greek language and culture on Judaism at the beginning of the second century CE. The main thrust of his argument about these blessings, which he considered incidental to his main theme on the influence of Platonic-Pythagorean ideas on tannaitic Judaism, was that the negative attitude towards women expressed in these blessings originated in

other passage cites this list in emphasizing that all who fulfill Divine commands will be rewarded by God (p. 188; the passage does not appear in the mss. of *Tana Debe Eliyahu* but it has been added by Ish-Shalom to his edition from the Yalkut Shimoni, Lech Lecha 76). Note the use in these passages of two types of servants, both male and female.

28 *The Life of Gaius Marcius*, Loeb Classical Library, Vol. 9, p. 595.

29 Euchel's *Gebeten der Juden*, Second edition, 1799, p. 7.

30 Arthur Schopenhauer, *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1859, I, pp. 577–588 (I wish to thank Dr. Stefan Reif for sending me a facsimile of these pages); München: Georg Müller, 1912, I, pp. 559–560, 709–710.

31 See his essay “On Women”, which appeared in *Parerga and Paralipomena*. An English translation appeared in *Schopenhauer: Selections* (ed. DeWitt H. Parker), The Modern Student's Library: Scribner's 1928, pp. 434–447.

Greek sources rather than being of Semitic origin. He considers this point rather insignificant and his main interest in referring to it is to point out how unfounded it is to make generalizations about what is to be considered as truly Semitic.³²

At about the same time that Joël was working on his thesis, we find Isaac Hirsch Weiss (1815–1905) addressing the same issue. In the second volume of his well known history of the oral law, *Dor Dor ve-Dorshav*, first published in 1876, Weiss referred to Socrates' custom of giving thanks that he was created man and not animal, male and not female, Greek and not barbarian, in a list of items in which he tried to show the depth of Greek influence on Judaism.³³ He repeated this idea in his discussion of the life of R. Meir. Here he pointed out that R. Meir was the student of R. Aqiva, who gave his life in devotion to the study of Torah. Nevertheless, R. Meir “was a true scholar” who tried to learn everything from everyone. The institution of these three blessings is cited as an example of R. Meir's openness to non-Jewish sources and his willingness to adopt into Judaism customs found in other cultures.³⁴ Weiss' agenda is clear at this point, and he does not discuss whether this adoption was wise or not.

A further parallel to these blessings in antiquity was found by James Darmstedter who, in the 1880s, reported that these expressions of thanksgiving were found in Iranian sources.³⁵ An Iranian prayer in second- or

32 *Blicke in Der Religions-Geschichte zu anfang des zweiten christlichen Jahrhunderts*, Amsterdam: Philo Press, 1971 [photographic repr. of the 1880 edition published in Breslau], pp. 119–120.

33 Isaac Hirsch Weiss, *Dor Dor ve-Dorshav*, 2, Vienna 1876, p. 19, cf. p. 147; Ziv: Jerusalem – Tel Aviv [no date, reprint of 1903 edition], vol. 2, p. 27.

34 *Ibid.*, p. 132. M. D. Herr accepted the attribution of this statement to R. Judah, as reported in the *Tosefta*, mentioning that R. Judah had a positive attitude to the Roman government (מ"ד הר, "השפעות חיצוניות בעולמם של חכמים בארץ-ישראל – קליטה ודהייה", התבוללות וטמיעה – המשכיות ותמורה בתרבות העמים ובישראל (בעריכת י' קפלן ומ' שטרן), ירושלים תשמ"ט, עמ' 86–87). On the other hand, it has been suggested that R. Meir was a first-generation descendant of converts from Phrygia. See בצלאל בר-כוכבא, "על חג הפורים ועל מקצת ממנהגי חג הסוכות בימי בצלאל בר-כוכבא, ציון, סב (תשנ"ז), עמ' 399–400; Naomi G. Cohen, "Rabbi Meir, a Descendant of Anatolian Proselytes: New Light on His Name and the Historic Kernel of the Nero Legend in Gittin 56a", *JJS*, 23 (1972), pp. 51–59.

35 James Darmstedter, *Une prière judéo-persane*, Paris: Cerf, 1891. I have not been able to find a copy of the original publication. Its contents were summarized in "Philology Notes", *The Academy*, 40 [1021] (Nov. 28, 1891), p. 483 (I wish to express my thanks to my

third-century sources expressed gratitude to Hormiz: “O Creator, I thank Thee for that Thou hast made me an Iranian, and of the true religion...., Thanks to Thee, O Creator, for this, that Thou hast made me of the race of men; ...for this, that Thou hast created me free and not a slave; for this, that Thou hast created me a man and not a woman”.³⁶ Darmestedter wished to show that the Iranian prayer had been influenced by Jewish sources, just as, in his opinion, there were other Jewish influences on Iranian religion.³⁷ It is significant to note here that the Iranian content of the three questions was identical (*mutis mutandis*) with the one that appeared in Babylonian sources, rather than with the tannaitic form. Darmestedter's publication aroused controversy among scholars who suggested that the Iranian position had been influenced by Greek sources rather than by Jewish ones.³⁸ The discussion of the relationship of the Jewish blessings to Greek sources was taken up, following Darmestedter's publication, by David Kaufmann, in an article published in 1893. Kaufmann accepted the idea that the Jewish tradition was influenced by Greek mores.³⁹

If we turn now to the major theme of our study, the status of women as reflected in these blessings, we may notice that, although it was recognized that there had to be [a minimum of] three blessings, no discussion is found of what women should say in place of the blessing “Who has not made me a woman”. It is simplistic to say that women did not pray, for tannaitic sources consider women obligated to pray the *amidah* (*Mishna Berakhot* 3:3) and it is reasonable to assume that they did indeed recite this prayer. We find that a Babylonian *amora* rejects a Palestinian tradition about the blessing to be recited over the New Moon with the statement that that blessing is said by our women – with the implication that men would say something more sophisticated (*Sanhedrin* 42a). So women did pray, but they did not recite all

colleague, Dr. Stefan Reif, who provided me with a copy of this publication).

36 This quote is taken from “Philology Notes” (see above).

37 See the discussion of this point by J. Murray Mitchell, *op. cit.*, 41 [1051] (June 25, 1892), pp. 616–617; T.K. Cheyne, *op. cit.*, 42 [1052] (July 2, 1892), p. 14.

38 See prior note.

39 David Kaufmann, “Das Alter der drei Benedictionen von Israel, vom Freien, und vom Mann”, *MGWJ*, 37 (1893), pp. 14–18. Greek influence has also been accepted by M. D. Herr [above, n. 34]. It is of interest to note that Louis Feldman, in his comprehensive study entitled *Jew and Gentile in the Ancient World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993) does not mention this example of Greek or Hellenistic influence on Judaism.

the prayers offered by men. One could only say that women were not of equal obligation in other liturgical acts, such as the obligation to recite these three blessings.⁴⁰ Nobody, apparently, was concerned over the fact that women could not recite one of these blessings, and it would thus seem that they did not recite any of them.

C. Women's Response in Medieval Times

We may now turn to the medieval period or, to be more exact, to the evidence of the 12th to 15th centuries. In different areas of the world we now find women who recited these blessings and found substitutes for the blessing: "Who has not made me a woman". The best known is the one testified to by R. Jacob ben Asher (Spain, 1270?–1340).⁴¹ He reports that women were accustomed to saying a blessing "Who has made me according to his will".⁴² This is presented as a female custom and R. Jacob does not claim that this was a rabbinical suggestion. He explains that this blessing does not express pride but is rather an expression of resignation to their lot, similar to the praise of God expressed by someone who has borne the loss of a close relative.⁴³ This report is also found in the work of David Abudarham, a

40 This point has already been made by I. Singer, in the *Authorized Prayer Book*. For a discussion of the history of women's obligation to pray see Judith Hauptman, "Women and Prayer: An Attempt to Dispel Some Fallacies", *Judaism*, 42 (1993), pp. 94–103; Michael J. Brody, Joel B. Wolowelsky, *ibid.*, pp. 387–395; J. Hauptman, *ibid.*, pp. 396–413. It may be significant that the obligation of women to pray refers to the *amidah*, which was considered public prayer. The benedictions of self-identity were not part of the public prayer. It is somewhat contradictory to the presumed status of women that they were required to pray the *amidah* but they were exempt from the private blessings.

41 Ephraim Kupfer, "Jacob ben Asher", *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, Jerusalem 1972, Vol. 9, pp. 1214–1215.

42 Tur, *Orah Hayyim* 46. The source of this blessing is unknown. Israel Abrahams (*Annotated edition of the authorised daily prayer book with historical and explanatory notes, and additional matter, compiled in accordance with the plans of the Rev. S. Singer*, by Israel Abrahams, London, 1914, pp. xvi–xvii) has pointed out that there is a similar phrase in Ben Sira, who says that God has made man "according to his will" (50:22, ed. M. Z. Segal, Jerusalem 1959, p. 342. Segal also points out the similarity of Ben Sira to this blessing), but it would seem highly unlikely to find influence of the Hebrew Ben Sira in medieval Spain.

43 It is worthwhile noting that a contemporary of R. Jacob, Kalonymus ben Kalonymus (1286–?), used the same idea in connection with the male blessing. After extolling the situation of women in his time, he laments the fact that he was created a man and had not been fortunate

younger contemporary.⁴⁴ Their testimony about the form of the blessing is supported by manuscript evidence. A *siddur* written in Ladino presents this blessing in Hebrew characters, here transcribed into Latin characters: “*que me fizo como su voluntad*”,⁴⁵ and a similar version, “*que fizi me comy la*

enough to be like Dinah, the daughter of Leah, who had been turned into a female in the womb – although originally conceived as a male. He ends his lament with the statement that he recites the blessing for not having been made a woman in a low voice, accepting it as an articulation of his acceptance of his unhappy lot. This lament appears in his satirical-humoristic work, *Even Bohan*, and has been reprinted in H. Schirmann, *Ha-shirah ha-ivrit bisfarad wiprovans* (Jerusalem–Tel-Aviv 1972², 2/2, pp. 504–505). This passage has also been used by Yael Levin-Katz as a preface to her book *Tehinat ha-nashim levinyan hamiqdash* (Eked: Jerusalem 1996). Cf. Tova Rosen, “Circumcised Cinderella: The Fantasies of a Fourteenth-Century Jewish Author”, *Prooftexts*, 20/1–2 (Winter/Spring 2000), pp. 87–110.

44 *Abudarham Ha-Shalem*, Jerusalem 1963, pp. 39–40. There is some doubt about the proper pronunciation of this name and I follow the use of the *Encyclopaedia Judaica*. For his dates see Zvi Avneri, “Abudarham, David ben Joseph”, *EJ*, Jerusalem 1972, Vol. 2, pp. 181–182. Abudarham appends to this that women are comparable to a person who cultivates another’s fields without the knowledge of the owner. According to Jewish law, such a person is entitled to reward for the work that he did although his reward is not equal to that of the person who cultivated another’s field at the request of the owner. Thus, women are entitled to reward if they fulfill the commandments which they are not required to fulfill. The history of this parable is informative. We find it first in the commentary of Menahem Meiri (Provence, 1249–1361) to a passage in BT (*Avodah Zarah* 3a) which states that gentiles who study Torah (voluntarily) are not entitled to the same reward as Jews who study Torah because they are commanded to do so, but they are, nevertheless, entitled to some reward. Meiri reports that the Palestinian Talmud uses the analogy to a person who cultivates another’s field without his knowledge (*Beth ha-Behira al Masechet Avodah Zarah*² [ed. A. Sofer], Jerusalem 1965, p. 5; Sofer mentions that he could not find this source). This analogy appears in the context of the morning blessings in the work of Abraham Ha-Yarchi (*Sefer Hamanbig: Rulings and Customs of R. Abraham ben Nathan of Lunel* [ed. Yitzchak Raphael], Jerusalem 1978, p. 38). Ha-Yarchi applies the analogy both to slaves and women and he does not mention any specific blessing for women. His use of the analogy shows that he did not intend to provide an explanation for the special blessing of women, but rather as an attempt to clarify their status vis-a-vis the commandments. I tend to think that this was what was meant by Abudarham, and his quoting the analogy would seem to show that he felt that some explanation was necessary for the fact that women were excluded from some of the *mitzvot*.

45 Moshe Lazar, *Siddur Tefillot: A Woman's Ladino Prayer Book* [Paris B.N., Esp. 668; 15th C.J], Labyrinthos: Lancaster, CA, 1995, pp. 4–5. Lazar states that the manuscript is in pocket format (11x8.7 cm). The scribe changed verbs from masculine form to feminine and from

volintady sua”, also in Hebrew characters, is found in a prayer book for a woman written according to the Italian rite.⁴⁶ These manuscripts also show adaptation to feminine characteristics in the other blessings by using the feminine form “maid servant” (*servanta*), rather than male slave, and “goya”(!).⁴⁷

A second region in which we find a special blessing for women is in Provence. Here we find a prayer book written for a woman in the 14th or 15th centuries. The book was written in Shuadit, the Jewish-French patois of the area, in Hebrew letters. As we shall see, the contents of the prayer book show that it was meant for a woman but this is also superficially evident. The first page of the book is decorated with the phrase “my sister, be the mother of thousands of ten thousands”.⁴⁸ The three blessings which are the subject of our discussion all have a special form. The first two follow the pattern of feminizing their forms which we have found in Spain, using “goya” and maid-servant. However, the third blessing is entirely different: “Who has

plural to singular. According to Lazar, there was no traditional translation of the prayers, but the prayers were translated by the scribe for a particular woman (Introduction, pp. xx–xxi). Lazar enumerates 11 manuscripts of prayer books translated into Romance languages: seven in Judeo-Italian (in Hebrew letters), two in Catalan (in Latin letters), one in Shuadit (Judeo-Provençal) and one in Ladino. I wish to thank Mr. Joel Kahn for bringing Lazar’s publications to my attention. Mr. Kahn has also kindly informed me that this version also appears in early printed *siddurim* in Ladino: *Siddur Tefillot* [Ladino *siddur* in Hebrew characters, for a woman, pre-1492] fol. 3v: and in two Latin-character Ladino *siddurim* published in Ferrara for the use of repentant apostates: *Libro de Oracyones* [1552] and a *Ladino mahzor* [1553]. The text of the second publication reads: “Benedich tu Adonay nuestro Dio, Rey del mundo, que no me hizo gentio...que no me hizo sieruo...que no me hizo muger. Y siendo muger, dira: ...que me hizo como su voluntad”.

46 Ms. of The Jewish Theological Seminary, Mic. 4076; Acc. 01207. The text in Hebrew characters reads קי פיצוי מי קומי לבולינטדי טואה.

47 R. Shabtai Sofer rejected the use of the feminine form, *shifha*, instead of the male form *eved*, basing himself on his understanding of the Talmud (see above, n. 14) that women are maid-servants to their husbands (*Siddur...Shabtai Ha-sofer* [ed. Yitzchak Satz and David Yitzchaki], Baltimore 1994, p. 16).

48 The verse is taken from Genesis 24:60 but the plural of the Bible has been changed into singular. My attention was first drawn to this *siddur* by the article of George Jochnowitz, “... Who Made Me a Woman”, *Commentary*, 71/4 (1981), pp. 63–64. A 17th-century traveler reported that in Avignon there was a separate service conducted for women, in Hebrew mixed with the vernacular, conducted by a blind rabbi (see Carol Herselle Krinsky, *Synagogues of Europe*, Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1985, p. 239).

made me a woman” (קי פיס מי פנה)! Here we find a positive expression of pride in being a woman, and this blessing appears also in Hebrew, in at least two prayer books copied by Abraham Farisol, between 1470 and 1480, according to the Italian rite.⁴⁹ In both of these manuscripts, the form is actually “who has made me a woman and not a man”! However, one may question whether this form of the blessing was actually adopted out of a sense of pride in being a woman. It may well be that this was just a mechanical adjustment. The masculine form in the Italian rite was “who has made me a man and not a woman” and the form adopted by women, or for women, was simply the reverse image of this blessing.

The third region where a special blessing for women has been found is in Germany. R. Joseph b. Moshe, the student of R. Israel Isserlein (1390–1460), collected his master's customs in the work known as “*Leqet Yosher*”. He reported that R. Isserlein said that women say “Who has not made me a brute” instead of “Who has not made me a woman”. R. Joseph himself reported that he had heard from a woman(!) that she said “Who has made me according to his will” which, as we have seen, was the form used in Spain. However, R. Joseph adds that the mother of R. Isserlein, who had given up her life as a martyr in Austria,⁵⁰ had been accustomed to saying “Who has not made me an animal”.⁵¹ The choice of this blessing as a substitute for the blessing “Who has not made me a woman” is particularly edifying. We have

49 JTS ms. MIC 8255, copied by Abraham Farisol in 1471 (comp. David Ruderman, *The World of a Renaissance Jew: The Life and Thought of Abraham ben Mordecai Farisol*, Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College, 1981, p. 158, # 13; my thanks to Dr. Joel Kahn who brought this manuscript to my attention and to Dr. Ruth Langer who showed it to me in the JTS library); Jerusalem, JNUL, Ms. Heb 8° 5492, written in Mantua in 1480 (this ms. was mentioned by Shalom Sabar, “Bride, Heroine...”, Proceedings of the 10th World Congress of Jewish Studies, D/2, Jerusalem, 1990, p. 68). One wonders whether Farisol had not carried this version with him from his home town in Provence, Avignon. For the general relationship of women to prayer in Italy at this time see Howard Adelman, “Rabbis and Reality: Public Activities of Jewish Women in Italy During the Renaissance and Catholic Restoration”, *Jewish History*, 5/1 (Spring 1991), pp. 30–32.

50 It would seem reasonable to assume that the reference is to the pogroms of 1420. However, it seems strange that R. Isserlein, who was accustomed to talking about these pogroms on Tish'a be'Ab, did not seem to mention that his mother had given up her life at that time (see Shlomo Eidelberg, *Jewish Life in Austria in the XVth Century*, Philadelphia 1962, p. 18, n. 18).

51 Joseph b. Mose, *Leket Joscher* (ed. J. Freimann), Berlin 1903, p. 7.

seen that gratitude for not being an animal had already been expressed in the classical tradition but the assumption that the mother of R. Isserlein was influenced by classical literature is unlikely. However, we have already seen that this blessing has been found in early Italian manuscripts and it is likely that the tradition of this blessing was known also in Germany – even if it was not actually used. R. Asher ben Shaul, who lived in Lunel in the late 12th and the early 13th century, reports that some people ask why they do not thank God for not having been created animals. His answer is that thanks for this has already been given in the *asher yazar* blessing.⁵² Thus, when women looked for a third blessing to complete the triad, gratitude for not having been created an animal was a likely choice.⁵³

Thus, the second period in the history of these blessings, as far as women are concerned, shows that women took upon themselves greater liturgical obligations than they had been accustomed to in the past, and they found their own methods by which they amended the liturgy to their needs. This is definitely true of the Spanish blessing as it is presented by the Tur as the custom of women. It is less obvious for the German version, but it is instructive to note that the rabbinical discussion of this point refers back to the custom of a famous woman for its authority. As far as the Provençal version is concerned, there is no real evidence that their solution was devised by women but we do not find any mention of this solution in the works of any rabbinic authority. The uniqueness of women's prayers is also evidenced by the fact that many of these women prayed in the vernacular, while men were expected to pray in Hebrew. It is of interest to note that women had a knowledge of Hebrew letters, although they did not necessarily understand the language. It would also be reasonable to presume, based on the fact that their vernacular was written in Hebrew letters rather than in the local written

52 *Sefer ha-Minhagot*, p. 141 (published by Simha Asaf, *Mitoratam shel Rishonim*).

53 A similar renaissance, in Provence, of the blessing about not being a boor has been postulated. See Zvi Groner, "A Blessing That was Forgotten and Revived" [Hebrew], *Bar-Ilan*, 14/15 (1974), pp. 94–97. Taylor, in a summary of the classical sources, suggested that the original thanksgiving for not having been created a boor was possibly a replacement for the classical thanksgiving at not having been created an animal. He refers to the parallelism of boor and beast in Psalms 73:22 (Charles Taylor, *Sayings of the Jewish Fathers Comprising Pirke Aboth in Hebrew and English*², Cambridge 1897 [photographic reprint Ktav, New York 1969], p. 139f.).

language, that they could not read the local written language.⁵⁴

D. Into Modernity and the Response of Men

We may now turn to the third period in the history of these blessings, which is exemplified by a growing awareness of men to the problems involved in the blessings for women. The sensitivity to this blessing was of two types. On the one hand, there were those who felt that there was something inherently wrong in the blessing because it implied that women were inferior beings. On the other hand, there were those who felt that the statement of the blessing was actually true, but that the fact that women feel insulted by this has to be taken into consideration. There were two methods for dealing with this: either by advocating a change in the liturgy; or by explaining these blessings in a way that would reduce the problem. Rather than present the material chronologically, we will discuss first the limited attempts to change the liturgy and then turn to the more predominant use of exegesis as a method of dealing with this problem.

It was the Reform movement and its adherents who attempted to change the liturgy of these three blessings. We will just point out that A. Geiger, in the *siddur* that he published in 1854, substituted for these three blessings “Who has created me to worship him”. In the modern American Conservative movement we find that the blessing about women has been replaced by “Who has created me in His image”.⁵⁵ This prayer book also uses positive forms for the other two blessings: “Who hast made me an Israelite”, rather than the negative “Who hast not made me a gentile”; “Who hast made me free” rather than “Who hast not made me a slave”. Although the expression of gratitude for having been created an Israelite would seem to obviate the other two blessings (see the statement of A. Berliner below), the desire to retain the trifold structure was more important. In order to retain a logical structure, the order of the blessings was reversed: first thanking God for being created in

54 I leave to social historians the question of the spirit of the times which caused women to undertake additional religious obligations to which they had not been accustomed in earlier periods.

55 See, for example, *Sabbath and Festival Prayer Book with a new translation*, The Rabbinical Assembly of America and the United Synagogue of America, 1953 (reprint of 1946 copyright), pp. 45–46. Cf. Robert Gordis, “‘In His Image’: A New Blessing, an Old Truth”, *Conservative Judaism*, 40/1 (1987), pp. 81–85.

His image; then thanking Him for being created a free man; and finally thanking Him for having been created an Israelite.

However, Orthodox Judaism found only one proponent for a change in the liturgy, Abraham Berliner (1833–1915).⁵⁶ The main thrust of his argument was connected with the blessing of not being a gentile. Berliner discussed the variant version of “Who hast not made me a gentile”, – “Who has made me an Israelite (or a Jew)”, which is found in many manuscripts of the *siddur* and in printed editions of the Talmud. Berliner was a philologist, and he well knew that the positive form of this blessing was instituted as a result of Christian censorship. However, he thought that it was a good idea anyway and he also thought, apparently, that since this change had been in existence for hundreds of years,⁵⁷ it had some claim to being traditional. He invoked also the authority of the Vilna Gaon, who seems to have thought that the texts with this version were valid textual traditions. Berliner stated that if his suggestion was adopted, there would be a welcome by-product in that the blessings “Who has not made me a woman” and “Who hast not made me a slave” would automatically be eliminated from the *siddur* as there would no longer be any point to them. Thus, he said, we would no longer be required to justify these blessings in any way.⁵⁸

56 Alexander Carlebach, “Berliner, Abraham”, *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, CD Rom Edition.

57 He mentioned that it was found in the *siddurim* printed in Mantua 1548, Tübingen 1560, Prague 1566, Venice 1566 and 1572, Dührenfort 1694. We may add that it is also found in mss. *siddurim*, such as the Parma ms. written for a woman. Here, the words “not a gentile” have been heavily crossed out and “Jewess” has been added to the text. The fact that this version was a result of censorship was already pointed out by R. Yom Tov Lipman Heller in his *Malbushei Yom Tov* (see Shimon Hirari [below, n. 63], p. 229). An interesting sidelight on this censorship is that the *Malbushei Yom Tov* refers it to the “*Yishmae’lim*” and it seems obvious that he really meant the Christians. It is unclear whether the use of “*Yishmae’lim*” for “Christians” is in itself a result of censorship or whether it is a case of internal censorship.

58 Abraham Berliner, *Ketavim Nivharim* (translated from German), Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kuk, 1969, Vol. 1, pp. 21–22. This suggestion was again raised in an article written for a volume on halakhic feminism (גילי זיוון, “שלא עשני אשה וישעשני כרצונו: הצעה לברכה אחת”, אורים תשנ”ח, עמ’ ה–כה), and it was scathingly criticised as “antagonistic” to “the integrity of the rabbinic spirit” (Aharon Feldman, *Tradition*, 33/2 [Winter 1999], pp. 66). For a discussion of whether the positive blessing would obviate the others see Shimon Hirari, *Yismah Libenu* (below, n. 63), p. 227–229.

A more limited attempt to change the liturgy in order to take into consideration the feelings of women was that of R. Aaron Worms, the head of a yeshiva in Metz in the late 18th century and a member of the Napoleonic Sanhedrin.⁵⁹ Rabbi Aaron ruled that the three blessings should be said silently, in order not to insult those who were sensitive to the contents of the blessings. It would seem that his main concern was with the gentiles and not with the women. It has been said of him that he ruled in a speech that the laws applying to heathens do not apply to French Christians. In his commentary to tractate Sanhedrin he explained that R. Yohanan's injunction against gentiles learning Torah only prohibits their dealing in *pilpul*, but learning Torah according to the *peshat* is permissible.⁶⁰ As far as women are concerned, several lines before the above ruling, in his explanation of the blessing “Who hast made me according to His will”, he states that it was the will of God that women should be subservient to their husbands so that the male might devote himself to the worship of his creator and his work.

There is no evidence that the ruling of R. Aaron Worms was ever accepted in any synagogue. J. Wolowelsky, in a journal of modern Orthodoxy, attempted to revive this ruling out of consideration for the feelings of women,⁶¹ whose attendance rate at synagogues is today greater than ever – and still growing.⁶² However, his attempt was rejected by the editor of the journal in an article published in the same issue.⁶³

59 On this personality see Moses Qatan, “Rabbi Aaron Worms and his Disciple Eliakim Carmoly” [Hebrew], *Areshet*, 2 (1960), pp. 190–193; Jay R. Berkovitz, “Rabbinic Scholarship in Revolutionary France: Rabbi Aaron Worms’ Me’orei Or”, *Tenth World Congress of Jewish Studies*, B/II, Jerusalem 1990, pp. 251–258.

60 The passage is cited by M. Yashar, “Birkat ‘shelo asani goy””, *Sinai*, 51 (1962), pp. 50–59.

61 Joel Wolowelsky, “‘Who Has Not Made Me A Woman’: A Quiet Berakha”, *Tradition*, 29/4 (1995), pp. 61–68.

62 David Casutto, renowned as a synagogue architect, informed me that when he was younger the rule of thumb was that one place should be assigned to the women's section of the synagogue for every three places in the men's section. However, today, in planning a synagogue for a modern Orthodox community, he finds it necessary to assign the seats equally between the men's and women's sections.

63 Emanuel Feldman, “An Articulate Berakha”, op. cit., pp. 69–74; see also Marcy Serkin and others, op. cit., 31:3 (1997), p. 111 ff. The idea that this blessing should be said silently, at least when women are present, was independently suggested by a Sephardic rabbi in Israel, who actually insisted on it in order to refrain from the serious issue of embarrassing the women (Shimon Hirary, *Responso Yismah Libenu*, Tel Aviv 1993, no. 33, p. 231. I am

We may now turn to the exegetic attempts to deal with these blessings. In spite of the fact that orthodox Jewry did not feel itself competent to effect changes in the liturgy, many of its adherents felt uncomfortable with the idea that this blessing implied that women were inferior to men and they tried to solve this problem with exegesis.

It would seem that the first attempt to deal with this problem exegetically was that of R. Shmuel Edels (Maharsha; Krakow, 1555–1631) in his commentary to the Talmud. He explains that men and women each have relative advantages. While men may receive additional rewards for doing those things that they are obligated to do, they will receive more severe punishment if they do not do what they are required to do. Although women do not have the same obligations as men, this is compensated for by the fact that they do not bear such severe responsibility. The boor, on the other hand, bore the full responsibility for keeping the commandments, but was not capable of fulfilling his duties. Thus, he would carry the full burden of punishment. The context of this statement was his attempt to explain the talmudic argument that there was no place to offer thanksgiving for not being a boor. Since one had already thanked God for not being a woman, one could not offer an additional thanksgiving for not being a boor – less than a woman. In the context of this explanation, it was not necessary to give women any sort of equality to men. On the contrary, his explanation of women's status

grateful to Dr. Aharon Arend who brought this responsum to my attention). I am told that an Orthodox school in Cleveland adopted a different solution. After the male precentor said the blessings, he paused for a moment and one of the girls recited the feminine blessing out loud. It is instructive to note that the idea of reciting a blessing silently in order not to slight the feelings of others is also found in *Haredi* circles – but in another context. Some people did not make a blessing on tefillin during the intermediary days of the holiday (for a discussion of this see יעקב כץ, "תפילין בחול המועד – חילוקי דעות ומחלוקות ציבוריות בהשפעת הקבלה", קעמ"ז, כרך ג, עמ' 191–213 [=הנ"ל, הלכה וקבלה: מחקרים בתולדות דת ישראל על מדוריה [124–102 עמ' 102–124] (וזיקתה החברתית, ירושלים תשמ"ד, עמ' 102–124)]. In order not to set them apart, those who did say the blessing were required to recite the blessing silently (see ישראל טויסיג, דינים ומנהגים (וסיפורי צדיקים, ירושלים תשמ"א). An opposite example of vocalizing a prayer as a sign of emphasis was reported by Prof. Dan Mechman. He was told that the ultra-Orthodox council (*moezet gedolei ha-torah*) ruled, after the Holocaust, that the phrases referring to those who had been burned and slaughtered for the sanctity of God's name in the ancient *avinu malkeinu* prayer should be recited out loud. See Dan Mechman, in J. Guttman (ed.), *Temurot yesod ba-am ha-yehudi be'ikvot ha-shoah*, Jerusalem 1996, p. 630. I am grateful to Mr. Mordechai Meir who brought this source to my attention.

tended to weaken the force of the thanksgiving for not having been created a woman – the status of men was not that much better! Therefore, I tend to see his explanation as an expression of his own discomfort with the relegation of women to an inferior status. It might be relevant to note here that the Maharsha and his numerous disciples were supported by his mother-in-law from 1585 until her death twenty years later. In fact, his very name, Edels, is a reference to his mother-in-law, Edel – as if to say he is Rabbi Shmuel who belongs to Edel.

One of the more remarkable exegetical efforts⁶⁴ was that of R. Yaakov Meshulam Orenstein, Rabbi of Lemberg in the early 18th century. He did not discuss these blessings themselves, but he offered a novel interpretation of the woman's blessing. In his commentary on the *Shulchan Aruch*, R. Orenstein construes the blessing “Who has made me according to his will” to mean that women were actually superior to men. Men had been created by God only after He had conferred with the angels, while woman was created according to God's will alone.⁶⁵

64 Exegesis is an ancient device used to reconcile old texts with new ideas and it may be found also in other contexts. In modern times we may include in this category those statements appended to many editions of halakhic works that the references to nations of the world refer only to ancient nations who had not seen the light of monotheism and modern culture. One may quote, in this context, Jacob Tugenhold, who used this method in his work as censor. Thus, for example, among the notes he added to a haggadah printed in 1820 he stated that the statement “now we are slaves” means that we are slaves of material possessions and the prayer that we shall be free means that we hope to be free from subjugation to the frivolities of this world (see Chaim Lieberman, *Ohel Rahel*, 3, 1984, pp. 642–646).

65 The passage is cited in G. Ellinson, *Ha-isha ve-ha-mitzvor*³, Jerusalem 1977, p. 110. There have been further modern attempts to explain that these blessings actually imply the superiority of women. For an example I cite the following exchange which appeared in the mail-Jewish discussion list. “For that matter, how come we don't all say, She Asani Kirtzono, since all of us, and all our souls, are different, and some men's souls are better than some women's and the other way round as well, and this would cover everyone. A man cannot say ‘he made me according to his will’, because when a Jewish boy is born, he is ‘unfinished’ until the bris milah. But a girl is complete at birth, already made according to Ha-Shem's will” (Neil Parks <nparks@torah.org>; Date: Tue, 10 Nov 98 13:13:41 EDT). A similar thought is found in the writings of R. Z.Y. Kuk. He wrote that women are more divine than men and thus more like the will of God. Thus, it is appropriate for them to say that they were created according to His will (Z.Y. Kuk, *Sihot Harav Zvi Yehudah Kuk...Shemot*, ed. Shlomo Hayyim Aviner, Jerusalem: Sifriyat Havah, Bet El, 1998, p. 380).

Of anecdotal quality is the response attributed to R. J. L. Diskin, who lived in Jerusalem at the end of the 19th century. It is reported that his wife complained that men who were much inferior to her would thank God that they were not made a woman and she would have to answer *amen* to their blessing! Her husband replied that the man's blessing did not apply to women as a category, but only to his own wife – that he was glad that their positions were not reversed. R. Baruch Epstein, who reported this story, did not think that this explanation had any validity but it was given only to appease his wife's anger.⁶⁶

However, most exegetical efforts were turned to explanations of the men's blessings. R. Ze'ev Yavetz (1847–1924),⁶⁷ a scholar who wrote an “orthodox” history of the Jews, also published a *siddur* with a commentary. In his commentary, he quoted biblical passages in explication of these blessings and he totally ignored the talmudic reasonings for these blessings. The blessing about not being a gentile was elucidated, not by a passage which denigrates gentiles, but by a passage from Deuteronomy (4:19–20) which says that God has taken the Jews to be his nation. Even the blessing about not being a slave had its meaning changed by quoting the passage from Leviticus (26:3) which refers to the redemption of Israel from slavery in Egypt. Most instructive is his commentary to the blessing about women. Here he points out that women are more susceptible to suffering than men and he quotes God's statement to Eve: “I will make most severe your pangs in childbearing” (Genesis 3:16).⁶⁸ In more modern terms we might say that this blessing is meant to recognize that women are discriminated against, whether by God or by man. Thus, this blessing might be considered the beginning of a search for equality for women, since the first step in that search is the recognition that there is discrimination. Note that Yavetz has totally abandoned the talmudic rationale for these blessings in his attempt to retain these blessings in a spirit conformable to modernity.

66 B. Epstein, *Maqor Baruch*, New York: H"IL, 1954, 3, p. 981.

67 Benzion Dinur, “Jawitz, Ze'ev”, *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, Jerusalem 1972, Vol. 9, pp. 1303–1304.

68 Ze'ev Yawitz, *Siddur Avodat ha-levavot*, Jerusalem 1966 (repr. of Berlin 1922), pp. 8–9. Similar in intent is the remark of the HID Azulai that the blessing refers to men's gratitude at not having to suffer the menstrual cycle – although he gives this cycle a kabbalistic explanation based on the fact that menstrual blood is a sign of a high degree of impurity (*Petah Eynayim* on Sotah 11b; quoted by Shimon Hirari [below n. 63], pp. 234–235).

A different approach was taken by Elie Munk, scion of a family of German Orthodox rabbis, who served as a rabbi both in Germany and in Paris.⁶⁹ He wrote a commentary to the prayer book, first published in German (1938), which became very popular and was translated into French, English and Hebrew. In his attempt to reconcile these blessings with the intellectual demands of modernity he addressed the underlying theology rather than the text of the blessings. He justified the blessing about not being a gentile by remarking that Jews had always suffered and been downtrodden among the gentiles and that this blessing was necessary to strengthen the Jewish self image. Although he did not draw this parallel, one is reminded of the *Kuzari* of R. Judah Halevi, which was written in an attempt to encourage an oppressed people. Munk realized that although his apologetics might justify the idea of the blessing, it did not justify a negative form of the blessing. He therefore pointed out that many halakhic authorities had approved the positive form of the blessing.

Turning to the blessing about not being a woman, Munk had a more difficult task. Again, he did not discuss the form of the blessing but the underlying idea – the inferiority of women implied by the fact that they were not required to keep as many of the commandments as men were. Here he suggested that women should see their release from many of the obligations as a sign of the trust that God had in them that they would fulfill their divine mission on the basis of their own internal inclinations and understanding – without its being necessary to impose upon them the severe regime imposed upon men! Munk castigated the Reform movement for eliminating these blessings from the prayer book since, according to Munk, these blessings had never caused the Jews to denigrate women. On the contrary, their unique status as the mistress of the home was the basis for the strength of Jewish family life throughout the generations. Munk was a commentator and not one to introduce change to the prayer book. His explanation of the superior spiritual status of women in Judaism follows that of R. Samson Raphael Hirsch in his commentary to Leviticus (23:43) with which, it is reasonable to assume, Munk was familiar.⁷⁰ Munk did not take into consideration the fact

69 [Editor], "Munk", *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, Jerusalem 1972, Vol.12, p. 524.

70 This idea has already been mentioned by the Maharal of Prague. In his *Derush 'al Hatorah* to Exodus 19:3 he explains that women were mentioned first because they are more easily able to reach those heights of spirituality which a man is able to reach only through intense

that if one followed his conclusions to their logical end, women would be required to thank God for not having been created men, and men should rather be jealous of women who were created at a higher level of spirituality. In true role reversal, men should be the ones to thank God for having created them according to his will – even though they were not as spiritually elevated as women.

Joseph H. Hertz, the Chief Rabbi of the British Empire during the first half of this century, also turned his hand to apologetics in his commentary to the *siddur*. He stresses that “there is no derogation of women implied in the Benediction”. He is aware of the Greek parallels and tries to show how different the true Jewish attitude towards women and strangers is than that expressed in the Platonic thanksgivings. He refers to Berliner’s urging the reintroduction of the positive wording, which he seems to favor, but he does not go so far as to urge this change on his own behalf. Something of his true attitude is to be found in his explanation of the women’s blessing. Here he quotes a poem by Mendes: “Who hast made me a woman, to win hearts for Thee by motherly love or wifely devotion; and to lead souls to Thee, by daughter’s care or sisterly tenderness and loyalty”. He does not seem to feel any need to explain this blessing for women who think that there is something else in life, and even in the worship of God, other than being a mother or wife, daughter or sister.⁷¹

Moshe Spero has attempted to give these blessings psychological meaning.⁷² He asserts that the blessings referring to non-Jew and slave

study of Torah, and that woman will also receive a greater reward than men. The relationship of this idea to that of R. Hirsch has been pointed out by Isachar Yaakovson, *Netiv Binah*², Vol. 1, Tel Aviv: Sinai, 1964, p. 166. Yaakovson gives credit to Yonah Emanuel for mentioning this to him. Hirsch, in his own commentary to the prayer book, one of his last works, was less drastic. Here he states that although women are not required to keep all the commandments, they know that their task is no less important to God than the task of their brothers (*Siddur Tefillot Yisrael 'im peirush...Hirsch*, Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook, 1992, p. 11).

71 See above, n. 27. A similar approach was taken by Phillip Birnbaum, *Ha-siddur ha-shalem*, New York: Hebrew Publishing Co. 1949, p. 17. See Annette Daum, “Language and Liturgy”, *Daughters of the King / Women and the Synagogue* (ed. S. Grossman and R. Haut), Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1992, p. 189.

72 Moshe Halevi Spero, “The Didactic-Psychological Function of Three Rabbinic Blessings”, *PAOJS*, 8–9 (1987), pp. 111–146.

represent two sociopsychological aspects of the human personality. The non-Jew represents a person who has no obligations at all, while the slave represents a person who is totally obligated, with no freedom of choice at all. These two blessings, taken together, express the idea that we wish to be people who have accepted obligations out of free will. His explanation of the third blessing is based on the fact that human embryos contain the elements for developing into both sexes. In their development, they each lose some of their potential. It is thus necessary, he states, that “both [men and women – JT] must recite some blessing which impresses upon the self a satisfaction with the eventual delimited yet balanced sex-appropriate identification”.⁷³ This explanation is, of course, anachronistic, as the blessing of the women was not created at the same time as the men’s blessing, and it was not instituted by the rabbis. His explanation, which does not take into consideration the fact that the wording of the blessing is so different, would be more convincing if the wording of the women’s blessing was “Who has not made me a man”.

One of the more creative efforts to refine these blessings was that of Israel Isaac Hasida. In an article published in the popular Orthodox journal *Sinai*, he suggested that these blessings were originally based on Psalms 100:3: “He made us and we are His”, reading **לו אנחנו**, and not the written version **לא אנחנו** which would be translated “He made us and not we ourselves”. Therefore, he maintained that these blessings should also be read **שלו** and not **שלא**. They should then be translated as thanks to God for having made us his nation, for having made us his servant and, finally, for having made us his wife – following the common marital analogy of the special relationship between God and the Jewish people.⁷⁴

The attempts of modern Orthodoxy to use exegesis in order to retain these blessings in spite of modern criticism show both a growing awareness of the problem involved in the status of women in Orthodox Judaism and the limitations of modern Orthodoxy in dealing with this problem. The limitations are especially apparent when we compare the ability of R. Aha bar

73 Op. cit., p. 131.

74 I. Hasida, “Towards an Understanding of the Three Blessings...” [Hebrew], *Sinai*, 99 (1986), pp. 95–96. Hasida could have found support for his reading in the BT *Sotah* 31a. The Talmud declares that the reading “lamed-alef” may have the same meaning as the reading “lamed vav”.

Yaakov, in talmudic times, to change a blessing which he felt was not suitable and the inability of modern Orthodoxy to effect any change in the liturgy. The difficulties faced by modern Orthodoxy in instituting any change is due, in no small part, to its position between the ultra-Orthodox community or yeshiva circles on the one hand, and the Reform movement on the other hand. There is a fear that any change will challenge the limited consensus that there is on religious matters between the modern Orthodox community and the ultra-Orthodox community. But there is also a fear that change fits into the “slippery slope” theory as formulated by Wolowelsky.⁷⁵ Once change is permitted, you never know where it will stop. Thus, change itself takes place mainly in exegesis and in small, incremental steps.

The reaction of the Oriental tradition to the changing status of women is different. Although the blessing instituted by women was accepted by R. Joseph Karo in his *Shulchan Aruch* (OH 46:4), later Sephardic halakhic authorities introduced limitations. R. Hezekiah da Silva (1659–1695) ruled that women should not recite this blessing since it was not mentioned in the Talmud. If the rabbis of the Talmud had wanted woman to say this blessing, they should have said so.⁷⁶ This decision is also found in the work of R. Hayyim Yosef David Azulai (Hida, 1724–1806), *Qesher Godel*, no. 22. The Hida mentions a compromise. He states that women recite this blessing without mentioning the name of God and his Kingdom: “Blessed [is He] Who has made me in accordance with his will”.⁷⁷ The Hida was considered one of the greatest Sephardic scholars, if not the greatest, after R. Joseph Caro. His decision was accepted by R. Yosef Hayyim (1834–1904), who was Chief

⁷⁵ See above, n. 61.

⁷⁶ *Peri Hadash*, OH 46:4. The most comprehensive limitation was suggested by an Ashkenazic scholar, R. Yaakov Emden (1697–1776), who refused to permit women to say any of the three blessings in their traditional form. He presented his reasoning in a section of his *siddur* entitled “the women’s section” (*Ezrat Nashim*), in which he included all the laws of the morning blessings pertaining to women and children! His reasoning was that since, for grammatical reasons, a woman would have to say “Who has not made me a non-Jewess...maidservant”, and since the blessing mentioned in the Talmud included only the masculine forms, women’s blessings should be considered as blessings not included in the Talmud and should not be recited – at least in the traditional form which included the mentioning of the name of God and His Kingdom. However, I have not found any acceptance of his far-reaching conclusions.

⁷⁷ *Qesher Godel*, no. 22.

Rabbi of Baghdad for 50 years, but he advised the women to think of God's name and Kingdom while reciting the blessing.⁷⁸ The Hida's position was adopted also by the late Chief Sephardic Rabbi of Tel Aviv, R. Hayyim David Halevy (1924–1998), who felt it necessary to add that one who recites this blessing should be aware that women are exactly as worthy as he is, but that she is not obligated to keep all the commandments.⁷⁹ Nevertheless, it is not clear how influential his decision was on the practice of women. In the very popular *siddur Tefilat ha-hodesh*, published in 40 editions between 1810 and 1975,⁸⁰ the instructions of the Hida were published as an introduction to the morning blessings, but the women's blessing was printed as if it was no different than any of the other morning blessings.⁸¹

Only in modern Sephardic *siddurim* do we find the blessing printed specially without the name of God.⁸² It is significant to note that people who belong to the circles of R. Ovadia Yosef have published a special edition of the prayer book, designed specifically for women.⁸³ Although the recognition

78 *Ben Ish Hai*, first year, Vayeshev, 10, Jerusalem 1985, I, p. 59. His decision was quoted by R. Yaakov Hayim Sofer, *Kaf ha-hayim*, 46:41, in apparent concurrence.

79 *Meqor Hayyim*, I, Jerusalem 1986, p. 68.

80 For a list of the editions see Raphael Turgeman, "The Editions of the *Siddur Tefilat ha-hodesh* and its Dissemination among Jewish Communities" [Hebrew], *Morashtenu*, 10 (1997), pp. 227–229. Forty editions of this prayer book were published between 1801 and 1975 in Leghorn, Salonika, Vienna, Venice, Bombay, Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. It was used in North Africa, Egypt, Iraq, and Yemen.

81 The same is true of the text of the Sephardic *Seder Tefillah mikol ha-shanah*, Vienna: Anton Schmid, 1838. This *siddur* does not even contain the instructions of the Hida.

82 Unique in this context is the *Seder Avodat Yisrael* of Seligmann Baer who followed the Hida and printed this blessing without the name of God (Roedelheim 1868; repr. Tel Aviv 1957). R. Y. M. Epstein thought that women no longer used this blessing, although he himself did not seem to reject it (*Aruch ha-Shulchan*, Orach Chayyim 46:11; cf. Ruth Langer, *To Worship God Properly: Tensions Between Liturgical Custom and Halakhah in Judaism*, Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1998, p. 106) while his son thought that it should be said without the name of God as it was not mentioned in the Talmud (B. Epstein, *Baruch Sheamar*, Tel Aviv 1968, p. 30). There is no evidence that this opinion had any influence on Ashkenazic Jewry.

83 סידור בת ציון, הוצאת בצלאל, רח' יואל 22, עם הסכמות של הרב עובדיה יוסף. It is somewhat ironic that although R. Ovadia Yosef limited the obligation of women to pray, he included the morning blessing as part of the women's obligation (*Yalkut Yosef*, I, p. 185; see Judith Hauptman, op. cit., note 14). We may point out that *siddurim* published mainly for women were existent among Ashkenazic Jewry in the 17th and 18th centuries. The only difference

of women's need for a full-text prayer book would seem to imply awareness of the changed status of women, this *siddur* not only continues to adopt traditional attitudes toward the status of woman – it actually presents a strengthening of the limitations of women in prayer. R. Yosef has followed the ancient Sephardic tradition which limits recitation of blessings to those required by the Talmud and severely forbids the use of blessings in contexts in which they are not required by the Talmud.⁸⁴ This principle has also been extended to other blessings, notably the blessings before the reading of Shema'. Since these are considered time-oriented, women are not required to say them – and are thus forbidden to say them – at least they may not use the traditional blessing formula. We find here an interesting paradox. On the one hand, it would seem that modernity demands change in tradition. Publication of a *siddur* for women would seem to show a response to modernity and to the changing needs of women. On the other hand, the traditional practice of women for several hundreds of years, reciting the blessing using the name of God, has been rejected, in order to follow an ancient rule which had been neglected. It is somewhat ironic that Sephardic Jewry has been able to change the tradition and, in so doing, has widened the gap between it and modern ideas, while Ashkenazic Jewry, although recognizing the validity of modern ideas and the dissonance between them and the liturgy, is unable to change the liturgy and is only capable of using exegesis – at times very creatively – to reconcile this aspect of the liturgy with modern ideas.⁸⁵

between these *siddurim* and “regular” *siddurim* were that these were published with a Yiddish translation. They were also suitable for men and the title page of one them declares that it is for women and “for men who are like women” in that they do not understand Hebrew.

84 For a discussion of the principles which guide R. Yosef in his decisions see בנימין לאו, “להחזיר עטרה ליושנה: מאבקי חוץ ופנים של הרב עובדיה יוסף”, אקדמות, ח (כסלו תש”ס), עמ' 9–23.

85 I have been informed by several people that a new suggestion has been offered in the interests of equality – that men should also say *שעשני כרצונו* and that women should add *שלא עשני איש*. One of my informants told me that R. Shlomo Riskin was the author of this idea. This idea seems to reflect the feeling that the talmudic tradition of three blessings is more sacred than the halakhic problem of reciting an unnecessary blessing. It does not seem to take into consideration the problem of instituting a blessing that has not been mentioned in the Talmud. It would seem more in line with halakhic principle to suggest that women could eliminate the blessing *שעשני כרצונו* and replace it with their thanks to God *שלא עשני איש*. As the women's blessing is not mentioned in the Talmud, and as its present form was the suggestion of women, it does not seem to me to be a violation of any principle for

women to change this blessing to a form which is compatible with their feelings – for those who feel that the present form is unsuitable. However, even men who feel that it is not “right” to thank God for not having been made a women may, nevertheless, feel grateful that they are men. A point in case is the message of Allen Scult, in an e-mail letter sent to H-Judaic on Sun, 21 Nov 1999 14:42:06. He writes that, although he has substituted non-sexist liturgy for this blessing, he realized that he could not do the type of work that he does were he a women, and he is grateful that he can do this type of work.

Personally, in an era where we are becoming increasingly aware of the fact that society treats women unfairly, when we have just heard (Dec. 2000) that women who live in the coastal areas of Israel have been advised to lock themselves in their homes because of fear of a serial rapist, when we hear so much of men brutalizing women and men’s violence toward women, besides “minor” difficulties such as lack of parity between men and women in the work environment and in governmental positions, I am thankful to God that he has not made me a woman. My awareness of this situation, and my recognition of the injustice in it, force me to do what I can to change this situation and work to change the world in such a way that men will have a problem with this blessing – feeling that it no longer has a basis in reality.