



Noahide Laws & Lifecycle Course



Noahide Prayer: Blessings II



*Noahide Nations Nagid Clergy
Certification Program*

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Noahide Prayer: Blessings II

Introduction

In the last lesson we saw the rationale for Noahides to make blessings. We also learned that it is acceptable and, perhaps, even preferable for Noahides to use the texts of the blessings established by Ezra and the *Anshei Kenesses HaGadolah* (Men of the Great Assembly) for this purpose. In this lesson we are going to examine each of the blessings and how it is applied. The governing laws of the blessings presented here are the same as those practiced by Jews. However, some necessary adjustments have been made. These changes are indicated in the footnotes.

For ease of reference, we have numbered the texts of the blessings.

Blessings over Food and Drink

Blessings over food and drink are said both before and after eating or drinking.

**A B R E A D
M E A L**

The Main Meal

A bread-based meal usually has two parts: the main meal, and the “after meal,” at which drinks and deserts are served.

Many verses in Tanach speak of the primacy of bread as the basic foodstuff of man. Because of its unique status, bread has the ability to “exempt” other foods eaten at the meal from requiring a blessing.

This means that, if you eat a meal at which bread is served, you only need to make a blessing over the bread at the outset of the meal.¹ No further blessings are required on anything else served. The only exception is wine because it too is uniquely distinguished in Tanach.

¹ You may notice that Jews wash their hands in a ritual manner before making the blessing over bread. This practice is related to commemorating specifically Jewish temple purity rituals. Noahides should not practice this ritual washing. Normative washing of the hands with soap and water for cleanliness is perfectly acceptable.

What is Called Bread?

For the purpose of this blessing, bread is defined as having been made from a flour of either wheat, barley, rye, oats or spelt, kneaded with water, and baked. Whether or not the bread is leavened makes no difference.² Bread includes pita, bagels, Kaiser rolls, Matzah, etc.³

- 1) The blessing over bread is: *Blessed are you, our God, sovereign of the universe, who brings forth bread from the earth.*

This blessing, like most blessings, is in the present tense because God is constantly creating and bestowing His kindnesses up His creation.

The After-Meal

Desserts, including after-meal drinks such as coffee, tea, or a digestive, are not included as part of the main meal. Therefore, they are not covered by the blessing over bread and would require their own blessings.

Other Blessings on Food & Drink

Blessings over Any Grains or Food Made From Grains

Any food made from wheat, barley, rye, oats, spelt, or rice that is not bread receives the following blessing:

- 2) *Blessed are you, our God, sovereign of the universe, who creates many species of sustenance.*

This blessing would be made on crackers, rice cakes, pasta, pop tarts, cereals, oatmeal, etc.

Should you have a food that is a mixture of grain and something else, always make the blessing on the grain-based food and do not make a blessing on the other food. For example: when eating shredded wheat cereal with milk, make the above blessing on the shredded wheat only and do not make a blessing on the milk. This is, again, due to the prominence of grains.

For Wine (Including Grape Juice)

Tanach praises grape products in many places, elevating wine as the most prominent of all beverages. For this reason, we have a special blessing for it:

- 3) *Blessed are you, our God, sovereign of the universe, who creates the fruit of the vine.*

² Small crackers, like Ritz or saltines, receive the blessing #2 below, despite their similarity to Matza.

³ Pita chips and bagel chips, though, would only require blessing #2 below.

Blessings on Fruits and Vegetables

The Torah divides produce into two botanical categories: trees and ground vegetation. A tree is defined by the Talmud as any plant whose stalk and branches remain from season to season. Ground vegetation is any plant whose stalk or branches wither back and must regrow each season.⁴

According to these definitions, bananas and strawberries are the fruits of ground vegetation. Apples, pears, oranges, and lemons, on the other hand, are the produce of trees. The Torah has established separate blessings for the fruits of each type of plant.

The Fruit of the Tree

For the fruit of trees the blessing is:

4) Blessed are you, our God, sovereign of the universe, who creates the fruit of the tree.

This is the correct blessing for apples, oranges, pears, blueberries, plums, peaches, nectarines, lemons, grapefruit, etc.

The Fruit of the Ground [Vegetation]

For the fruit of ground vegetation, which includes most vegetables, the blessing is:

5) Blessed are you, our God, sovereign of the universe, who creates the fruit of the earth.

This blessing would be made over tomatoes, potatoes, peppers, broccoli, cauliflower, strawberries, melons and gourds, eggplant, etc.

For All Other Foods & Drinks

For all foods and drinks which do not require one of the above blessings, the following blessing is used:

6) Blessed are you, Lord, our God, sovereign of the universe, through whose word all things came into being.

Guiding Principles of Before-Blessings

- 1) There is no minimum amount for recitation of a before-blessing; a blessing is proper even for the minutest amount that is consumed.

⁴ The Talmud lists many other criteria for identifying ground vegetation and trees. We have listed here only the most common feature. With some exotic fruits, such as papaya and passion fruit, their classification can get tricky. In these cases we have to rely on more obscure Talmudic criteria.

- 2) Once one has made the blessing, he should not speak between the conclusion of the blessing and tasting the food or drink.
- 3) There is a principle of economy of blessings. We always try to make blessings in the most efficient way possible. If you have a fruit salad that contains apples, oranges, pears, and blueberries, all of which can be covered by blessing #4 above, the one should make one blessing on the whole mixture.
- 4) When you have many foods before you, you should always make the blessing on the one you prefer or desire most at that moment. The only exception is bread – if you plan on eating bread then you should make that blessing first and thereby “exempt” all other foods (remember- economy of blessings).
- 5) If one has no particular preference for any of the foods before him, and bread is not part of the meal, then he should make the blessings in the order listed above starting with blessing #2. Meaning, one should first make the blessing over grain foods (#2), then wine (#3), then fruit of trees (#4), fruit of ground vegetation (#5), and lastly, all other foods (#6). For example, if one has a fruit salad before him that contains oranges, and strawberries, he should pick out an orange, make the blessing upon it (#4) and then pick out a strawberry and make the blessing upon it (#5). This hierarchy of blessings is based on the degree to which various foods are given prominence and praise in Tanach.
- 6) When a grain food occurs in mixture with other foods, one only needs to make a blessing on the grain food (#2). For example, apple pie (mmmmmm...) would only require a #2, not a #2 and a #4.
- 7) One should preferably make his blessing over a whole food item rather than a partial one. If one has half-an-apple and a whole apple before him, he should make the blessing on the whole apple.
- 8) One should hold the food or drink in his hand (or on his fork) while he makes the blessing.
- 9) A food which is added merely as a spice or flavor does not require its own blessing. When eating French fries and ketchup one only needs to make a #5 on the French fries.
- 10) Similarly, if a food contains a number of ingredients wherein one is clearly primary and the others are secondary, one only makes the blessing on the primary. For example, one only makes a #2 on the noodles in a lasagna.

If one is eating a beef stew with very tiny pieces of vegetables, but big chunks of meat (mmmmmm...), then the blessing should only be made over the meat (#6). If the ingredients are all of equal prominence, one should make the unique blessing called for by each ingredient.

- 11) Any food normally requiring a special blessing (#2 through #5) that has been completely liquefied or otherwise rendered unrecognizable only required a #6. Pringles is a good example – they get a #6
- 12) If you are every unsure as to what blessing to say, or have forgotten what to do, then make a #6. In a pinch it will cover anything.

After Blessings

We also bless God after having partaken of his benefit. This blessing is in many ways a greater expression of thanks than the fore-blessing.

As mentioned in Lesson 15, the *Midrash* records a blessing after meals that was taught by Abraham to non-Jews:

7) Blessed is the God of the universe, of whose bounty we have eaten.

This blessing should be said any time one has eaten any amount and feels satisfied.⁵ It may be enhanced with the addition of Psalms or other specifically composed texts. These additional texts should be added before the blessing.

Blessings on Aromas

The following are blessing on various types of aromatic benefit. There is no after-blessing for these blessings.

If you are ever in a pinch and don't know which one to say, or are uncertain as to what you are smelling, use #8.

Upon Smelling Spices (Cloves, Cinnamon, Nutmeg, etc) or Natural Incenses:

8) Blessed are you, our God, sovereign of the universe, who creates species of spices.

⁵ After-blessings differ greatly between Jews and Noahides. This is because the text of most after-blessings is unique to Jews alone. Furthermore, the existence of this Midrashic blessing trumps the use of any of the Jewish after-blessings by Noahides.

Upon Smelling Fragrant Trees and their Flowers

Here we apply the same definition of trees mentioned above for the blessings on fruit. This blessing would be said over any tree or flower with a woody stalk (i.e. roses):

9) *Blessed are you, Lord, our God, sovereign of the universe, who creates fragrant trees.*

Upon Smelling Fragrant Grasses, Herbs, and Their Flowers

Here we apply the same definition used above for ground vegetation. This blessing would be used when smelling lemongrass, tulips, or orchids:

10) *Blessed are you, Lord, our God, sovereign of the universe, who creates fragrant grasses.*

When Smelling Fragrant Fruits (i.e. an Esrog)

11) *Blessed are you, Lord, our God, sovereign of the universe, who gives good fragrance to fruits.*

Blessings of Praise and Gratitude

Upon Seeing Lighting

This blessing, as the one on thunder and rainbows, may only be said once per rainstorm. In order to say it twice, the sky would have to clear completely and then another storm roll in. Or, a person would travel to a place where there is another storm

12) *Blessed are you, Lord, our God, sovereign of the universe, who fashions the work of creation.*

This blessing is also said whenever one sees exceptionally impressive natural phenomena such as giant mountains, shooting stars, or great rivers. It is also said when one experiences an earthquake. However, in these cases, it can only be said after 30 days have passed since the last time the phenomenon was experienced. This 30-day rule will be discussed more below.

Upon Hearing Thunder

13) *Blessed are you, Lord, our God, sovereign of the universe, whose power and might fills the world.*

Upon Seeing a Rainbow

The rainbow was given as a sign of God's promise never to destroy the world again after the flood of Noah. Therefore, we recite the following blessing upon

seeing the rainbow. We only recite it when we can see both ends of the bow in the sky:

- 14) *Blessed are you, Lord, our God, sovereign of the universe, who remembers the covenant, is faithful to His covenant, and who fulfills His word.*

Upon Seeing the Ocean

According to many, this blessing should also be said upon seeing the Mediterranean Sea. This blessing, and many of the following, is only said after thirty days have elapsed since the last time the sighting or event occurred. This is to preserve the freshness and impact of the blessing. For example: a person sees the ocean and makes the blessing. 15 days later, he sees the ocean again. This time, he should not recite a blessing. He only says another blessing if 30 days passes since this last sighting (which amounts to 45 days from the last time he made the blessing).

- 15) *Blessed are you, Lord, our God, sovereign of the universe, who makes the great sea.*

Upon Seeing Things of Unsurpassed Beauty

This blessing is reserved for seeing exceptionally beautiful people, landscapes, or other such creations. The 30 day rule applies to this blessing.

- 16) *Blessed are you, Lord, our God, sovereign of the universe, who has such in His world.*

Upon Seeing Things Strange and Grotesque

This blessing is reserved for seeing animals or people that are strange or deformed. The 30 day rule applies to this blessing.

- 17) *Blessed are you, Lord, our God, sovereign of the universe, who varies the forms of his creations.*

Upon Seeing Fruit Trees in Bloom

This blessing may only be recited once a year, in the spring, and upon flowering fruit trees:

- 18) *Blessed are you, Lord, our God, sovereign of the universe, into whose world, lacking nothing, He created good creatures and trees, for the benefit of man.*

Upon Seeing an Outstanding Torah Scholar

This blessing is reserved for the very few, very special leaders of the Torah world. There are, at most, less than 10 people in the world for whom this blessing would be said. The 30 day rule applies to this blessing.

- 19) *Blessed are you, Lord, our God, sovereign of the universe, who has apportioned his wisdom to those who hear Him.*

Upon Seeing an Extraordinary Secular Scholar

Like the blessing above, it is reserved for very few people. This is made upon seeing the Albert Einstein's and Isaac Newtons of the world (I know one leading Rabbi who said it when he met Steven Hawking). At least one authority, though, holds that it may be said for any Nobel Prize winner. The 30 day rule applies to this blessing.

- 20) *Blessed are you, Lord, our God, sovereign of the universe, who has given of his wisdom to flesh and blood.*

Upon Seeing a Gentile King

To merit this blessing, the ruler must 1) rule lawfully, 2) cannot be overruled, and 3) has absolute power over the life and death of his subjects. There are virtually no heads of state in our times who meet these qualifications. The custom today is to recite an altered form of the blessing, omitting the references to God's kingship. This makes it merely a statement of praise and not an actual blessing. The 30 day rule applies to this blessing.

- 21) *Blessed is he who has given of his glory to flesh and blood.*

Upon Seeing, for the First Time, a Friend Who Has Recovered From a Mortal Illness

- 22) *Blessed is the merciful one, sovereign of the universe, who has given you to us and not to the dust.*

Upon Hearing News That Benefits Oneself and Others

- 23) *Blessed are you, our God, sovereign of the universe, who is good and does good!*

Upon Hearing Extremely Bad News, Such as the Death of a Person, or News of a Calamity or Plague:

- 24) *Blessed is the true judge.*

If One Has Experienced a Miracle in a Certain Place

If a person believes that he has benefitted from a miracle, then the following blessing is recited each time he is in the place where the miracle occurred. However, it is only recited if one visits the place once every 30 days or more. If one visits the place more regularly than every 30 days, the freshness of the experience will quickly wear off.

25) *Blessed are you, Lord, our God, sovereign of the universe, who performed a miracle for me in this place.*