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Blessings on Seeing: Blessed are You Who Makes Creatures Different

1. **Abraham Joshua Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p.49**

The sense for the "miracles which are daily with us," the sense for the "continual marvels," is the source of prayer. There is no worship, no music, no love, if we take for granted the blessings or defeats of living. No routine of the social, physical, or physiological order must dull our sense of surprise at the fact that there is a social, a physical, or a physiological order. We are trained in maintaining our sense of wonder by uttering a prayer before the enjoyment of food. Each time we are about to drink a glass of water, we remind ourselves of the eternal mystery of creation, "Blessed be Thou…by Whose word all things come into being." A trivial act and a reference to the supreme miracle. Wishing to eat bread or fruit, to enjoy a pleasant fragrance or a cup of wine; on tasting fruit in season for the first time; on seeing a rainbow, or the ocean; or noticing trees when they blossom; on meeting a sage in Torah or in secular learning; on hearing good or bad tidings – we are taught to invoke His great name and our awareness of Him. Even on performing a physiological function we say "Blessed be Thou…who healest all flesh and doest wonders." This is one of the goals of the Jewish way of living: to experience commonplace deeds as spiritual adventures, to feel the hidden love and wisdom in all things.

2. **Babylonian Talmud, Berakhot 58b**

אָמַר רַבִּי יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בֶּן לֵוִי: הָרוֹאֶה אֶת הַבַּהֲקָנִים, אוֹמֵר: ״בָּרוּךְ ... מְשַׁנֶּה הַבְּרִיּוֹת״. מֵיתִיבִי: רָאָה אֶת הַכּוּשִׁי, וְאֶת הַגִּיחוֹר, וְאֶת הַלַּוְוקָן, וְאֶת הַקִּקֵּפַח, וְאֶת הַנַּנָּס, וְאֶת הַדַּרְנִיקוֹס, אוֹמֵר: ״בָּרוּךְ ... מְשַׁנֶּה אֶת הַבְּרִיּוֹת״. אֶת הַקִּטֵּעַ, וְאֶת הַסּוֹמֵא, וְאֶת פְּתוּיֵי הָרֹאשׁ, וְאֶת הַחִגֵּר, וְאֶת הַמּוּכֶּה שְׁחִין, וְאֶת הַבַּהֲקָנִים, אוֹמֵר: ״בָּרוּךְ ... דַּיַּין אֱמֶת״!

לָא קַשְׁיָא: הָא מִמְּעֵי אִמּוֹ, הָא בָּתַר דְּאִיתְּיְלִיד...

תָּנוּ רַבָּנַן: הָרוֹאֶה פִּיל, קוֹף וְקִפּוֹף, אוֹמֵר: ״בָּרוּךְ ... מְשַׁנֶּה אֶת הַבְּרִיּוֹת״. רָאָה בְּרִיּוֹת טוֹבוֹת, וְאִילָנוֹת טוֹבוֹת, אוֹמֵר: ״בָּרוּךְ ... שֶׁכָּכָה לוֹ בְּעוֹלָמוֹ״.

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said: One who sees spotted people recites: Blessed…Who makes creatures different. The Gemara **raises a challenge: One who saw a person with** unusually **black skin, a person with** unusually **red skin, a person with** unusually **white skin [*lavkan*], an** unusually **tall and thin person, a little person, or one with warts [*darnikos*] recites: Blessed…Who makes creatures different.** However, one who sees **an amputee, a blind person, a flat-headed person, a lame person, one afflicted with boils, or spotted people recites: Blessed…the true Judge**.

The Gemara answers: This is **not difficult. This,** where Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi says to recite: Who makes creatures different, refers to a case where the individual was spotted **from** when he was **in his mother's womb**. While **this,** where one recites: The true Judge, refers to a case where the individual only became spotted **after he was born…**

The Sages taught: One who sees an elephant, a monkey, or a vulture recites: Blessed…Who makes creatures different. One who saw beautiful creatures or **beautiful trees recites: Blessed…Who has such things in His world.**

3. **Meiri, Berakhot 58b**

וכן כתבו שלא נאמר כן אלא על אדם שזה הרואה מצטער על שנויו דומיא דרואה בריות טובות שהוא נהנה על ראייתם ואין הדברים נראים לי שראיית הדברים המחדשים אף בלא הנאה ואף בלא צער ראוי לברך עליהם.

[The great commentators] also wrote that this blessing applies only when the person seeing an unusual creature is distressed by its unusual appearance, similar to the case of seeing beautiful creatures, which one enjoys looking at. I do not find these opinions convincing. One should recite a blessing upon seeing things that are novel or unusual, even without experiencing either pleasure or distress.

4. **Shulchan Arukh, Orach Chayim 226**

הרואה כושי וגיחור דהיינו שהוא אדום הרבה והלווקן דהיינו שהוא לבן הרבה והקפח דהיינו שבטנו גדול ומתוך עוביו נראית קומתו מקופחת והננס והדרקונה דהיינו מי שהוא מלא יבלת ופתויי הראש שכל שערותיו דבוקות זה בזה ואת הפיל ואת הקוף מברך בא"י אמ"ה משנה הבריות:
הרואה את החיגר ואת הקטע ואת הסומא ומוכה שחין והבהקנין והוא מי שמנומר בנקודות דקות אם הם ממעי אמם מברך משנה הבריות ואם נשתנה אח"כ מברך דיין האמת ויש מי שאומר דדוקא על מי שמצטער עליו...

Upon seeing a Kushite, a *gichur,* meaning someone who is very red, or a *lavkan*, meaning someone who is very white, or a *kapach*, meaning someone whose abdomen is large and whose height appears shortened due to his thickness, or a little person, or a *darkonah*, meaning someone who is covered in warts and whose hair is matted together, or an elephant, or a monkey, one recites the blessing "Blessed be He who varies the creatures."

Upon seeing a lame person, an amputee, a blind person, a person afflicted with boils, or a person with vitiligo (who has small spots on their skin), if they have been like that since birth, one recites the blessing "Blessed be He who varies the creatures." If they became like that later in life, one recites the blessing "True Judge." →**Some people say that one only recites the blessing if one feels sorry for the person**…

5. **Babylonian Talmud, Ta'anit 20**

תָּנוּ רַבָּנַן: לְעוֹלָם יְהֵא אָדָם רַךְ כְּקָנֶה וְאַל יְהֵא קָשֶׁה כְּאֶרֶז. מַעֲשֶׂה שֶׁבָּא רַבִּי אֶלְעָזָר בְּרַבִּי שִׁמְעוֹן מִמִּגְדַּל גְּדוֹר מִבֵּית רַבּוֹ, וְהָיָה רָכוּב עַל חֲמוֹר וּמְטַיֵּיל עַל שְׂפַת נָהָר, וְשָׂמַח שִׂמְחָה גְּדוֹלָה. וְהָיְתָה דַּעְתּוֹ גַּסָּה עָלָיו מִפְּנֵי שֶׁלָּמַד תּוֹרָה הַרְבֵּה.

נִזְדַּמֵּן לוֹ אָדָם אֶחָד שֶׁהָיָה מְכוֹעָר בְּיוֹתֵר. אָמַר לוֹ: שָׁלוֹם עָלֶיךָ רַבִּי! וְלֹא הֶחְזִיר לוֹ. אָמַר לוֹ: רֵיקָה, כַּמָּה מְכוֹעָר אוֹתוֹ הָאִישׁ! שֶׁמָּא כָּל בְּנֵי עִירֶךָ מְכוֹעָרִין כְּמוֹתְךָ? אָמַר לוֹ: אֵינִי יוֹדֵעַ, אֶלָּא לֵךְ וֶאֱמוֹר לָאוּמָּן שֶׁעָשָׂאַנִי: ״כַּמָּה מְכוֹעָר כְּלִי זֶה שֶׁעָשִׂיתָ״. כֵּיוָן שֶׁיָּדַע בְּעַצְמוֹ שֶׁחָטָא, יָרַד מִן הַחֲמוֹר וְנִשְׁתַּטַּח לְפָנָיו, וְאָמַר לוֹ: נַעֲנֵיתִי לְךָ, מְחוֹל לִי! אָמַר לוֹ: אֵינִי מוֹחֵל לְךָ עַד שֶׁתֵּלֵךְ לָאוּמָּן שֶׁעָשָׂאַנִי וֶאֱמוֹר לוֹ: כַּמָּה מְכוֹעָר כְּלִי זֶה שֶׁעָשִׂיתָ.

הָיָה מְטַיֵּיל אַחֲרָיו עַד שֶׁהִגִּיעַ לְעִירוֹ. יָצְאוּ בְּנֵי עִירוֹ לְקָרָאתוֹ, וְהָיוּ אוֹמְרִים לוֹ: שָׁלוֹם עָלֶיךָ רַבִּי רַבִּי, מוֹרִי מוֹרִי! אָמַר לָהֶם: לְמִי אַתֶּם קוֹרִין רַבִּי רַבִּי? אָמְרוּ לוֹ: לְזֶה שֶׁמְּטַיֵּיל אַחֲרֶיךָ. אָמַר לָהֶם: אִם זֶה רַבִּי — רַבִּי

אַל יִרְבּוּ כְּמוֹתוֹ בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל. אָמְרוּ לוֹ: מִפְּנֵי מָה? אָמַר לָהֶם: כָּךְ וְכָךְ עָשָׂה לִי. אָמְרוּ לוֹ: אַף עַל פִּי כֵּן, מְחוֹל לוֹ, שֶׁאָדָם גָּדוֹל בְּתוֹרָה הוּא.

אָמַר לָהֶם: בִּשְׁבִילְכֶם הֲרֵינִי מוֹחֵל לוֹ, וּבִלְבַד שֶׁלֹּא יְהֵא רָגִיל לַעֲשׂוֹת כֵּן. מִיָּד נִכְנַס רַבִּי אֶלְעָזָר בְּרַבִּי שִׁמְעוֹן, וְדָרַשׁ: לְעוֹלָם יְהֵא אָדָם רַךְ כְּקָנֶה וְאַל יְהֵא קָשֶׁה כְּאֶרֶז. וּלְפִיכָךְ זָכָה קָנֶה לִיטּוֹל הֵימֶנּוּ קוּלְמוֹס לִכְתּוֹב בּוֹ סֵפֶר תּוֹרָה תְּפִילִּין וּמְזוּזוֹת.

The Sages further taught in praise of the reed: A person should always be soft like a reed, and he should not be stiff like a cedar. An incident occurred in which Rabbi Elazar, son of Rabbi Shimon, came from Migdal Gedor, from his rabbi's house, and he was riding on a donkey and strolling on the bank of the river. And he was very happy, and his head was swollen with pride because he had studied much Torah.

He happened upon an exceedingly ugly person, who said to him: Greetings to you, my rabbi, but Rabbi Elazar did not return his greeting. Instead, Rabbi Elazar said to him: Worthless [*reika*] person, how ugly is that man. Are all the people of your city as ugly as you? The man said to him: I do not know, but you should go and say to the Craftsman Who made me: How ugly is the vessel you made. When Rabbi Elazar realized that he had sinned, he descended from his donkey and prostrated himself before him, and he said to the man: I have sinned against you; forgive me. The man said to him: I will not forgive you until you go to the Craftsman Who made me and say: How ugly is the vessel you made.

He walked behind the man, trying to appease him, until they reached Rabbi Elazar's city. The people of his city came out to greet him, saying to him: Greetings to you, my rabbi, my rabbi, my master, my master. The man said to them: Who are you calling my rabbi, my rabbi? They said to him: To this man, who is walking behind you. He said to them: If this man is a rabbi, may there not be many like him among the Jewish people. They asked him: For what reason do you say this? He said to them: He did such and such to me. They said to him: Even so, forgive him, as he is a great Torah scholar.

He said to them: For your sakes I forgive him, provided that he accepts upon himself not to become accustomed to behave like this. Immediately, Rabbi Elazar, son of Rabbi Shimon, entered the study hall and taught: A person should always be soft like a reed and he should not be stiff like a cedar. And therefore, the reed merited that a quill is taken from it to write with it a Torah scroll, phylacteries, and *mezuzot*.

6. R. Yeshayah Horowitz, *Shnei Luhot Ha-Brit, Shaar Ha-Otiot, Hallel* 8

עוד בכלל הזה להלל ולשבח כל מה שברא הקב"ה, וזהו כבודו, כי פעולות האומן מראים על חכמת האומן, כענין שנאמר)תהלים קד, כד (מה רבו מעשיך ה', וכתיב)שם קיא, ב (גדולים מעשי ה'. ויבחון בכל ההשתלשלות, וישכיל בכל מה דאפשר. ואף מה שנראה מכוער, הכל עשה ה' בחכמה. ועל כן קבעו רז"ל (ברכות נח, ב) ברכות על הרואה בריות משונות, כמו הברכות על הרואה בריות נאות (שם (כי האומן הגדול שעשאם יודע למה עשאם כך. כעובדא דר' שמעון בן אליעזר...

ולאו דווקא בצורת אדם, אלא מכל מה שנברא בעולם לא יספר בגנותו. ומביא מעשה בחובות הלבבות, בחסיד שהיה הולך בדרך ועמו אנשים, והיתה נבילה מוסרחת בדרך. אמר אחד כמה מסריח נבילה זו. השיב לו החסיד שיניה לבנות, כלומר למה אתה מספר בגנותה, תתבונן שיש בה איזה דבר משובח. ובודאי לא הפשיע אותו על שרצה לעבור מריח רע, אלא על מה שסיפר בגנותה...

וכך כתב מהרמ"ק בתומר דבורה וזה לשונו, לא יבזה שום נמצא מהנמצאים, שכלם בחכמה. ולא יעקור הצומח אלא לצורך. ולא ימית הבעלי חיים אלא לצורך, ויברור להם מיתה יפה בסכין בדוקה לרחם כל מה שאפשר. זה הכלל, החמלה על כל הנמצאים שלא לחבלם תלויה בחכמה...

Also included in this principle is the obligation to praise and extol everything that the Holy One, blessed be He, created, for this is His glory. The works of a craftsman reveal the craftsman's wisdom, as it is said: "How great are Your works, O Lord!" (Psalms 104:24), and it is written: "Great are the works of the Lord" (Psalms 111:2).

Examine all of the cosmos and meditate upon them as much as is possible. Even that which may appear to you to be ugly, even that, G-d made with wisdom. That is why our rabbis, of blessed memory, established a blessing to be said upon seeing strange creatures, just as we do upon seeing beautiful creatures—because the Master Craftsman who made them knows why He made them that way. Think of the story of Rabbi Elazar, the son of Rabbi Shimon...

This applies not only to the human form, but to everything created in the world: one should not speak disparagingly of any of it. He then cites a story from *Hovot ha-Levavot* (Duties of the Heart) regarding a pious man who was walking on the way with other men. They passed by a carcass rotting by the side of the road, and one of the men exclaimed, "What a stench this carcass makes!" Upon which the pious man commented, "It has fine white teeth." Obviously, the pious man did not mean to rebuke his fellow for wishing to avoid the stench of the carcass. Rather, what he meant by his words was, "Why are you speaking of its ugliness? Contemplate that there is something to praise about it!"...

And thus Rabbi Moshe Cordovero wrote in Tomer Devorah, as follows: "Do not scorn anything that exists, for all of them were made with wisdom. Do not uproot anything that grows, if not for a purpose. Do not bring death upon any living being, unless there is a need. And even then, choose for this creature a merciful death, with a finely honed knife, so that you show as much compassion as is possible. This is the general rule: Compassion upon all that exists, so as not to cause harm—all this comes from wisdom...."

7. **Mishnah, Avot 4:3**

הוּא (בן עזאי) הָיָה אוֹמֵר, אַל תְּהִי בָז לְכָל אָדָם, וְאַל תְּהִי מַפְלִיג לְכָל דָּבָר, שֶׁאֵין לְךָ אָדָם שֶׁאֵין לוֹ שָׁעָה וְאֵין לְךָ דָּבָר שֶׁאֵין לוֹ מָקוֹם:

He used to say: Do not despise any man, and do not discriminate against anything, for there is no man that has not his hour, and there is no thing that has not its place.

8. **R. Beth Nichols, Appreciating Differences**

https://templebethel.org/appreciating-differences/

This blessing is an expression of gratitude to God for creating diversity. This is a blessing that praises God for making us different from one another. It is human nature for people to seek out like people – people with similar physical features, beliefs, behaviors, or experiences. We naturally lean towards what feels familiar and safe. And yet, this ancient blessing urges us to marvel at the diversity of humanity...

→Diversity is a fact. Differences surround us. **But to live out the value of *m'shaneh habriyot,* appreciating those differences, we need to enter situations as if we are the travelers who**

always find the good in people. We need to be open to getting to know the people around us, to learning their stories, to understanding their differences, and to finding their strengths. Only then can we move past intolerance, right through tolerance and on to pluralism. *Baruch Ata Adonai, Eloheinu Melech Haolom, M'shaneh Habriyot* / Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the Universe, who makes creatures different. Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the Universe, who inspires us to embrace difference and to weave together a healthy and holy diverse community.

9. **Joanie Calem, "Mishaneh HaBri'ot – A Powerful Prayer & Song," Jewish Disability Inclusion News**

https://jewishdisabilityinclusionnews.substack.com/p/mishaneh-habriot-a-powerful-prayer

I absolutely love the fact that there is this prayer in Judaism, *Baruch Atah Adonai Eloheinu Mishaneh HaBri'ot*, that translates loosely as Blessed is the One who has created creatures differently.

This prayer does not come from the Torah, but is mentioned in various parts of the Talmud, in Maimonides' Mishneh Torah, and in the Shulchan Aruch by Joseph Caro from 1563. →And it says it all I think – **thank goodness that we are not all created exactly the same**!

This of course is not an excuse to treat people differently, not an excuse for inequity or inequality, but rather a recognition and celebration, a sense of awe, that difference is wonderful, that variety is the spice of life. How different would the life experience of our loved ones' with disabilities be if we were all walking around thankful that each of us is unique – and exquisite in that uniqueness.

I teach about **the world of invisible disabilities** – ADHD, ADD, ODD, OCD, Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD), Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES), and mental health challenges – all experiences that create challenges for people in their daily life. All of these acronyms have a lived experience behind them, which affects people's interactions with others and their resilience moving through their daily lives. But each of these conditions is invisible, and those walking alongside someone struggling with one of these conditions does not necessarily recognize a disability, because there are no physical cues to alert them. So often I have heard people say, "If I only knew that they person was struggling in that manner I would not have said what I said."

→***If only we walked through the world thankful for difference, we might not judge someone for behaving in a way that seems off-kilter to us. We might offer a hand of understanding and compassion.*** **We might change that person's life by treating them the way we would like to be treated and celebrating that they are not the same as we are.**

10. **R. Elazar Melamed, *Harchavot Peninei Halakhah, Birkot Ha-Reiyah* 14:2**

אמנם נראה הפירוש, שבימים עברו, מראה כושי היה נדיר ביותר, כמו שגם מראה של ג'ינג'י (הוא הגיחור הנזכר בברכות נח, ב) היה נדיר, ועל שניהם בירכו "משנה הבריות". ואף היה בזה ביטוי של השתתפות בצער, שהואיל ואדם נראה שונה כל כך מחבריו, יש חשש שהדבר יקשה על השתלבותו בחברה. אבל כיום ב"ה אין זה נחשב שוני גדול וממילא אין מברכים עליהם.

וגם על לבקן לכאורה אין לברך, הואיל ומראה לבקן שכיח. וכפי הנראה בעבר כשהתגוררו במקומות קטנים, היו אנשים שבמשך שנים לא ראו לבקן, ואולי פחות אנשים נחלו בזה. אבל כיום שרוב האנשים מתגוררים או מבקרים בערים הגדולות ורגילים לראות לבקנים – אין לברך עליהם.

→It seems, however, that the explanation is as follows: In earlier times, a Black person's appearance was extremely rare, just as the appearance of a redhead (referred to as gichor in Berakhot 58b) was also rare. A blessing of Meshaneh HaBriyot ("Who makes creatures different") was recited upon seeing either. This blessing also expressed empathy for the person's distress, since someone whose appearance differed so greatly from that of others might have difficulty integrating into society. Today, however, thank God, these appearances are not considered significant differences, and therefore the blessing is not recited upon seeing such individuals.

Similarly, one apparently should not recite the blessing upon seeing a person with albinism, since this appearance is relatively common. It seems that in the past, when people lived in small communities, some might go for years without seeing a person with albinism, and perhaps the condition was less prevalent. Today, however, when most people live in or visit large cities and are accustomed to seeing people with albinism, the blessing should not be recited upon seeing them.

11. R. Eliezer Melamed, *P'ninei Halakhah*, Berakhot 14-15

העולם הזה אינו מושלם, יש בו פגעי טבע שונים, רעידות אדמה, בצורות, קור וחום. גם האדם אינו מושלם, ולעיתים נולד אדם בעל מום, משונה ביותר, והצער על כך גדול. למרות זאת צריכים להתחזק באמונה ולדעת כי ה' ברא את העולם חסר, כדי שנצטרך להתמודד עם קשיים ונזכה מתוך כך לגלות את הכוחות הגנוזים בנו ולהיות שותפים בתיקונו של העולם. לכן, גם בעת אסון שאיננו מבינים את פשרו נצטווינו לברך 'דיין האמת'. כמו כן, למרות שאיננו מבינים מדוע ישנם מומים ופגמים בעולם, צריכים אנו להאמין שהבורא, יודע תעלומות, מנהיג את עולמו כראוי ולטובה, ועל כן תקנו חכמים לברך על ראיית אדם משונה: "ברוך אתה ה' אלוהינו מלך העולם משנה הבריות".

רק על שינוי גדול מברכים, כגון: על הנולד ללא כף יד או רגל; או שמרוב גובהו אינו יכול לעמוד זקוף וקומתו נכפפת; או שהוא ננס מאוד; או שכל שערותיו דבוקות זו לזו; או תאומי-סיאם, שמחוברים מלידתם זה בזה; או שידיו קצרות מאוד ביחס לגופו, וכל כיוצא בזה. וכן מברכים על בעל חיים שנולד עם מום משונה ביותר...

... יש להיזהר מאוד שלא להעליב את בעל המום תוך כדי אמירת הברכה. ובכל מצב שיש חשש שהוא יעלב, יש לברך בחשאי. ואם גם זה עלול להעליב אותו, עדיף שלא לברך כלל. מפני שהאיסור להעליב ולצער אדם, וקל וחומר אדם סובל, גדול יותר מהמצווה לברך ברכות אלו.

→This world is imperfect. It is subject to various natural disasters, including earthquakes, droughts, cold, and heat. Human beings, too, are imperfect, and sometimes a person is born with a disability or an unusual physical appearance, which can cause great distress. Nevertheless, we must strengthen our faith and recognize that God created an imperfect world so that we would need to confront challenges and, through doing so, discover the strengths hidden within us and become partners in perfecting the world.

Therefore, even when faced with a disaster whose meaning we cannot understand, we are commanded to recite the blessing Dayan HaEmet ("Blessed is the True Judge"). Similarly, although we do not understand why there are disabilities and imperfections in the world, we must believe that the Creator, who knows all mysteries, governs His world properly and for the

good. For this reason, the Sages instituted a blessing to be recited upon seeing a person with an unusual physical appearance: "Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the universe, Who makes creatures different" (Meshaneh HaBriyot).

The blessing is recited only for a significant physical difference, such as a person born without a hand or foot; someone whose extraordinary height prevents him from standing upright, causing him to bend over; someone who is extremely short; someone whose hairs are all joined together; conjoined twins who have been physically connected since birth; or someone whose hands are extremely short in proportion to his body, and similar cases. The blessing is also recited upon seeing an animal born with an especially unusual deformity....

→One must take great care not to offend a person with a disability while reciting the blessing. Whenever there is concern that the person might be offended, the blessing should be recited discreetly. If even this might cause offense, it is preferable not to recite the blessing at all. This is because the prohibition against insulting or causing distress to another person, especially someone who is already suffering, takes precedence over the mitzvah of reciting these blessings**.**

12. **Babylonian Talmud, Berakhot 54a**

עַל הַגְּשָׁמִים, וְעַל בְּשׂוֹרוֹת טוֹבוֹת אוֹמֵר: ״בָּרוּךְ הַטּוֹב וְהַמֵּטִיב״. עַל בְּשׂוֹרוֹת רָעוֹת אוֹמֵר: ״בָּרוּךְ דַּיַּין הָאֱמֶת״. בָּנָה בַּיִת חָדָשׁ, וְקָנָה כֵּלִים חֲדָשִׁים, אוֹמֵר: ״בָּרוּךְ … שֶׁהֶחֱיָינוּ וְקִיְּימָנוּ וְהִגִּיעָנוּ לַזְּמַן הַזֶּה״. מְבָרֵךְ עַל הָרָעָה מֵעֵין עַל הַטּוֹבָה, וְעַל הַטּוֹבָה מֵעֵין עַל הָרָעָה.

For rain and other good tidings, one recites: Blessed…Who is good and Who does good. For bad tidings, one recites: Blessed…the true Judge. Similarly, when one built a new house or purchased new vessels, he recites: Blessed…Who has given us life, sustained us, and brought us to this time. One recites a blessing for the bad that befalls him just as he does for the good. Similarly, one must recite a blessing for the good that befalls him just as for the bad.

13. **Dr. Seth Ward, "'Blessed is He Who Varies his Creatures' and the Blessings on Diversity"**

https://drsethward.wordpress.com/2020/03/18/blessed-is-he-who-varies-his-creatures-and-the-blessings-on-diversity/

The categories of complexion, color or race are not neutral: they make persons of Priestly families unfit to render divine service in the Temple, although similar disabilities do not necessarily render animals unfit for sacrifice. They are generally considered to cause pain or displeasure when seen by others—although here some of the sources note that this is hardly appropriate when a person was born this way. The juxtaposition with the blessing *she-kakha lo be-olamo* for seeing persons of great beauty (or as Saadiah notes, "well put together") implies that persons for whom one might say *meshaneh habriyot* would be considered ugly or unnatural. I am not aware, however, of other broad legal distinctions based solely on race, color or the physical handicaps covered by this blessing...

→**I have a daughter with a serious disability, albeit one that is not always immediately visible—I do not think most people would think of saying *meshaneh ha-beriyot* upon seeing her. But working with others with family members with disabilities, it is clear that many in the Jewish community do not exactly "thank God" for persons with disturbing disabilities**, or consider them as an intrinsic part of the human experience...

→**It's not clear to me that the Talmud and other material I reviewed sees these types of diversity as positive either**: after all, they taught that one should thank the Creator for the bad as well as the good, and this is the blessing "for the bad" – as opposed to *kakha lo be'olamo*. But it is a recognition that diversity is indeed a part of life, and needs to be treated as such. The Talmud provides a framework for recognizing physical diversity and thanking God for it. Actually, the Hebrew word for "thank" can also mean to "acknowledge." Our job today is to start from this point and to recognize diversity. **I don't think we need to "celebrate" the diversity of creatures as much as to "acknowledge" the reality of such diversity. The true test is not to celebrate diversity but to deeply respect populations for whom one might recite *meshaneh ha-beriyot* not as oddities but as intrinsic to our human experience.**

14. **Laura Tuchman, "Disability and God Talk," *The Prizmah Journal, "The God Issue"***

https://prizmah.org/hayidion/god-issue/disability-and-god-talk

Every human being is created in the image of God. Every human being has a spark of the divine within. When people are taught to honor and lift up the divine spark within their fellow human beings, the all-too-common impulse to "make other" or to exoticize those who are different from us begins to give way. As human beings, we tend to categorize, make quick judgments, and place people in boxes as a means of creating order out of the chaotic and constantly changing world around us. This pattern, though apparent across many markers of personal and social identity, is particularly acute and noticeable when it comes to individuals with disabilities. Whether out of a fear we do not know how to articulate or out of a fear of saying or doing the wrong thing, we tend to place those with disabilities in a category separate from the norm. If disability is addressed at all, particularly in a religious context, it tends to be used as a vehicle for the continued othering of the individual, even when it appears that it is being used to build bridges.

→An example of this in Jewish tradition is the brachah that one is supposed to make upon seeing a "strange" individual: meshaneh habriyot. Blessed are You, God, ruler of the universe, who diversifies or makes different the creatures. On its face, this appears to be a beautifully inclusive brachah, one that we might want to teach our children from the earliest age as a means of honoring the diversity that is humanity. **However, for many individuals with disabilities and other visible differences that fall outside of social norms, including myself, this brachah, instead of building bridges and honoring the beauty within our non-normative bodies, instead places us firmly within the category of "other." When we thank God for diversifying God's creatures, the inverse of that is that we are thanking God for making us normative in body, normative in appearance...**

One exercise that I have seen used successfully when thinking more deeply about meshaneh habriyot is to have people think for several moments about a time when they observed someone noticeably different and a time when they were observed for being noticeably different. Reflecting upon the feelings that arose during either of these encounters is instructive for beginning to shift one's understanding of the brachah. It is also useful to use these reflective moments as a catalyst for thinking more broadly about the ways society would be transformed if we took the notion that we are all created in the image of God seriously.