

Mitzvah of the Month

Blessings of Summer Appreciation

In our tradition, prayer is a mitzvah, a commandment. Let me try to disabuse us of classic notions of prayer, those that conjure designated words accompanied by designated rituals and postures in designated places. Instead, I encourage us to perceive everything that we do or say as potential prayer. If we act and speak with intent, with directedness, with passion that seeks to embrace a moment, an experience, an interaction with other people or creatures or the majesty of creation – that is prayer.

In Hassidic tradition, the goal is to say one-hundred blessings each day! Blessings are a special category of prayer. They don't, as is a common misunderstanding, give or bestow blessing to or upon anything. Rather, these beautiful articulations recognize and take deeper notice of the normative and mundane, lifting them to levels of intensified appreciation. One day this summer, in places new and familiar, with old friends and new, let us strive to say one-hundred blessings. Here are some possibilities for articulating the moments for a vacation or a "stay"cation.

For any new occasion, or the return of a seasonal or annual occasion we say: Baruch a-ta Adonai E-lo-hey-nu me-lech ha-o-lam shehe-che-ya-nu v'ki -ma-nu v'hi-gi-a-nu laz-man ha-zeh. We are in awe within the Holy-Oneness-of-Everything. The Oneness forms our life. The Oneness sustains us with bounty. The Oneness enables us to reach wonderful moments.

When we see a unique manifestation of nature, you would say:
Baruch a-ta Adonai E-lo-hey-nu me-lech ha-o-lam, o - seh ma'aseh v'rey-sheet.
We are in awe within the Holy-Oneness-of-Creation: the Creation continues every day.

When we see a rainbow say: Baruch a-ta Adonai E-lo-hey-nu me-lech ha-o-lam, zocheyr ha-b'rit, v'ne'e-man b'vri-to, v'ka-yam b'ma-a-ma-ro.
We are in awe within the Holy-Oneness-of-Everything: This rainbow reminds us that to be within the Oneness is a covenant of word and deed.

If we meet someone wise, a guide, a new friend, a helpful stranger, we might say: Baruch a-ta Adonai E-lo-hey-nu me-lech ha-o-lam, she-na-tan mey-chawch-ma-to l'va-sar va-dam.
We are in awe within the Holy-Oneness-of-Everything; the Wisdom-of-the-Oneness can be wonderfully revealed from those of flesh and blood.

If we engage in some out of the ordinary, even daring, activities. If we are, at some point, in some physical danger, from which we are extricated, and at some time later, we pass or speak about the place where this happened to you, not only do you point out the place to your companions and show your scars, you also say:
Baruch a-ta Adonai E-lo-hey-nu me-lech ha-o-lam, she-a-sa li neys ba-ma-kom hazeh.
I am in awe within the Holy-Oneness-of-Everything and the possibility for me to see the places and experiences as miraculous.

For the opportunities we will take and make to do social justice along our way:
Baruch a-ta Adonai E-lo-hey-nu me-lech ha-o-lam a -sher kid-sha-nu b'mitz-vo-tav v'tzi-va-nu lir-dof tze-dek.
We are in awe and wonder before and with the Holy-Oneness-of-Everything. From the Oneness we glean mandates for our living, one of which is to contribute to the world's healing through the acts of justice.