

ברכת בורא נפשות Blessing of Borei Nefashot

1. Siddur Ashkenaz, Shacharit, Asher Yatzar Blessing

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ יְקוֹק אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם אֲשֶׁר יָצַר אֶת-הָאָדָם בְּחִכְמָה וַיְבָרָא בּוֹ נְקִיבִים וְנְקִיבִים חֲלֹלִים וְחֲלֹלִים
גָּלוּי וַיְדוּעַ לִפְנֵי כֹסֶא כְבוֹדְךָ שָׂאֵם יִפְתָּח אֶחָד מֵהֶם אוֹ יִסָּתֶם אֶחָד מֵהֶם אִי אֶפְשָׁר לְהִתְקַיֵּם וְלַעֲמֹד לִפְנֵיךָ
אִפְּלוּ שְׁעָה אֶחָת. בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ יְקוֹק רֹפֵא כָּל-בָּשָׂר וּמַפְּלִיא לַעֲשׂוֹת:

Blessed are You, Hashem our God, Sovereign of the Universe, Who formed people with wisdom and created within each person openings and hollows. It is obvious and known in the presence of Your glorious throne that if one of them were ruptured, or if one of them were blocked, it would be impossible to exist and stand in Your Presence even for a short while. Blessed are You, Hashem, Who heals all flesh and performs wonders.

2. R. Ezra Bick, “Asher Yatzar: Reminder of Dependence on God,” the Israel Koschitzky Torat Har Etzion Virtual Beit Midrash

The *Shulchan Arukh* quotes the conclusion as “*rofei choli khol basar u-mafli la'asot*.” This formulation, while rejected by many Ashkenazi authorities, is accepted by the Levush and the Magen Avraham, and explicitly defended by Rav Ya’akov Emden (Ya’avetz). It appears to be reintroducing the formulation of Rav through the back door. Ya’avetz explains that while, as Shmuel pointed out in the *Gemara*, using the noun “*cholim*” is ill-advised, as it is not correct to refer to the entire human race as ill, the term “*choli*” is acceptable, as it refers to the “frailties of all flesh,” rather than a specific illness...

Asher yatzar presents a third model, at least as concerns life. Life is not a stable condition, able to run on its own. It is inherently precarious; its very mode of operation is the source of its instability. This is what the blessing calls “*nekavim nekavim, chalulim chalulim*,” which the commentators explain refers to the opening and closing of orifices, in order to eat, to void and even to breathe. Life is, by definition, living on the edge. What makes this possible is that God is “*rofei khol basar*,” or better yet, “*rofei choli khol basar*” – He heals **continuously** the frailties of all flesh, the dynamic instability that we call life.... God’s “preventive medicine” is not about providing vitamins, but about maintaining a continuous stream of life, of balance, of change and renewal...

Because of this, we may use the double formulation of “*rofei khol basar u-mafli la'asot*.” When juxtaposed with *rofei khol basar*, *mafli la'asot* does not mean “who created everything perfectly, without need for correction,” but the opposite: Who wondrously made man as a delicately balanced dynamic process, which requires the constant presence of God's finger to keep it running smoothly.

3. Siddur Ashkenaz, Blessing of Borei Nefashot

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ יְקוֹק אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם בּוֹרֵא נַפְשוֹת רַבּוֹת וְחִסְרוֹנָן עַל כָּל מֶה שֶׁבְּרָאתָ לַחַיּוֹת בָּהֶם נִפְשׁ
כָּל חַי בְּרוּךְ חַי (חַי) הָעוֹלָמִים:

Blessed are You, Hashem, Sovereign of the Universe, Creator of numerous living beings and all that they lack, for all the things You have created with which to sustain the soul of every living being. Blessed is the Life of the worlds.

4. Mishnah, Berakhot 6:8

הַשּׁוֹתֶה מִיָּם לְצִמְאוֹ, אוֹמֵר שֶׁהַכֹּל נִהְיָ בְּדִבְרוֹ. רַבִּי טַרְפוֹן אוֹמֵר, בּוֹרֵא נַפְשוֹת רַבּוֹת וְחִסְרוֹנָן:

One who drinks water to quench his thirst recites: By whose word all things came to be. Rabbi Tarfon says: He recites: Creator of numerous living beings and all that they lack.

5. Jerusalem Talmud, Berakhot 6:1

רַבִּי אַבָּא בַר יַעֲקֹב בִּשְׁם רַבִּי יִצְחָק רֹבָא ר' כִּשְׁהוּא אוֹכֵל בֶּשֶׂר אוֹ בִיצָה הִיא אוֹמֵר אֲשֶׁר בְּרָא נַפְשוֹת
רַבּוֹת לַחַיּוֹת בָּהֶם נֶפֶשׁ כָּל חַי בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ יְקוֹק חַי הָעוֹלָמִים.

Rebbi Abba bar Jacob in the name of the great Rabbi Isaac: When Rabbi was eating meat or an egg he used to say: "Creator of numerous living beings to sustain with them all living souls. Praise to You, Eternal, Life of the worlds."

6. Babylonian Talmud, Berakhot 45

רַבִּי טַרְפוֹן אוֹמֵר "בּוֹרֵא נַפְשוֹת רַבּוֹת וְחִסְרוֹנָן". אָמַר לִיה רַבָּא בַר רַב חֲנַן לְאַבִּי, וְאַמְרִי לֵה לְרַב יוֹסֵף:
הֲלִכְתָּא מַאי? אָמַר לִיה: פּוֹק חֲזִי מַאי עֲמָא דְבַר.

Rabbi Tarfon says: Over water one recites: Creator of numerous living beings and all that they lack. Rava bar Rav Ḥanan said to Abaye, and some say to Rav Yosef: What is the *halakha*? He said to him: Go out and observe what the people are doing.

7. Rashi, Berakhot 45

מַאי עֲמָא דְבַר – הִיאךְ נוֹהֲגִים וְכַבֵּר נִהְיָ לְבַרְךְ בְּתַחֲלָה שֶׁהַכֹּל וּלְבִסּוֹף בּוֹרֵא נַפְשוֹת רַבּוֹת וְחִסְרוֹנָן עַל כָּל
מֶה שֶׁבְּרָא:

"What the people are doing" – what their practice is, and what they already practiced, saying the blessing in the beginning of "By whose word all things came to be," and in the end "Creator of numerous living beings and all that they lack, for all the things God created."

8. Babylonian Talmud, 37a

בְּתַחֲלָה מְבָרַךְ עָלָיו "שֶׁהַכֹּל נִהְיָ בְּדִבְרוֹ", וּלְבִסּוֹף "בּוֹרֵא נַפְשוֹת רַבּוֹת וְחִסְרוֹנָן עַל כָּל מֶה שֶׁבְּרָאתָ".

[Over rice,] at the start, one recites: By whose word all things came to be, and at the end, one recites: Creator of numerous living beings and all that they lack, for all the things You have created.

9. R. Yosef Ofer, “Blessing of Borei Nefashot,” *Alon Shvut* 72

דרך אחרת הציע ר"ש ליברמן: כפי שראינו הייתה הברכה בתחילה ברכה שלפני האכילה, כלומר ברכת שבח, והייתה דומה לשאר ברכות הנהנין המתארות את הקב"ה. עם העברתה לשמש כברכה שאחרי האכילה, ברכת הודאה. התאימו אותה לשמש כהודאה ע"י תוספת, ויש להבין כך:

בא"י אמ"ה (במאמר מוסגר: בורא נפשות וחסרונן) על כל מה שבראת!

Rabbi Saul Lieberman suggested another way of understanding the blessing: As we saw, the blessing at first was a blessing before eating, which is to say a blessing of praise, and it was similar to other blessings on benefiting from something, in that it describes God. When the blessing became used as a blessing after eating, a blessing of thanks, the blessing was adapted to be used as thanks through an addition, and we can understand it this way:

“Blessed are you God, Sovereign of the Universe, (in parenthesis: the Creator of numerous living beings and all that they lack), for all that you have created!”

10. R. Yosef Ofer, “Blessing of Borei Nefashot,” *Alon Shvut* 72

ראשונים שראו לפנייהם את הבבלי והירושלמי חשבו על אפשרות "להרכיב" את הנוסחים זה על זה. הדמיון בין הנוסחים איפשר את ההרכבה, למרות הבל המשמעות של "הנפשות".

The early rabbinic authorities who saw before them the Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmud thought of the possibility of “combining” the two formulations. The similarity between the formulations enabled them to be combined, despite the lack of meaning in the word *nefashot* (living beings).

11. Babylonian Talmud, Berakhot 37a

אמר מר, הכוסס את האורז מברך עליו “בורא פרי האדמה”. טחנו אפוא ובשלו, אף על פי שהפריסות קיימות, בתחלה מברך עליו “בורא מיני מזונות”, ולבסוף ברכה אחת מעין שלש. והתניא לבסוף ולא כלום!

The Master said: One who chews rice recites: Who creates fruit of the ground. If one ground it, baked it and then cooked it, even though the pieces are intact, at the start one recites: Who creates the various kinds of nourishment, and at the end one recites one blessing abridged from the three blessings [of Grace after Meals]. The Gemara raises the challenge: Wasn’t it taught in a *baraita* that in that case, at the end one [says] nothing?

12. Rashi, Berakhot 37a

ולא כלום – כלומר אין טעון מברכות פירות ארץ ישראל ולא כלום אלא בורא נפשות רבות ככל מידי דליתיה משבעת המינין:

“Nothing” – that is to say, it does not require the blessing on the fruits of Israel – “nothing” other than “Creator of numerous living beings (*borei nefashot rabot*),” just like any food that is not one of the seven species.

13. Responsa Rashba, Part I, 823

עוד כתב במה שקראו בורא נפשות רבות ולא כלום. וזה לשונו. אומר אני מפני שאינו מברך על הדבר שנהנה ממנו. וכל שאר הברכות מברך על הדבר שנהנה ממנו... וכן על כל המצות ועל כל הפירות על המצות ועל הפירות מברך. ואפילו ברכת שהכל שאינו מזכיר אותם אלא דרך כלל מ"מ הרי הוא כולל מה שנהנה ממנו כלל הדברים שמתהנו כמאמרו להנות מהם. אבל בברכת בורא נפשות אינו כן. שאינו מזכיר בברכה הדבר שנהנה ממנו בכלל הדברים לא בפירוש ולא בכלל. שאינו אומר בורא מינין הרבה למלאת חסרון הדברים שברא. אלא אדרבה הוא מברך על שברא נפשות שחסרות וצריכות למה שברא. על כן קראוה ולא כלום.

He wrote regarding calling the *borei nefashot* blessing "nothing," and these are his words. I say that this is because one is not making a blessing on the thing he is benefiting from, and in all other blessings, one makes a blessing on the thing he benefits from... on all of the mitzvot, and all of the fruit, one makes a blessing on the mitzvot and on the fruit. Even in the blessing *she ha-kol* [by whose word all things came to be], which does not mention particular things, nonetheless it includes in its general statement all the things that we benefit from according to God's word that we should benefit from them. But with *beorei nefashot* this is not the case. The blessing does not mention the thing we are benefiting from, not explicitly or implicitly. It does not say "Creator of many kinds of things to fill the needs of the things He created." Rather, the opposite – one makes a blessing on the numerous living beings that are lacking and need what God created. Therefore, the blessing is called "nothing."

14. Beit Yosef, Orach Chayim 207:3:1,

פירוש הברכה בורא נפשות רבות וכל מה שהם חסרים וכו' כלומר וחסרונם הוא מלשון (שופטים יט) רק כל מחסורך עלי שהוא כל צרכי סיפוק וה"ק בורא נפשות רבות וכל צרכי סיפוקן שהם הדברים שהם הכרחיים לצורך קיום חיותן כמו לחם ומים וגם על כל שאר הדברים שבראת שאינם הכרחיים לצורך קיום חיותן ואינם אלא להתענג דהיינו פירות וכיוצא בהם שאינם מוכרחים לצורך קיום החיות ולפירוש זה מלת וחסרון דבוק עם תחלת הברכה...

וי"א בורא נפשות רבות וחסרון על כל מה שבראת וכו' כלומר ומלת וחסרון דבוק עם על כל מה שבראת כלו' בא"י בורא נפשות רבות ומה שחסר לנפשות הוא מוטל על הדברים שבראת.

The meaning of the blessing "Creator of numerous living beings and all that they lack" is the same language used in (Judges 19:20) "I will take care of whatever you lack," which is everything one needs, just as he says "Creator of numerous living beings" and everything they need - which are those things that are vital for the survival of life, like bread and water. And also on all the rest of the things that You created which are not vital for survival, and are only there for enjoyment, meaning fruits etc. which are not vital for survival. And according to this understanding of the blessing, the word "and all that they lack" is part of the beginning of the blessing.

And there are those who say that "Creator of numerous living beings and all that they lack, on everything You created," etc. meaning the word "and all that they lack" is attached to "on everything You created" meaning "Blessed are you G-d...Who creates many beings and what is missing for these beings is [provided by] everything You created etc."

15. R. Alana Suskin, "The Blessing of Lack," MyJewishLearning.com

The late 19th-early 20th century rabbi known as the Chofetz Chaim explains the blessing in terms of a verse in Psalms (89:3) *olam chessed yiboneh* “the world is sustained by kindness.” He says that the *borei nefashot* blessing is unique in thanking God for “having created numerous living things *with their lacks*” and that we say it because of the deep and essential importance of acknowledging that God did not create people to be self-sufficient. Rather, we need to remember that everything with a soul is in need, and that this is a good thing, because it means that we must reach out to one another, thus building into the very foundation of society the need for us to help one another, and for society to build “passing it forward” into its very structure.

We acknowledge God and bless God for creating us in need – because it allows us to help one another. What greater blessing is there than that? True brokenness is not lack – a lack can be filled. True brokenness is thinking that one is complete unto oneself and doesn’t need anyone else. That tendency to think of oneself as self-sufficient leads to the desire to dominate, because the truth is that when one doesn’t ask for help, one prevents blessing from entering, from other people, and from God.

16. R. Jonathan Sacks, “Rabbi Sacks Speaks about the Jerusalem Unity Prize,”
rabbisacks.org

There's an incredible bracha - I don't know if you ever thought how strange it is - that we make after having a cup of coffee, a glass of water, “*Borei nefashot rabot v'chesronan*.” It's an extraordinary blessing. We thank God for making many different kinds of people and their deficiencies. Now, this is the only place in the whole of Judaism where we thank God for making us deficient. How come? The answer is, if we had no deficiencies, if we had no *chesronot*, if we lacked nothing, we'd never need one another.

But because we all lack something, and because we're all different - what I like, you have, and what you like, I have. And the bracha, “*Borei nefashot rabot v'chesronan*,” is a bracha of coming together in our diversity to form a unity.

To put it very bluntly, I don't need you to agree with me. I need you to care about me.

That unity of caring for one another is all we aspire to, and all we need.

Judaism is a choral symphony scored for many voices.

We may not be one denomination, one opinion, or one party, but we are, and always will be, one people. The smallest, most diverse people on the face of the earth, and our diversity is our richness.

Friends, let us reach out a hand to one another.

17. R. David Seidenberg, on neohasid.org

In all of rabbinic Judaism, the blessing *Borei N'fashot* may be the finest expression of what we would call ecological consciousness. It blesses the Creator for making creatures that need to use each other to survive. The needs of every creature unite it with all life and tie all species, all our relations, together, whether they be plants or animals or fungi or soil. Those needs compel creatures to evolve and reproduce as part of ecosystems of multitudes of species. All together they, and we, create a world that is alive and vibrant with life, and with the “Soul of all Life.”

18. R. Leo Dee, “Finding Joy Amid Sorrow: Lessons from Rebbe Nachman on Embracing Pain and Growth,” [jpost.com](#)

Simcha, according to Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, comes from the root tzmicha meaning growth, because when we are growing, we are happy. That may apply to growth in knowledge and good deeds, or growth in our relationships, or growth in wealth or status. However, when we plateau or even decline in any of these processes, we may feel pain, sadness, and even despair...

Then I realized that everything I do is driven by some sort of pain. I eat because I have the pain of hunger. I drink because I have the pain of thirst. I work because I have the pain of feeling I need to be productive, and because I imagine the pain of being penniless. And so on.

There is a bracha (blessing) that we say after drinking a glass of water. We say “Borei nefashot rabot vchesronan al kol ma shebarata” – “Who creates many souls and numerous living beings and what they lack.” We thank Hashem for what we lack, for the pain of lacking, because that’s part of the motivation for progress. That pain is the start of simcha.